



Government  
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Policy Research  
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Projet de recherche  
sur les politiques

# Living with Religious Diversity: An analytical framework for policy research

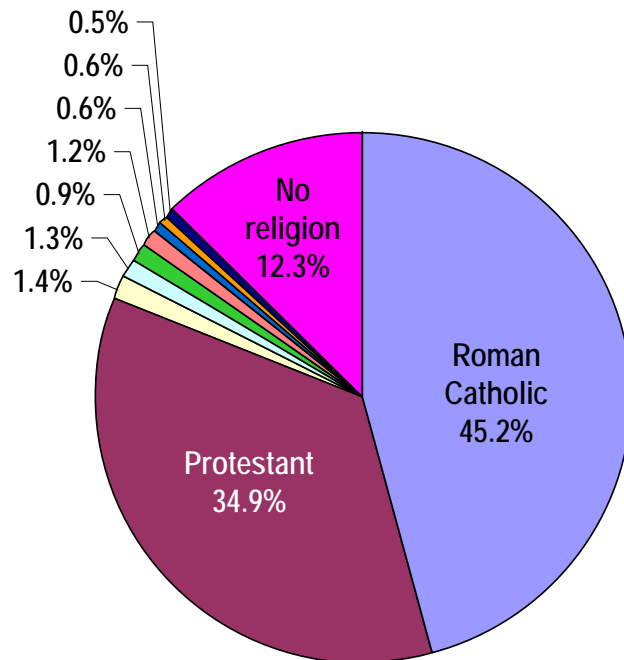
Multicultural Diversity Project  
Social Analysis and Research Group

January 2010

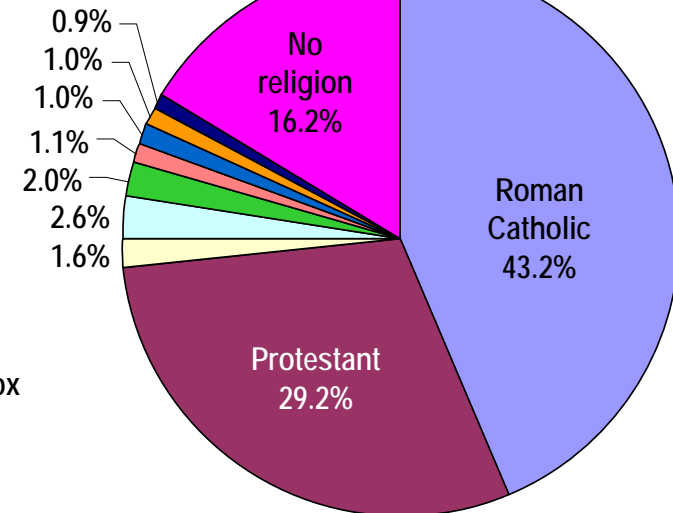
Canada

## Canada has significant (and growing) religious diversity...

Population by religious affiliation (%), 1991



Population by religious affiliation (%), 2001



Statistics Canada Census 2001

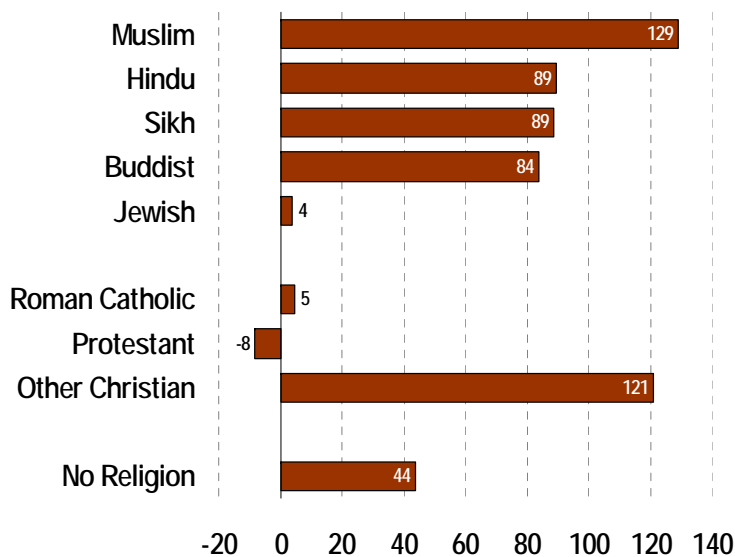
...though mainline Christian denominations remain dominant

