

# The “Canadian Diversity Model” In Brief

Prepared by Beverly Boutilier. Based on Jane Jenson and Martin Papillon,  
*The “Canadian Diversity Model”: A Repertoire in Search of a Framework* (CPRN, 2001)

## Introduction

Maintaining unity in a context of cultural diversity has been the perennial challenge of Canadians. The framers of Confederation rejected a single and undifferentiated national identity in 1867, when they chose federal institutions as the best means to recognize and protect the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Canadians. The conviction that Canadianism is rooted in diversity, rather than in the elimination of difference, continues to shape public discourse in the present day.

Respect for cultural diversity in Canada rests on the pillars of linguistic duality, recognition of Aboriginal rights and multiculturalism. The rejection of standardization does not mean that living with diversity has been easy, or that diversity is uniformly valued by all citizens. Tensions arising from the coexistence of real concerns about how to *balance competing values* still remain. The on-going challenge confronting Canadians is *how* to respect cultural diversity while still maintaining the cohesion needed to sustain Canada into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In practice, seeking balance has involved searching for compromise. New conditions challenge previous compromises across legitimate value differences. The need to account for a range of values makes democracy, and therefore well-functioning and inclusive democratic institutions, critical to the success of the Canadian way. The role of the state in setting some boundary conditions and promoting inclusion in a highly diverse society is another key, so much so that diversity has itself become a cornerstone of the Canadian citizenship regime.

Like Canada, the Canadian diversity model is a product of evolution, comprising a repertoire of responses to the country’s long-standing sociological diversity. Within this repertoire, dimensions of difference (content) and practices for making choices between competing values (process) are equally important. Illuminating the dynamics of the Canadian diversity model, with a particular view to describing its intersecting dimensions and the function of democratic practices, is the broad aim of this paper.



## Thinking about the “Canadian Diversity Model”

What is the “Canadian diversity model” and how does it work? The model is made up of a set of public and private practices that guide conflict resolution and choices about the meaning of economic, social and cultural differences. We refer to it as a repertoire because the practices are interrelated and involve choice. They also involve both civil society and state actors. As within the theatre, this repertoire sets limits, in addition to describing a range of possibilities. Additions to the repertoire are possible – with sufficient effort.

Over the last century and a half, Canadian society has evolved a range of responses to its own diversity that have been embedded as values in institutions. Cultural and social differences, for example, are recognized within the institutions of federalism, while individual and group rights are enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. These historical legacies are not immutable but they cannot be easily abandoned. At the same time, the existence of these embedded values does not result in a single action or outcome. Decisions must still be made about *how* to confront diversity. Choices must still be made from among sets of competing alternatives.

### A Repertoire – Process as well as Content

The Canadian diversity model is comprised not only of a repertoire of choices between competing values – the content of the model – but also of a series of rules for making those choices. These rules, or processes, derive from the decision rules and practices of liberal democracy, a system of governance that has defined the Canadian nation-state since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They also derive in large measure from the long-standing Canadian contention that liberal democratic government can be an instrument for collective action.

In Canada, unity and diversity are not viewed as mutually exclusive concepts. The valuing of diversity is deemed to enhance unity. Although tensions between the two can and do arise, they are generally viewed as interdependent concepts. At a general level, Canada faces challenges common to all liberal democracies, which is to strike the right mix between individual freedom and the creation of conditions of equality. In a pluralistic society, where cultures and values are more diverse, the attainment of this mix is more challenging. Notions of equality may vary between majorities and minorities, as well as within each group. Differing definitions of freedom can also produce diverging ideas about the role of the state.

The responses *generally considered legitimate* to such challenges constitute a society’s repertoire for handling conflict, including conflict arising from cultural, social and economic diversity. A society must view the response as legitimate, however, for the repertoire does not include all possible responses. Only when a response to conflict has achieved legitimacy – although not necessarily consensus – within a given society is it added to the repertoire. Even within liberal democracies, what constitutes a legitimate response will necessarily vary from society to society.

