

Abstract

Multiculturalism has been an official federal government policy in Canada since 1971 and is strongly associated with the country. However, from its inception, it has been met with strong criticism and opposition in the predominantly French-speaking province of Québec. While the long history of French-English conflicts in Canada has been explored, there is a paucity of comprehensive literature that focuses on the resurgence of this particular dispute in the last decade. This period includes Québec's adoption of several new, high profile, and controversial policies and laws that mark a rejection of the federal policy. To help fill this gap, and develop a more specific and contemporary description of this dispute, this paper uses frame analysis as a lens through which to examine a range of sources including news articles, government documents, press releases, speeches and interviews. Through this analysis six frames used by federal and provincial actors are identified and discussed: "Unique Cultural Preservation", "Québécois as Dominant Culture" and "Provincial Autonomy" on one side; and "Cultural Diversity and Pluralism", "Accommodation" and "National Unity" on the other. The findings reveal that the dispute is rooted in a historic struggle for power between the province and the federal government that can be traced back to the beginnings of colonization. Contemporary resurgence of the dispute in the province is influenced by a confluence of factors, including demographic changes, economic difficulties, and high profile legal challenges, with Québec authorities attributing these problems to the federal multiculturalism policy. The analysis also reveals a broader ideological debate taking place - one surrounding nationhood, national culture and the individual versus collective dynamic. The framing employed by both sides influence discourse on the dispute and on understandings of the country. These findings demonstrate how a deeper examination of a policy dispute can reveal important dimensions of a complex issue that are not always immediately evident. Given the prominence of Canada's national multiculturalism policy coupled with the fact that Canada currently has one of the highest rates of annual immigration per population of any country in the world, investigating the full nature of the current policy dispute can inform the future of multiculturalism policy in Canada and Canada-Québec relations more broadly.