# Though still few in number, Canadians from non-Christian (and "other Christian") backgrounds...

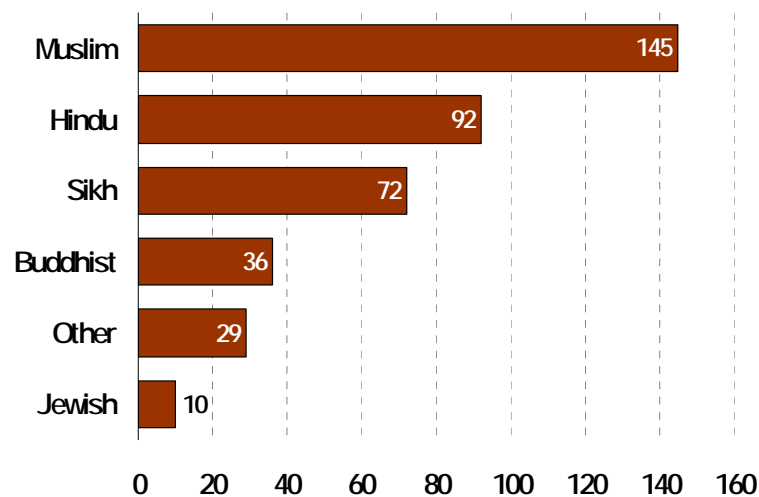
have grown rapidly...

...and are projected to continue to do so

% change in religious affiliation, 1991 to 2001



Projected % change in religious affiliation, 2001 to 2017



Source: Canadian Diversity Volume 5:2 spring 2006: Now that religious diversity is upon us; Kamal Dib

## There is increasing policy interest in the implications of growing religious diversity in Canada

- PRI cross-country roundtables in 2007 on multicultural diversity indicated that
  - much current debate on cultural diversity in Canada stems from an apprehension of *religious* diversity
  - policy-makers, media and the general public appear ill-equipped to deal with that challenge
- Concerns among policy-makers and the public over accommodation of minority religious practices were also a key driving force for the Bouchard-Taylor Commission

*"... multiculturalism is now under pressure to add a third track of religion, alongside ethnicity and race. This, indeed, is the third stage of multiculturalism, and its evolution is still very much a work in progress. There remains much uncertainty about the role of religion within the multiculturalism policy, and about the sorts of religious organizations and faith-based claims that should be supported by the policy."*