For example, in France, linguistic homogeneity has long been considered a legitimate route to achieving equality among citizens. In contrast, because Canada seeks to achieve harmony within a linguistically and culturally diverse society, the challenge has been to determine how much



recognition of difference is “enough” and how much is “too much” to ensure equality among citizens.

## The Canadian Diversity Model – Its Four Dimensions

Four key dimensions of difference underpin the Canadian diversity model. Tensions among concurrently important values are universal within liberal democracies although the tensions themselves may differ. The four dimensions of choice discussed here will make sense to Canadian readers, deriving as they do from the everyday universe of political discourse in this country. Our aim in identifying these four dimensions is to illuminate the operation of the Canadian diversity model, with a particular emphasis on how the tensions between diversity and equality are deployed in the political arena and on how the discourse about diversity in Canada is structured.

Box 1 identifies the end points within each of four dimensions. Both end points are present within the range of values held by Canadians as a whole. Some individuals or groups may position themselves at one end and reject the other, but the majority prefers to situate itself somewhere in the middle.

**Box 1**  
**The Canadian Diversity Model:  
Its Four Dimensions**

Uniformity ..... Heterogeneity

Individual Rights ..... Group Rights

Symmetry ..... Asymmetry

Economic Freedom .... Economic Security

The value tensions inherent in these four dimensions of difference can be understood as expressions of the fundamental debate about equality in liberal democracies, which in turn raises the closely related question of how best to achieve inclusion and cohesion in a diverse society.

At one end of the spectrum, lies the classic formal or procedural conception of *individual equality*, where, to achieve inclusion and cohesion, everyone must be treated the same. At the other end is the assertion that historical differences must be taken into account and the importance of community acknowledged. Advocates of this view argue that a commitment to equality entails some recognition of differences based on culture, gender, race and many other human characteristics, as not all individuals begin life with access to the same resources.

The four dimensions of difference identified in Box 1 give reflect the parameters of this debate:

- *Uniformity—Heterogeneity* refers to practices that acknowledge, or do not acknowledge, the diversity of political and social identities.



- *Individual Rights—Group Rights* refers to rights extended to guarantee protection to groups as well as citizens.
- *Symmetry—Asymmetry* refers to practices of the state that institutionalize the differential representation of communities.
- *Economic Freedom—Economic Security* refers to institutional forms and practices to achieve socio-economic equity and achieve substantive equality.

In each case, the words located on the left side of Box 1 reflect the classic liberal characterization of the debate. Those on the right give expression to the need for institutions and practices that are more cognizant of differences. As a society that values diversity, the question for Canada has been “how far” can we move toward a definition of equality that values differences without jeopardizing the equal treatment of individuals and liberal freedoms, as well as the shared sense of community essential for the cohesion of the political community?

Collective choice arrived at through democratic institutions of all kinds is required to answer this fundamental question, thus highlighting the importance of democratic processes and practices to the working of the model itself.

### **The Canadian Diversity Model – Its Process**

These practices for balancing tensions inherent in the *acknowledgment* of rival values are an integral part of the Canadian diversity model. Such tensions arise from Canada’s situation of “deep diversity” – that is, the deep divide resulting from the presence of several national communities within the country’s borders<sup>1</sup> – and its history as an immigrant society open to new arrivals from a huge range of places and cultures.

Canadian society and institutions have developed an array of responses to the tensions inherent in each of the four dimensions of difference highlighted here, as well as across the dimensions. While these responses are inspired by liberal values and rooted in democratic traditions, each evolved on a case-by-case basis in reference to a particular set of historical circumstances. The resulting repertoire of choices, in turn, shapes the day-to-day encounters of Canadians within civil society and provides direction to debates within the state and public institutions of representation.

