

A Religion Like No Other? Islam and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Canada |

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Polls indicate that Canadians continue to support a policy of official multiculturalism. At the same time, surveys also show that a majority of Canadians have a low opinion Muslims and support bans on Islamic religious practices. What explains this inconsistency? I argue that Canadians' views on Islam have been powerfully shaped by a broader, transnational discourse that casts Islam as a threat to Western liberal-democracy. According to its critics, Islam is not just another minority religion; it is a dangerous impediment to social cohesion and, paradoxically, an obstacle to the maintenance of a public culture founded on rights, toleration and openness. I trace how this discourse has shaped politics and policymaking in Canada, noting similarities and important differences with other states. In contrast to states in Western Europe, antipathy to Muslims has not resulted in a rejection of multiculturalism in Canada, either by politicians or the general public. This reflects the peculiar features of Canadian electoral politics, on the one hand, and the importance of official multiculturalism policy in shaping contemporary understandings of Canadian national identity among the public, on the other.