Will Kymlicka, 2008

UBC Laurier Institution Multiculturalism  
Lecture Series

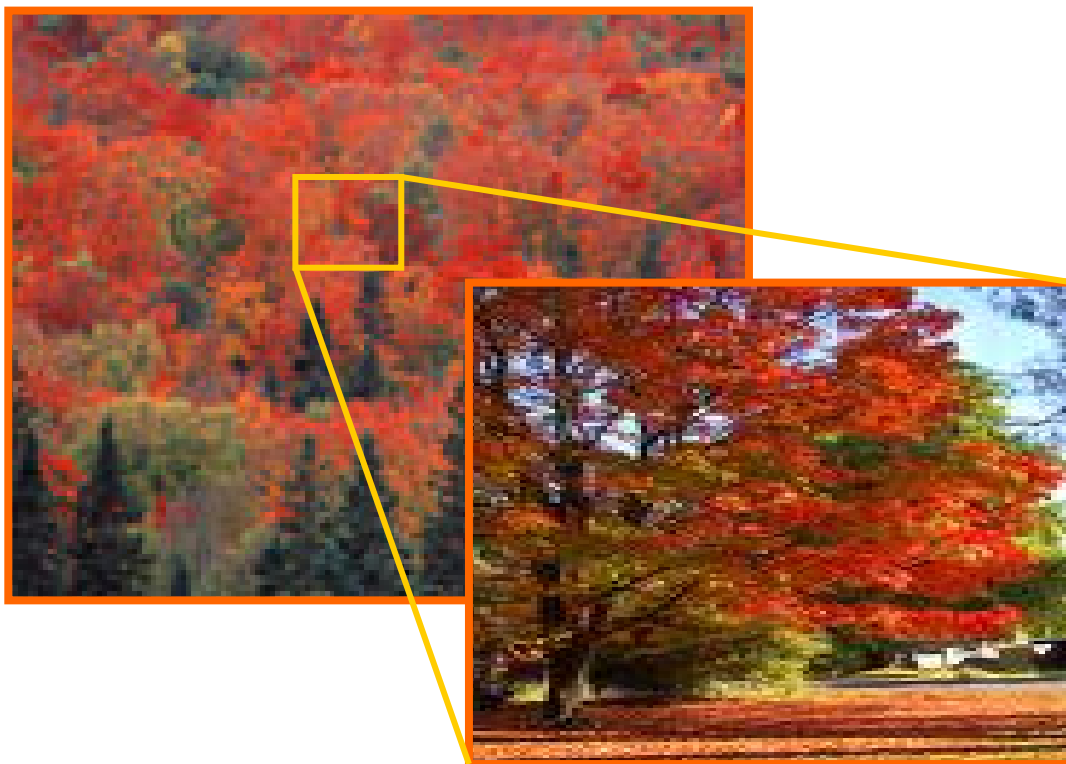
## Policy responses to increasing religious diversity need to succeed simultaneously at three distinct levels:



### At the “macro level” (“setting the tone”):

- Diverse societies generally feel the need to tell a coherent and compelling story about:
  - how, as a society, they treat their religious and other minorities justly and with respect
  - how the society balances sometimes competing interests as well as rights and principles set out in its foundational documents

