

# Multicultural Policy: Nigeria, Canada, and Switzerland

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper will investigate the extent to which Switzerland, Nigeria, and Canada have successfully implemented multicultural policy. It will also explore how each nation's history has affected contemporary multiculturalism within its borders. Nigeria has gone through multiple stages of multicultural policy, from coexistence and celebration of cultural diversity to assimilation and homogenization, since its independence from the British in 1960. Unlike Switzerland, Nigeria struggles with a colonial past that has manifested into detrimental consequences for multicultural policy in the form of religious violence and governmental corruption. The legacy of colonialism has greatly damaged multiculturalism in Nigeria, and it is reflected in their contemporary policies. Switzerland is protectionist both externally and internally. Multicultural policy in Switzerland is, and has historically been, centered around preventing immigrants (second and third generations included) from becoming legal citizens and formally integrating into society. Because of Switzerland's direct democracy approach, the small homogeneous population of legal citizens have direct power over multicultural policy, and this is one of the main reasons Switzerland struggles to create a prejudice free environment and successfully implement inclusive policy. Canada has been more successful in implementing multicultural policy and this paper will explore how it has accomplished that.

**Keywords:**  
Switzerland  
Nigeria  
Canada  
Multiculturalism  
Immigration

Multiculturalism, also known as coexistence with people deemed "different", has become a critical part of policy-making. As populations increase and spatial boundaries between ethnic groups mix, there is a greater need for cultural inclusiveness. I propose that for a country to achieve coexistence, it must be successful in two domains under the broad term 'multiculturalism'. The first is coexistence between a country's already existing citizens and the second is the integration of immigrants into society. In this paper I will examine the success of multiculturalism in Switzerland, Nigeria, and Canada. Why compare these countries? Switzerland and Nigeria each fail in achieving one of the two spheres of multiculturalism I outlined above. Both are countries comprised of multiple languages, religions, and ethnicities, but having diversity does not mean peaceful coexistence (Nigeria) nor does it mean the country necessarily wants to add to it (Switzerland). In Nigeria faces an unstable government created on unsteady circumstances that is implementing the wrong multicultural strategy while at the same time managing the lasting effects of colonialism that are causing religious violence. In Switzerland, issues arises because the country is a direct democracy and multicultural policy is controlled by a small master race due to the extremely difficult process for immigrants and their Swiss-born children to obtain citizenship. Canada, on the other hand, is successful in implementing multicultural policy because

it has achieved cultural peace within its borders as well as the inclusion of immigrants. Multiculturalism can only be achieved on a nationwide level when it is successfully enforced through policy.

Nigeria struggles with multicultural policy largely because of its governmental system. Due to corruption and internal struggles for ultimate political power prevent the country from attending to multiculturalism. After a string of failed coup d'etats that were regarded as ethnic based after Nigeria gained independence in 1966, multicultural policy fell through. What caused this corruption and ethnic tension? It is impossible to fully understand Nigeria's current multicultural policies without first examining the foundation on which modern Nigeria was created.

Before British colonialism, what is now known as Nigeria consisted of three regions who lived in peaceful autonomy and spatial coexistence (Udebunu, 2011). To the north were the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani, to the south were the Christian Igbo, and to the east were the Christian Yoruba (Powell, 2015). Britain saw the Igbo and Yoruba as less resistant to change and more willing to adopt Western culture and accept British rule (Berman, 2004).

The Muslim Hausa-Fulani were consequently isolated from the important political roles and when Nigeria

gained independence, the Igbo and Yoruba took the highest positions in government (Powell 2015). As a result of British favoritism, Nigeria gained autonomy on uneven political and social ground. How can a new nation create a successful polycultural society when a large proportion of the people feel isolated and unfairly represented? The answer, according to Bingham Powell (2015), is simple: they cannot. The British brought with them the stigmatization of religion. A socially constructed weight was now placed on religion in Nigeria and British favoritism of Christianity over Islam would have significant consequences for multiculturalism.