The following notions inform the operation of a Canadian diversity model constructed on commitments to *practice*:

- There is *no absolute contradiction* between a commitment to equal treatment and liberal freedoms and a commitment to the recognition of difference and particular treatment, when needed, to enhance equality.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “deep diversity” was originated by Charles Taylor; see Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).



- Working toward inclusion involves a constant balance between the principle of equal and uniform treatment and the need to provide *special treatment* – and therefore different treatment – of special categories of persons.
- The tensions are manageable, within *a range* of possible choices, and these choices are not fixed or immutable.
- *Electoral politics* and other institutions of collective decision-making provide the mechanisms for arriving at choices within each dimension.

The four dimensions of difference can be separated for purposes of analysis but, in practice, they are entwined, informing debates of everything from intergovernmental relations and federalism to social policy benefits. Canadians, therefore, do not have the option – some would say the luxury – of addressing only one dimension at a time, or according greater significance to one than another. The challenge for the Canadian diversity model, then, is to reach a balance among them that will be accepted by most Canadian citizens.

## **Rival Values and Locations of Compromise**

As noted above, each dimension of difference has two end points. Our principal aim here is to describe the tensions inherent in each dimension and, in doing so, to locate the “saw-offs” that characterize the contemporary Canadian diversity model. Another is to identify the unresolved issues that will likely shape political discourse in the future.

### **Uniformity-Heterogeneity**

The first and most basic dimension of the Canadian diversity model is the recognition and valuing of diversity itself. Although most societies are characterized by some degree of heterogeneity – differentiated socially, by gender and often by ethnic or religious differences – few societies explicitly identify such heterogeneity as legitimate, tending either to ignore differences or integrate some cleavages into the structure of political life. In contrast, Canada’s stance has long been to acknowledge a certain degree of heterogeneity, while seeking a wider commitment to being “Canadian” as the basis for some degree of commonality.

Political choices made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and embedded in the country’s basic political institutions – federalism, public education, law and the courts, for example – made a purely homogenous conception of citizenship impossible in Canada. More recent decisions reflect a continued commitment to those choices. The tensions between a homogenous and more heterogeneous model of citizenship remain important, however.

The British Crown first accepted and institutionalized the linguistic and religious differences of the two European peoples who founded modern Canada. The 1867 Constitution followed suit, establishing new rules for democratic decision making and extending to the provinces jurisdiction over education, language, justice in private matters, and culture. This division of powers was the condition for Quebec’s acceptance of permanent minority status for French-speaking Canadians in a



federal Parliament. In short, the creation of a cohesive political community north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel required placing cultural and religious diversity at the heart of Canadian society.

One legacy of these choices has been an ongoing debate about how much heterogeneity Canadian society can accommodate while still maintaining some cohesion. There are two aspects to this question.

First of all, we can ask “how much” diversity is possible or desirable. What are the consequences of diversity for social cohesion? Some observers argue that too much diversity may lead to fragmentation, economic inequalities and erosion of social capital. Calls to limit immigration quotas in Canada today, for example, stem in part from a preoccupation with the consequences of greater diversity. But, even for Canadians committed to fostering multiculturalism or interculturalism, the question of how to deal with diversity still remains. Should society accept and even celebrate the multiple identities of its citizens, viewing them as a range of “equivalent choices”? Or should it insist on a high degree of conformity to “community standards” while providing only basic protections against discrimination?

The second aspect refers to “what kind” of diversity should be acknowledged, highlighting in more specific terms the relation between political unity and diversity. The issue of public recognition of diversity underpins discussions of national unity in Canada. While ethno-cultural or multicultural differences are generally accepted, the recognition of Canada as a multinational state is still controversial. The most obvious example of this tension has been the difficulty of finding a place on the continuum that might recognize Quebec as a distinct national unit within Canada, without it being a threat to Canada itself. In recent years, the claims of Aboriginal peoples have begun to provoke similar concerns.

Finding a compromise position on this first dimension remains a particular challenge for Canadians, whose lack of consensus about “how much” and “what kind” of diversity has repercussions for the debates, claims and institutional responses defined in the other three dimensions discussed below.

