

Title: Multiculturalism “On the Ground”: The Social Geography of Immigrant and Visible Minority Populations in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, Projected to 2017

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Research Question: To what degree are newcomers and members of visible minority groups ghettoized in Canadian cities? More precisely, is there a correspondence between the landscapes of immigrant/visible minority groups and areas of poverty in Canadian metropolitan areas? Is the tendency for residential clustering increasing or diminishing? What can we expect to see in the near future?

Importance: Race riots have occurred in the cities of France and the USA, especially in neighbourhoods associated with marginalized visible minority groups. With such a large number of visible minority newcomers settling in Canadian cities, should we worry that the same tensions could emerge in this country? The term ghettoization is increasingly used in Canada; it is important to see whether this is an accurate depiction of the situation.

Research Findings: Our analysis corroborates other studies that show higher rates of low income among immigrants and members of visible minority groups than the Canadian population as a whole. Moreover, immigrants and visible minority groups are unevenly distributed in the three metropolitan areas examined in this study. In all three cities, the distribution of these groups is complex and is comprised of a mixture of concentration and dispersion. That is, there are areas that can be identified with relatively high densities of immigrants and/or visible minority groups, but the dispersion of these populations is also striking. We find little evidence of ghettoization, that is, extensive areas dominated by a single ethnocultural group that are also areas of socio-economic marginalization. There are some small areas that share these characteristics, most notably in the inner, older, suburbs of Toronto, but they are few in number. Instead, we find that most areas of immigrant and/or visible minority concentration tend to be socially heterogeneous, with a mixture of low- and medium-income households. We also used estimates of the number of immigrants and members of visible minorities in Canadian cities in 2017 to project future ethnocultural landscapes in the same three metropolitan areas. The patterns identified above are unlikely to change dramatically in this time frame.

Implications: While this study does not lead to the conclusion that “nothing is wrong”, it is clear that the degree of ghettoization in Canada is routinely overstated within the media and, to a degree, scholarly and policy debates as well. This study calls for a more nuanced understanding of the social landscapes associated with immigrants and visible minority groups in Canada.