

# Economic integration is a major leveler for Quebecers' immigration preferences, study shows

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Credit: Michael Descharles on Unsplash

Canada's points-based immigration system, which prioritizes work skills over country of origin, has defined its approach to welcoming new arrivals since its implementation in 1967. This is also true in Quebec,

which, unique among Canadian provinces, administers its own immigration system while prioritizing French-language proficiency.

Historically, immigration has been viewed positively by Canadians and Quebecers, thanks to their contributions to population and [economic growth](#).

Nevertheless, there remain large segments of the population that prefer to welcome immigrants from countries of similar ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds as them.

In a new paper [published](#) in a special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, the authors ask whether greater economic and cultural integration can offset innate biases against immigrants who are from different backgrounds than the majority host population—in this case, Quebec.

In a survey of 2,400 Canadian-born self-identified white francophone Quebecers, the researchers found that although there remains a country-of-origin preference among respondents, this can be mitigated by social class and the expectation that immigrants will contribute to the province's economic well-being.

"The points system has not eliminated the country-of-origin preferences, which we expected," says Antoine Bilodeau, a professor in the Department of Political Science who co-authored the paper with Audrey Gagnon, Ph.D. '23, now at the University of Ottawa. "But when Quebecers see that economic integration is working, they want immigrants to come even if they are not from their preferred country. And that is exactly in the spirit of the points system."

## **Assessing people, not countries**

For the purposes of their study, the researchers designed six profiles of a fictional 34-year-old French-speaking male would-be [immigrant](#) to Quebec. The only other information provided was country of origin—either France or Algeria, both of which are among the leading sources of immigrants to the province—and a vague description of his occupation.

These were designed to represent a social class associated with the profession. He would either be a lower-class maintenance worker, a middle-class computer technician or an upper-class successful businessman.

The respondents were asked to pretend they were an immigration officer tasked with assessing the candidate's eligibility based on the combination of variables. Each respondent was only given one profile and no photo. The French and Algerian applicants were designated equally fluent in French, thus neutralizing the politically charged language issue.

Overall, 95% of candidates were given a grade that would grant them admission to Quebec.

"We were surprised to see that the national origin question did not have as large an effect as we expected," Bilodeau says.

France was still the preferred country by a statistically significant margin, but across all three social classes the difference was only in the mid to high single-digit percentages. Middle- and upper-class immigrants were preferred over lower-class ones.

"We suspect that one of the reasons behind this was the humanizing aspect," Bilodeau explains. "We are presenting a person, not just a nationality. Also, because the respondent is supposed to be a [government official](#), there may be an element of professionalism that overcomes an

individual's stereotypes and prejudices."

Notably, a candidate's likelihood to integrate in and contribute to the province's economic well-being played a substantial role in evaluations. The more likely they were to integrate successfully, the more positive the assessment, regardless of national origin or social class.

"From an economic integration perspective, it was the same across the board: there was no social class difference effect and there was no national origin effect. If you are perceived as integrating economically, regardless of whether you are French or Algerian, you will be rewarded the same."

Based on these results, the authors conclude that Canada and Quebec's points-based system by and large is working as designed, up to a point.

"The system cannot overcome completely the fact that people have greater preferences or affinities or insecurities in relation to some groups. But these preferences are not insurmountable, and we know that they are not especially unique to Quebec."

**More information:** Antoine Bilodeau et al, Overcoming origin-based preferences by selecting skilled immigrants? Preferences in immigrants' national origin and social class in Quebec, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2024.2315353](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2315353)

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