## **Individual Rights-Group Rights**

Well before the entrenching of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982, Canadians enjoyed certain fundamental individual freedoms protected by the laws and courts, as well as a commitment to equality. Because of its recognition of cultural diversity, Canada has not followed the standard model of liberal republicanism, in which citizens are granted a uniform set of individual – and purportedly “neutral” – rights based on a common citizenship. Instead, Canadians have always chosen some measure of protection and differentiated treatment for certain groups in society, based on the notion of *group rights*.

A supposedly “neutral” and context-blind conception of individual rights stands in stark contrast to the principles that informed the creation of the Canadian federation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as discussed above. Canadian federalism institutionalized compromises that required the extension of protections for language (French-English) and for religious communities (Catholic-Protestant). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canada’s institutionalization of human rights commitments – through international



covenants, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and domestic human rights commissions – has extended protections against discrimination to a range of additional groups.

Group-based rights can be exercised by individuals or groups. As such, group rights are not necessarily collective rights in the fullest sense of the term. For example, anti-discrimination measures are individual rights based on group membership. Other rights may be individual and collective. The distinction between group-based rights and individual rights, then, lies not in the rights themselves, but in how the rights are articulated in claims for recognition, as well as in how institutional responses to these claims are framed. For this reason, Canada's recognition of group rights, whether extended to collectivities or individuals within certain groups, is not in contradiction to liberal principles, once the value of culture to individual well-being and freedom is acknowledged.

*The British North America Act, 1867* and the *Constitution Act, 1982* each recognize a range of group-based rights – for example, educational rights for religious minorities (*BNA Act*) and minority language educational rights (the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*) – that are held by individuals, but exercised collectively through institutional arrangements granting the right to public funding to the minority group for separate schools in some provinces.

Sections 15 and 28 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* extended the original group-based protections already present in human rights covenants and legislation. This extension signaled that procedural equality – treating everyone the same without distinction based on race, language, sex, religion or other characteristics – is not sufficient to guarantee equality. Instead, affirmative action may be needed to overcome past discriminatory treatment. These sections, nevertheless, remain well within the tradition of liberal recognition and protection of individual rights. Equality seekers making claims under Section 15 do not seek differentiated citizenship status but rather full inclusion in the citizenship regime.

The balance sought between individual and groups rights is also expressed in Sections 25 and 35 of the *Charter*, which define a specific set of protections for the group rights of Aboriginal peoples living in Canada. The courts have played a significant role since 1982 elaborating a balance between the group rights of Aboriginal peoples and the guarantee of individual rights to all Canadians. Similarly, Quebec language policy emphasizes collectively held group rights. Language legislation is intended to provide protection to the French language, considered a cultural good for all members of the community.

Language and educational rights, as well as Aboriginal rights, are constitutional dispositions giving some groups particular recognition that result in differential treatment. These group-based rights – some held by individuals and others collectively – are in contradiction to a strict interpretation of the principle of universal and equal citizenship founded on a liberal republican model of individual rights. But, as a growing number of political theorists argue, in a diverse society, a *contextual* approach to equality that is sensitive to the reality and specificity of each case, and that goes beyond a simple *procedural* conception can bring much better results. Such an approach has been, and still is, a key component of Canada's repertoire for managing the tensions arising from cultural diversity.

## Symmetry-Asymmetry

Institutional arrangements that provide some level of political autonomy for specific groups on the basis of their distinct cultural identity and history are also central to the working of the Canadian diversity model. Such arrangements conflict with the standard liberal conception of universal citizenship, which holds that, if everyone is to be treated the same, all citizens should share the same political institutions without distinction. It is within the institutions of federalism where this tension is traditionally played out.

