

Behind Immigration Debates: Discourse, Policy and Reality of Muslim Integration in Western Societies

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Immigration debates varied greatly across Western societies, expressing distinctive national concerns and putting forward different approaches to immigrant integration. With international conflicts and the 'war on terror,' these debates have emphasized possibly distinctive problems regarding Muslim groups. Research on actual processes of Muslim minority integration in Western societies shows that while these distinctive national debates and 'discourses' represent symbolic inclusion and exclusion, and have important impacts on Muslims, overall they provide a poor representation of the reality of Muslim social and economic integration. In this context, a comparison of France and Canada is of particular interest for two reasons: (1) they represent almost diametrically opposed integration 'models': republican secularism in France, multiculturalism in Canada; and (2) for each there are excellent large-scale survey data to assess Muslim minority integration. Analysis shows that Muslims experience significant barriers to integration in both settings, mainly based on racial, cultural or ethnic differences, more than religion. Specific policies such as citizenship laws and headscarf bans matter, but social and political experiences in the community reveal only minor differences across settings.