Along with Religious differences, the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba have complex cultures, different ways of governance and clothing styles, and above all no desire for assimilation into a single nation (Powell, 2015). With an entitled ownership of manifest destiny only seen in Europeans, Britain carelessly drew boundaries without considering ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences that existed before their arrival (Powell, 2015). The British created situations for conflict between the ethnicities who had, up until that point, never coexisted in such a close quartered mixed environment. As well as conflicts within the system of governance, Britain's sudden institutionalized religious and ethnic mixing caused forced proximity and ultimately led to clashes of violence that would prevail long after Nigeria gained independence. During the 1980s, Muslim riots against Christians in the northern area ended in thousands of deaths (Powell, 2015). Terrorist groups have also emerged in the wake of perceived political and social inequality. One such terrorist groups is Boko Haram, which translates to "Western education is forbidden" (BBC, 2016). Religious and ethnic distrust and terrorism has arisen because of British colonialism. Christianity and Islam have been stamped as mortal rivals and multicultural policy is paying the price.

In recent years Nigeria has improved the stability of the government, and current multicultural policies are focusing on trying to homogenize Nigeria's cultural diversity and creating unity as a nation. Current policies are focused on assimilation as a means of ending the religious and political violence that has plagued Nigeria and caused thousands of deaths (Udebunu 2011). This, according to Cyril Udebunu (2011), is a disadvantageous strategy in creating a peacefully coexisting nation. Udebunu further goes on to say that multicultural policy in the future should be focused on restoring autonomy to the three regions to develop their unique cultures and create an environment where differences are respected and the "current ethos of hate and distrust engendered by the politics of domination that has characterized Nigeria's government" (p. 8).

Although not facing outright cultural violence between its citizens, Switzerland struggles with achieving

multiculturalism. Switzerland has a decentralized system of governance, also known as federalism. Similar to America's state system, Switzerland is divided into 26 cantons (Vertovec, 2010) and then further partitioned into municipalities (Helbing, 2010). Each Canton has its own carefully maintained judiciary, educational, and health care systems (Wiedmer, 2010). Federal Departments make suggestions for improving multiculturalism, but it is up to each Canton to implement the suggestions and make multicultural policy (Helbing, 2010). The result is a plural multicultural society. This deregulation of policy responsibility is where problems of discrimination occur. Steven Vertovec (2010) states that "Several [cantons] favor discriminatory practices" (p. 143). Cantons "can use their autonomy to experiment with various approaches in migrant related political fields" (Vertovec, 2010 p. 143) but in practice, segregation still persists in Switzerland at the local level. As Steven Vertovec (2010) explains, "other European countries may be able to adopt policies 'behind closed doors' to extend political and social rights [to ethnic groups], but this is nearly impossible in Switzerland" (p. 146). Because Switzerland is a direct democracy, its federal policies candidly reflect the feelings of the people. It is therefore difficult to impose a standardized policy and supervise culturally inclusive efforts (Helbing, 2010).

The native population of Switzerland in the 1990s was not producing enough children to maintain majority, and Switzerland felt its social security being threatened (Wiedmer, 2010). A tiny master race felt itself at risk of losing power and this fear, coupled with Switzerland's system of direct democracy is what has led to a failure in a successful multicultural nation (Wiedmer, 2010). From the 1960s to the 1980s Switzerland adopted a 'Cultural Distance Policy' that defined three hierarchical spheres in which each ethnicity was placed and given priority of resources (Vertovec, 2010). As Wiedmer (2010) describes, there is a hierarchy in which different minorities are placed and how favorable they appear to Swiss legal citizens. In a recent survey, "0% answered the Italians are 'out of place' in Switzerland, 1% found that Portuguese to be 'out of place', and 15% found the Turks to be 'out of place', 25% mentioned the Bosnian Serbs, and at the extreme end were the Albanians with 34%" (Wiedmer, 2010 p. 28). "Even among the young immigrants themselves a certain pecking order exist" (Wiedmer, 2010 p. 28). This pecking order affects the formal and informal assimilation of immigrants into Switzerland.

It is up to each Municipality to decide who can become citizens, a process known as naturalization. Marc Helbing (2010) states that "Switzerland is the only nation state in the world where naturalisations happen at the local level" (p. 33). During the 20th Century, Switzerland had one of the highest immigration rates, twice as high as Canada and the United States during that same time (Vertovec 2010). In 2000, 1.5 million out of Switzerland's 7.4 million were

people of foreign nationality. Even though it is 22.4% foreign born, Switzerland does not and has never considered itself a “country of immigration”(Vertovec, 2010 p. 131). To accompany this history of immigration is a history of non-inclusive integration policy (Vertovec, 2010). Municipalities decide who gets citizenship and they are still very frugal. Switzerland is “protectionist to a fault” (Wiedmer, 2010 p. 42) both internally and externally, and this greatly affected foreigners trying to assimilate. Although the second generation immigrants are “usually economically well integrated, the difficulties of obtaining citizenship will keep them from actively taking part in the political process” (Wiedmar, 2010 p. 29).