The participation of national minorities in the Canadian federation is mediated by the existence of another level of societal allegiance. National minorities often claim recognition of this duality in the Canadian citizenship regime, seeking institutional acknowledgement that they are different from other minorities, *in ways that go beyond group-based rights protected by a single government*. The debate over symmetry and asymmetry therefore concerns two conflicting definitions of the country. Is Canada a single nation-state, or is it a multinational state with *institutional* recognition of national minorities?

In practice, Canadian political institutions are asymmetrical. The creation of federal institutions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was seen by contemporaries as a way to recognize that territorially-based diversity existed. As well as enabling the creation of a province with a French-speaking majority, the *British North America Act* of 1867 gave provinces responsibility for key cultural areas, such as education and local government. From its inception as an autonomous state, then, Canada recognized that federalism serves a cultural purpose. As an element of the Canadian diversity model, the notion of asymmetry has been important for addressing the place of national minorities in the country.

In recent decades, the notion of asymmetry has been rejected in favour of a symmetrical understanding of Canada as a single nation-state composed of ten equal provinces, defined by territory rather than ethnicity. In the imaginations of many Canadians in the Trudeau and post-Trudeau eras, equality among the ten provinces is a core federal principle that is reinforced by the equality language of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and promoted to counter Quebec nationalism.

Efforts to resolve the tension between symmetrical and asymmetrical definitions of Canada produced a Canadian constitution that is asymmetrical in its arrangements. Canada is a territorial federation with a uniform division of power that also grants a degree of self-government to the French-speaking national minority concentrated in Quebec. Within Quebec, the minority can live as a majority and manage its own institutions. Moreover, certain policy decisions – in areas such as pensions, immigration and international relations – recognize that the government of Quebec may use certain prerogatives that the other provinces have, until now, elected not to exercise.

The process of negotiating self-government agreements with Aboriginal peoples is another area of asymmetrical institutional arrangements. Such agreements have both cultural and territorial dimensions. The current federal policy is to associate self-government agreements with land claim settlements, as a means of both enabling Aboriginal socioeconomic and cultural development and extending recognition of territorial rights resulting from the Aboriginal presence in Canada prior to European colonization.



These asymmetrical arrangements vary greatly in nature and significance, depending on the group's claims and socioeconomic and political position. Whatever their form – public government as in the case of the Inuit, or the devolution of administrative powers as in Manitoba – these institutional arrangements are explicitly constructed around cultural groupings. Aboriginal peoples are Canadian citizens but with a fundamentally different relationship to the common institutions defined in the Constitution. Debate has arisen about the opportunity and consequences of creating these kinds of systematic asymmetries. There is a fear of creating “independent units” separate from Canada or special “categories of citizens” based on ethnic criteria. The link to the uniformity-heterogeneity debate is apparent.

In general, the tension between symmetry and asymmetry is one area where the Canadian diversity model has yet to achieve a satisfactory balance. There is a need for a clear debate about the positive and negative impacts of asymmetry on the country and its feasibility, as well as about the forms of collective choice appropriate for resolving differences.

### **Economic Freedom-Economic Security**

The relationship between economic and social conditions and culture are an on-going concern of Canadians, who take pride in the commitment to social justice embedded in their public policy. Large-scale comparisons with other countries reveal Canada to be a country that has promoted a mix of liberal and social democratic values. The changing balance between economic freedom and economic security has implications for the working of the Canadian diversity model.

In previous decades, market relations were contained in the name of social justice, without threatening the country's basic commitment to the principles of capitalism or economic liberalism. Social programs that expressed a notion of the collective good – what Canadians owed to each other – were central to an earlier citizenship regime. In the middle decades of the last century, these commitments were most visible in two types of public action: a demonstrated willingness to share the costs of unevenly distributed life risks through both the creation of social programs and the spatial redistribution – or “equalization” – of resources from “have” to “have-not” provinces.

The result was a mixed pattern. Canada never went as far as many smaller European countries, which built generous welfare states to protect citizens from many of the effects of market society. In most cases, Canadians chose instead to define the social rights of citizenship as safety nets, rather than to promote greater equality of condition or actively structure labour markets. Universal programs were limited to education, health care, family allowances and pensions.