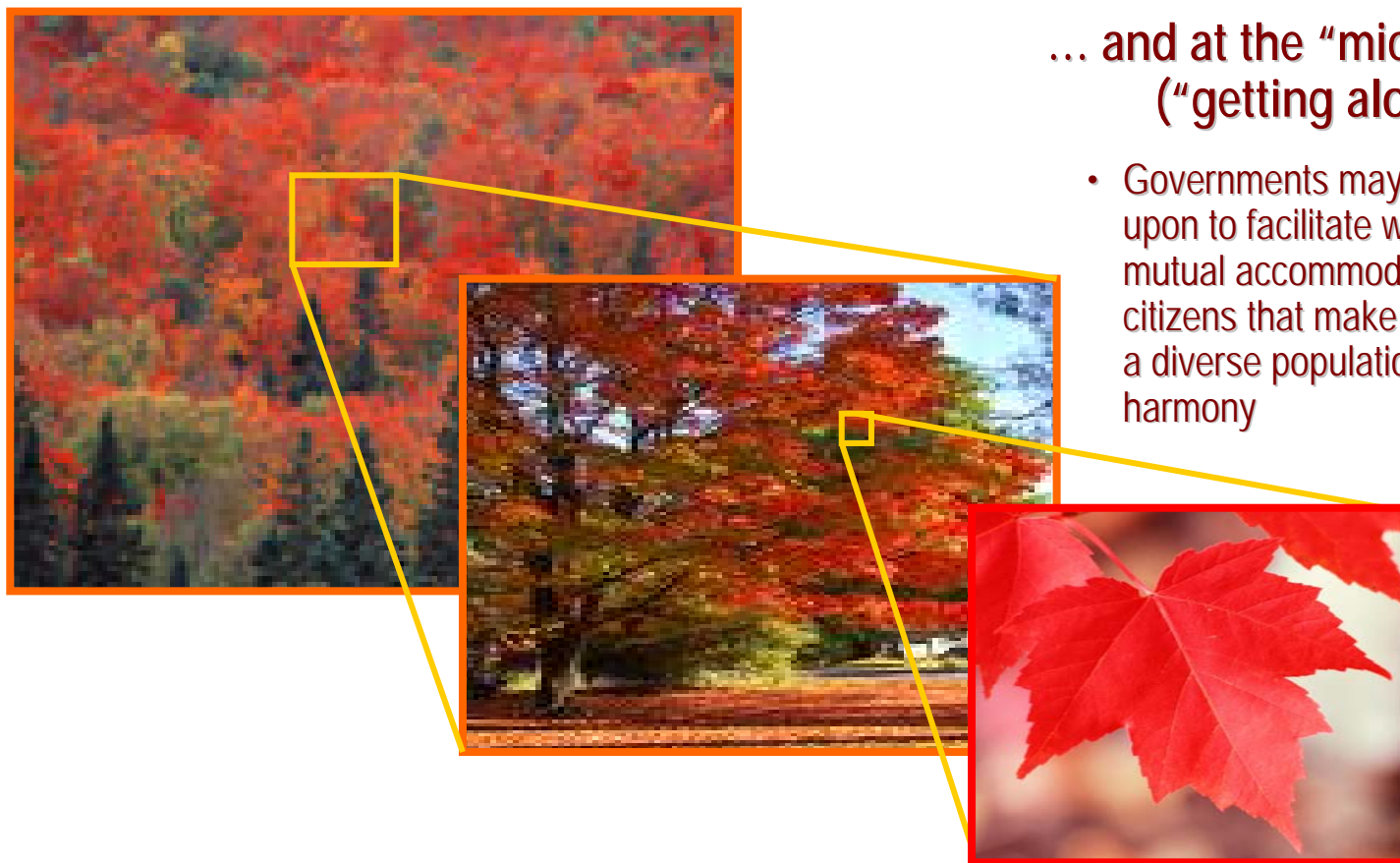
## Policy responses to increasing religious diversity need to succeed simultaneously at three distinct levels:



... at the “meso” level  
 (“serving Canadians”):

- Governments generally seek to be responsive to the needs of both religious and non-religious citizens when:
  - providing services or public goods either directly or indirectly to them
  - hiring them into public service
  - regulating behaviour by setting rules for the common good

## Policy responses to increasing religious diversity need to succeed simultaneously at three distinct levels:



... and at the “micro” level (“getting along”):

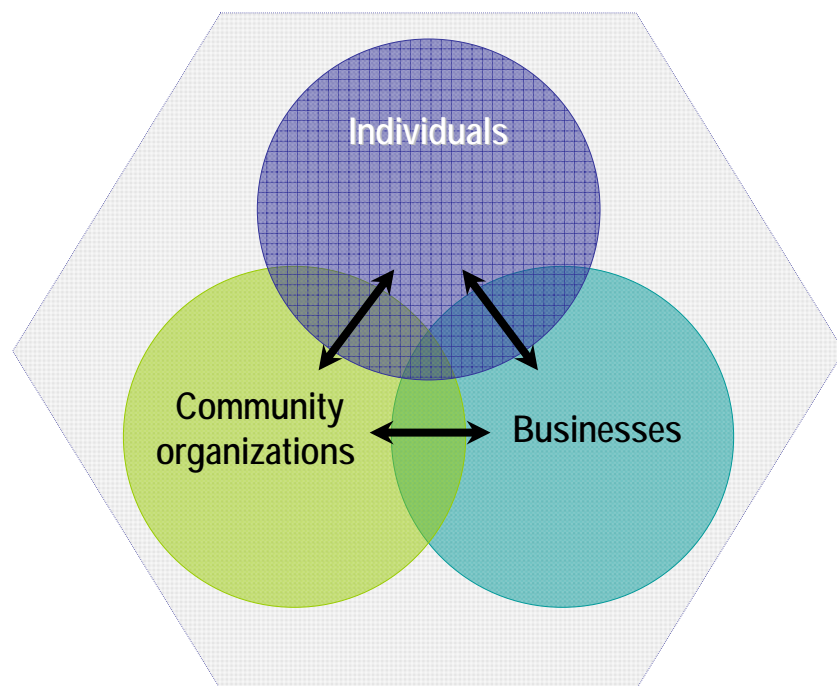
- Governments may be called upon to facilitate widespread mutual accommodation among citizens that make it possible for a diverse population to live in harmony