These policies of strict Naturalization prevented minorities from becoming legal citizens and therefore took away their political rights (Wiedmer, 2010). Up until the 1990s, it was assimilation or nothing, and most commonly, immigrants were not given the opportunity to assimilate before they were displaced back to their home country (Vertovec, 2010). Similar to Germany, this policy known as the Rotation Model, made it so that workers were exported out of Switzerland every couple years and were therefore unable to stay the amount of time necessary to obtain a permanent residence permit (Vertovec, 2010).

In Nigeria, immigration is not as high on their list of priorities. Most of the foreigners are extremely wealthy Europeans who are in Nigeria to exploit their natural resources and have no interest in formally immigrating and adopting Nigerian culture. Because they are extremely rich, and wealth controls the corrupt government, affluent White foreigners are able to get away with not participating in multiculturalism. The wealthy White foreigners live within the same city but in completely different worlds than the native citizens (Cunliffe-Jones, 2010).

Now consider the two steps necessary to achieve multiculturalism: peaceful coexistence of citizens of all ethnicities and successful integration of immigrants. Comparing Switzerland and Nigeria to this model, Nigeria is facing violence between its citizens of different ethnicities so it falls short on the first part of the multicultural model. Switzerland struggles to incorporate incoming immigrants and therefore cannot achieve multiculturalism as well, but for a different reason than Nigeria. After reading about how two countries are not successful in achieving multiculturalism, one might be wondering to themselves what a successful country looks like, and if one even exists.

Canada is one of only three countries in the world regarded as officially multicultural, the other two being Sweden and Australia (Wayland, 1997). What makes it multicultural? Unlike Nigeria and Switzerland, Canada successfully maintains cultural inclusiveness within its citizens and with incoming immigrants. In support of my

argument, Canada is prosperous in their multiculturalism because it has achieved coexistence within its citizens and then as the next step, successfully incorporates immigrants into its mosaic society of different ethnicities. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau is most known for his efforts in launching Canada’s multicultural policy. In 1971 he announced that the government would “support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life” (Wayland, 1997 p. 33). The most significant part of Trudeau’s policy was the rejection of their multilingual policy and the implementation of bilingual multicultural society. In 1988 the Multiculturalism Act, furthering Canada’s cultural pluralism (Wayland, 1997). Since then Canada has developed anti-racist initiatives, heritage language programs, and multicultural education programs (Wayland, 1997). Most importantly, Canada has developed cultural sensitivity and promotion at a federal level. Multiculturalism has become “an essential component of Canadian identity” (Wayland, 1997 p. 50).

Along with ethnic groups already existing within its borders, Canada focuses its multicultural policy on immigration. Having a history of immigrant exclusion policies similar to Switzerland, Canada has since changed its policy to one of inclusion. Developing a mentality that the inclusion of immigrants is critical to the identification of a multicultural national identity (Biles 2014).

In conclusion, both Nigeria and Switzerland are struggling to create multicultural societies but they struggle in different ways. Switzerland struggles with the inability to pass multicultural policy without the majority of the legal population’s approval and Nigeria struggles with corruption within its borders and two religious populations vying for political power. Both nations are struggling with inclusion, and in Nigeria’s case, the different ethnicities and religions demonstrate their frustration in a violent manner. An unwilling population is one thing, but an unwilling population with a direct pathway to policy, as in Switzerland, or with a corrupt and dysfunctional government, as with Nigeria, will never successfully create a multicultural society. Perhaps Nigeria needs to create a Federal system of cantons, like in Switzerland, to create more autonomous states because homogenization is not a realistic goal. At the very least for both Switzerland and Nigeria, tolerance of all ethnicities must be achieved. Canada has had more success in its implementation of multiculturalism both internally and with immigrants. Its strong centralized government has allocated multiculturalism as one of its main focuses and as a result, Canada is one of the leading countries in cultural coexistence.

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