These choices nonetheless located Canada in-between the end points of the economic freedom-economic security dimension. Canada chose a universal and publicly funded health care system later than many European countries, but at the same moment that the United States was choosing public support only for the poor and elderly through Medicaid and Medicare. Similarly, Canada chose to finance the explosion of post-secondary education in the 1960s with a public – albeit not free – system, while American families continued to absorb the high costs of a prestigious university education.



In the present era of globalization, these choices are back on the table. We are again confronted with the question of how much diversity in socio-economic conditions we are willing to tolerate as a result of market freedom. There is also the question of whether dimensions of social and cultural diversity increasingly correlate with economic position, so that certain groups are at risk of exclusion from mainstream Canadian society for reasons of race, ethnicity, gender and so on. Integration into the mainstream of Canadian society may not be working as effectively as in the past, while patterns of economic and social inequalities may be solidifying.

There are also significant and menacing variations in the rates of economic success among ethnocultural and religious groups. A recent report on Metropolitan Toronto, using 1991 census data, found that residents of non-European origin had unemployment rates far above the average, reaching one in five for many groups. Young people's rates of unemployment were higher still, with rates of 30 percent among some groups, particularly youths of Caribbean, African and Latin American origin. Even more distressing for the future was the fact that child poverty was endemic, reaching well beyond the 50 percent level among First Nations peoples and those reporting origins in Africa, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, an Arab country, West Asia, Mexico and Central America.

Assuring economic security for all may involve overcoming the blockages experienced by some groups in gaining real access to markets, and therefore to jobs and goods. In the case of immigrants, for example, past waves of newcomers could hope to achieve economic well-being by securing employment in the industrial economy. The contemporary service and information economies offer far less certainty. Racism and other forms of discrimination, non-recognition of educational credentials and a lack of networks can all create blockages to these markets. Vigilance to prevent discrimination, and efforts to promote inclusion, are therefore even more necessary if Canada is to become a learning society that values diversity of all sorts.

### **Process in the Canadian Diversity Model: Democracy at its Core**

In Canada's diversity model, the appeal to first principles is rarely possible. There is, for example, no one "right way" to work with the model that can be identified through simple appeal to a foundational law, such as the Constitution. As the foregoing discussion shows, there are always a range of possible choices between competing values. The diversity model depends on simultaneously seeking equal treatment and recognizing difference. It also acknowledges the need for active intervention to achieve equal outcomes, recognizing that formal equality may not always suffice. As a result, a decision rule is needed, choices must be made.

In a pluralist society, where cultures and values are increasingly varied, locating positions of compromise between and among competing values is a challenging task. Courts are important institutions for confirming societal choices, but hard choices are often better decided in the political than the judicial realm. Choices about the balance points between competing values, therefore, depend on democratic processes, in the broadest sense. In the Canadian diversity model, which is as much a commitment to fair practices as to specific outcomes, *process is as important as content*.

When functioning well, democratic institutions provide mechanisms for grappling with *conflict*, whether over values, ideas or interests. For decision rules to work well, it is not necessary for



citizens to come to a consensus about values. They must, however, develop the capacity to consider, assess, tolerate and then respect the value positions defended by other citizens. When well conducted, such democratic deliberation leads to decisions that are sustainable and can anchor good policy.

The challenge, then, in Canada's increasingly pluralistic society is to find new and democratic practices to manage conflict over legitimate value differences in order to arrive at choices that are fair, reasonable and acceptable within the model. Doing so will require Canadians to recognize that:

- their fellow citizens are justified in holding value positions different from their own;
- choices among legitimate alternatives must be made; and
- citizens have the capacity, through their institutions, to make such choices.

