

Immigration Trends—By the Numbers

By SALIM MANSUR

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The headline on my column last week read, “Immigration isn’t just about numbers.” But numbers indeed tell the story of how the trend line for immigrants arriving in Canada over the past 25 years slopes upward. In 2010, some 280,681 immigrants—or new arrivals as permanent residents, in the language of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada—entered the country. The figure for 1986 was 99,354.

The total number of immigrants arriving in this period (1986-2010) was more than 5.5 million, or an average of some 220,000 annually. During these years the total population grew from about 26 million in 1986 to 34 million in 2010.

To put the above numbers in perspective—all figures provided here come from government sources—Canada accepted some 4.4 million immigrants in the three decades between 1951 and 1981 at an average of about 146,000 annually. In 1951, Canada’s population was slightly above 14 million, and in 1981 the figure was close to 25 million.

The number for immigrants in 2010 was the highest for a single year during the past 60 years.

We might note in the period of 1986-2010 the spike in numbers occurred under the previous Conservative government of prime minister Brian Mulroney. In order to assure new Canadians or ethnic minorities that the Conservatives favoured increased immigration, the Mulroney government spiked the numbers upward, from less than 100,000 in 1986 to a record high of 256,641 in 1993.

This jump in immigration levels, while disregarding an economic downturn during the same period, was a transparent effort by the Mulroney Conservatives to woo ethnic votes. The irony is the effort failed as the Conservatives crashed to their worst electoral defeat in the 1993 election.

Immigration has contributed to population growth since Confederation. But during the past half-century, a dramatic shift took place in terms of the source-area com-

position of immigrants to Canada.

Until 1961 the origin of more than 90 percent of immigrants was from Europe, and non-European immigrants, primarily from Asia, barely registered at 3 percent. In the decades following the centennial year, these figures were significantly altered.

In the period of 1991-2001, immigrants of European origin entering Canada fell below 20 percent, and Asian immigrants soared to nearly 60 percent of the new arrivals. During the same period, immigrants from Africa accounted for nearly 8 percent of the total, while around 11 percent were those arriving from the Caribbean basin, Central and South America.

It is in this shift of source-area composition of immigrants that the demographic profile of Canada’s population as predominantly of European-origin has begun to change.

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In 2010, for instance, the top three source countries for immigrants—their respective numbers are given in brackets—were Philippines (36,578), India (30,252) and China (30,197). Together these three countries provided nearly 35 percent of new arrivals in Canada.

The other noteworthy figure for 2010 is the total number of immigrants originating from Muslim majority countries, which amounted to 65,684 or approaching 25 percent of the new arrivals.

The cumulative effect of these numbers over time will be significant, and this is why immigration is the big issue politicians of all stripes want to avoid publicly discussing. ■

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