## Key propositions for micro-level policy research

- Religious belief is a key element of many individual identities...  
... and is often idiosyncratic (i.e. varying significantly even among adherents to the same faith)
- Often, religious identity also reinforces other key elements of individual and group identity (ethnicity, race, language, gender, etc.)...  
... and provides valuable social capital (both “bonding” and “bridging”)
- Even when religious identities fade, attachment to religious symbols often remains...  
... e.g. as ethnic/national symbols and (occasionally) as political rallying calls
- Some level of tension between adherents of different faiths is likely inevitable

In most cases, potential religion-based tensions are addressed privately, through mutual accommodations...

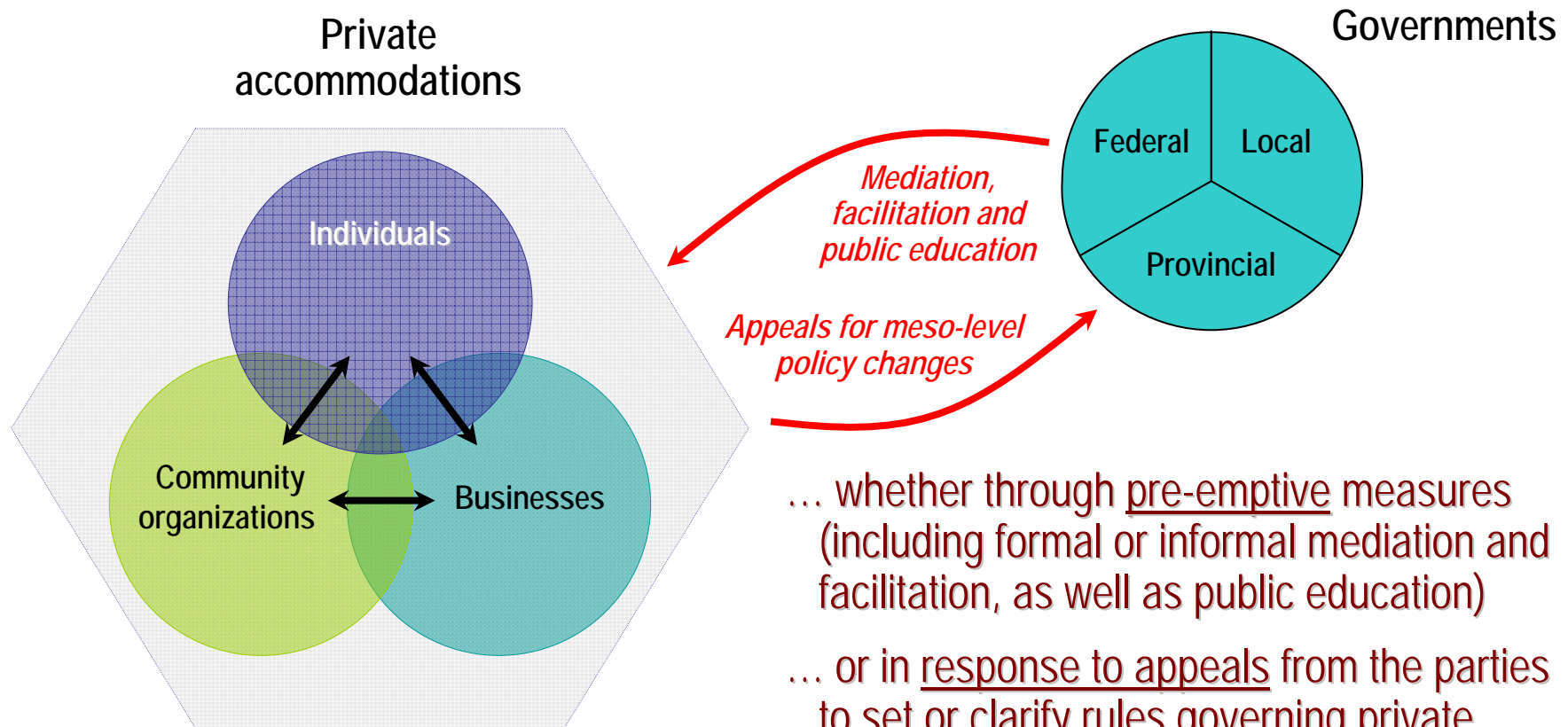
Private accommodations



Private accommodations may take many forms:

- voluntary accommodations for various reasons (some civic-minded, some directly self-interested)
- mutual avoidance
- ecumenical outreach / joint activities
- in some cases, voluntary self-exclusion from aspects of the broader society on the part of certain religious communities themselves (e.g. Hutterites, old-order Mennonites)

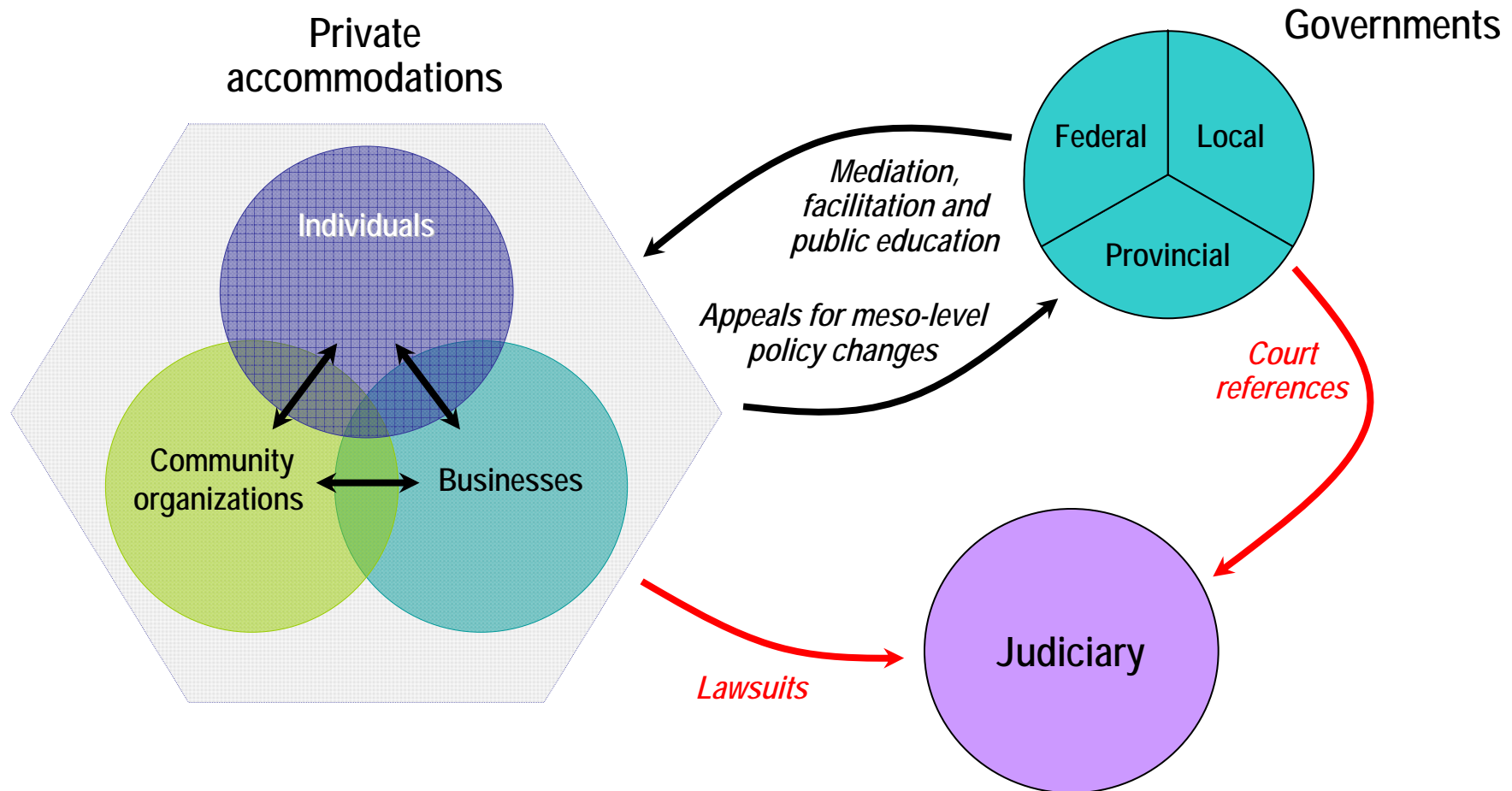
... though in some cases, governments may be called upon to intervene