This will require a sea change in the existing practices of Canadian democracy. The model of elite accommodation that, until recently, reserved the task of resolving conflict emerging from regional, cultural, linguistic and religious differences to small groups of leaders, has been found wanting and been rejected. The vision of limited democracy embodied by this model no longer meets the expectations of citizens, who display less trust in politicians and make claims for expanded democratic participation.

An active and engaged civil society is critical to the proper functioning of the Canadian diversity model. Founded on a constant search for balance, it requires healthy and inclusive institutions, both public and private, inside which participation can occur and through which routes to representation are opened. The challenge for Canada, as a diverse society with national minorities and a wide range of ethnocultural and religious groups, is therefore to develop an inclusive political culture that not only *permits*, but *encourages and supports* participation and access to decision making.

Finding the institutions and practices that will enable democratic choices is never easy. There are a number of possible routes to representation and arrangements for governance. The conventional practices of liberal democracy, such as *elections and party politics*, are indispensable. But so, too, are the various *institutions of interest intermediation* – community groups, ethnic associations, lobbies, professional associations, social movements and faith-based organizations, for example – that allow citizens to gather and find common ground with one another. There are also various strategies and arrangements for involving and *engaging citizens* beyond elections and group representation.

The next section demonstrates how these three routes to representation – elections and party politics; civil society and institutions of interest intermediation; and engaging citizens – can both help and hinder the operation of the Canadian diversity model.

## Making the Model Work

### Electoral and Party Politics – Choosing Alternatives and Recognizing Difference

Electoral and party politics are significant sites for acknowledging diversity and for working out the compromises needed for the Canadian diversity model to function.

#### **Box 2** **Electoral Democracy: Fostering an Inclusive Political Culture**

Political parties include *ethnocultural groups as candidates* for elected office

- Political participation as candidates and voters is key to citizenship practices
- All citizens are able to recognize themselves in their representatives
- Institutions of representation become locations for dialogue across groups

The *political discourse* of electoral politics and parliamentary decision-making is inclusive and respects the values and positions held by others

- The diversity model is inherently – and, therefore, inevitably – a site of conflict
- Good practices for *conflict management* are needed, recognizing that differences over value positions are normal and to be respected, even as compromise is sought
- Political discourse that is respectful of different value positions fosters transparency, dialogue and inclusion

The electoral system *represents the plurality of the electorate*

- Simple majority electoral systems cannot represent the plurality of the electorate in a diverse society
- Proportional representation has the potential to foster greater representation of minorities

*Cities* are significant locations of citizenship formation and democratic experimentation

- Recently arrived ethnocultural groups require the same access to municipal politics and services as others
- New practices for recognizing the changing constituencies of municipal governments are needed to foster democratic equity
- To work, the Canadian diversity model needs to operate at all three levels of government

## Civil Society and Interest Intermediation – Practicing Citizenship

Identification of the power of numbers, and the need for collective action to access to citizenship rights, are fundamental principles of Canada's liberal democratic institutions.

### Box 3 Civil Society and Interest Intermediation

Civil society or *intermediary associations* are vital avenues to participatory democratic practice that:

- Give voice to disadvantaged segments of the population
- Help citizens construct diverse identities and advocate for social rights
- Reinforce Canada's fledgling national identity and building loyalty to it
- Enhance the fairness of the democratic process

This role is undermined by recasting civil society groups as *"partners" of government*

- Civil society groups are now required to play a larger role in service delivery
- Core funding has been replaced by less stable project-based funding
- Civil society groups must now demonstrate their worth through an ability to raise funds

This alternative vision of the function of civil society groups has *consequences for democracy*

- The continuous search for funding and pressure to provide services undermines the advocacy role of civil society groups
- The voices of marginalized groups are silenced by this loss of autonomy from government

Addequately supported and rooted in civil society, interest intermediation associations can help to foster a greater sense of inclusion among *people who are at risk of marginalization*

- Valuing cultural diversity requires ensuring that marginalization does not occur
- Inclusion in civil society and democratic practices must be as complete as possible
- Systemic blockages to inclusion and participation in democratic citizenship must be overcome

Formal guarantees of equality, such as protection against discrimination and racism, are *not* enough

- Communities of disadvantage may require positive and concerted action to move toward participation
- This need for support may be experienced by ethnocultural minorities and new immigrants, as well as by national minorities
- The goal of participation is inclusion in the institutions of democratic citizenship

## Engaging Citizens in Hard Choices and in the Policy Process

Since the rejection of the Charlottetown Accord by a majority of Canadians in 1992, arguments have multiplied in favour of greater citizen engagement in political decision-making.

### **Box 4** **Citizen Engagement in the Policy Process**

Failure of the Accord demonstrated the limitations of referendums as choice mechanisms because they:

- Promote fixed principles by allowing a choice between only two options
- Prevent dialogue and negotiation, and the possibility of compromise between positions
- Muffle minority voices

There is a need for new models of participation that avoid polarization and prevent marginalization of minorities

- On-going dialogue with citizens about policy choices would help to identify shared values and areas of possible compromise
- But full access and equitable participation of disadvantaged groups must be ensured
- Greater support to civil society groups representing diverse interests is required

A change of culture within government structures is required in order for citizen engagement to become:

- A significant advance in linking citizens to the state
- An integral part of the policy process, with appropriate allocations of time and money
- More than a public relations exercise

Engagement initiatives hold both promise and risks for the diversity model

- There is a growing willingness to explore engagement models, especially in the realm of intergovernmental relations
- But there is the risk that direct input from “ordinary citizens” could be used to undermine the federal principle and the constitutional burden of compromise on which the diversity model depends

Citizen engagement is an important tool for locating choice points, but it is not

- A replacement for all other forms of public involvement or all other routes to representation
- A matter only for individuals – public deliberation must be conducted both at the individual level and through group representation
- A route to inclusive citizenship that can stand on its own



## Conclusion

We have defined the Canadian diversity model as a repertoire of practices in civil society and in government. It is defined by an ongoing search for balance among competing conceptions of the political community. We have further identified four dimensions of choice, whose polar ends represent value preferences supported by at least some Canadians. The ongoing need to locate balance points along these four dimensions remains a constant tension that can only be resolved through democratic practices.

The Canadian approach to diversity has long depended on a commitment to equality within a liberal democratic framework. This commitment is the common thread running through the four dimensions of choice that describe the lines of tension within the political community. The inclusion and participation of all citizens in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the community is, therefore, the necessary starting point for the successful management of diversity, as well as an end in itself.

Debate – about the balance points along each of the four dimensions – and collective choices – about the mix between uniformity and diversity – are crucial to the functioning of the model. Creating conditions where debate and collective choice are possible, in civil society as well as in everyday politics, has to be the fundamental aim of a diverse and pluralistic society such as Canada.

The Canadian diversity model continues to evolve in the face of a changing environment. To be successful, it requires, on an ongoing basis, that Canadians choose a mix between:

- heterogeneity and uniformity
- individual and group rights
- the expectations of constitutional equality and the necessity of a degree of asymmetry
- market freedoms and assuring economic security

Public space for deliberation that is both participatory and inclusive is needed in a highly diverse society. Such deliberation both ensures that minorities are included in the broad citizenry and reinforces the legitimacy of public institutions and policies for groups whose voices are often obscured by majority rule.

A country such as Canada, where conflicts over the nature and boundaries of the political community are constantly debated and negotiated, requires a strong and healthy public sphere. Canada's diversity model depends on democratic spaces that foster and structure on-going dialogue. The public sphere also has a significant role to play in mediating conflict. For this reason, individual citizens from all sectors of society and all backgrounds must have the resources to participate effectively in the political process. Support for intermediary institutions, such as advocacy and voluntary organizations representing marginalized groups, is equally essential. And it should not be forgotten that public institutions can exercise leadership, as well as represent.