... whether through pre-emptive measures (including formal or informal mediation and facilitation, as well as public education)

... or in response to appeals from the parties to set or clarify rules governing private relationships (e.g. human rights legislation)

... and, exceptionally (though increasingly),  
recourse may be made to the courts



## Key propositions for meso-level policy research

- Given competitive politics, political parties and governments can be expected to try to meet the particular needs of religious minorities by
  - adapting public services and policies to meet their needs
  - bringing them into the decision-making process
- ... though the same phenomenon can also be expected to also set limits:
  - e.g. stopping short of policy adaptations that are widely seen as running counter to broader societal values (gender equality, etc.)
- The likelihood of public resistance to policy adaptations can be expected to vary depending on the type of policy, e.g.:
  - greater resistance to special treatment where State authority over citizens is involved (criminal/family law, etc.) or in access to rationed services
  - resistance less likely to consultations with religious minority stakeholders, adaptations to services offered to all on a comparable basis

## PRI interviews with federal policy practitioners suggest:

- A broad recognition that religious diversity in Canada is here to stay...
  - ... though there is a clear reluctance to see religious diversity as distinct from other dimensions of cultural diversity (especially in relation to domestic policy)
  - ... and clear consensus that existing policy frameworks are adequate and a formal requirement to apply a religious diversity “lens” would be counter-productive
- An understanding (especially at the operational level) that successful policies require flexibility and dialogue with religious clienteles...
  - ... though those responsible for helping *make* policy appear to be less attuned to possible implications of religious diversity for the policies they design
- Some concerns over lack of training/information for public servants in relation to religious diversity...
  - ... and over frequent losses of corporate memory on what policy adaptations in response to the needs of religious clienteles were made (and why)

## Key propositions for macro-level policy research

- Both micro- and meso-level policies are in large part judged in terms of their coherence with a high-level societal discourse...
  - ... that may need to strike a broadly acceptable balance between competing values of respect for minorities and other fundamental values held by the society
- A key issue is the extent to which this discourse can/should be made explicit – or left largely implicit and free to evolve in response to occasional public controversies, court rulings, etc.
- In spite of the complexity of its role in society, public discourse on religion tends toward the simplistic
  - e.g. conflictual “clash of civilizations” with monolithic religious communities
- Competing stylized visions of the role of religion in society continue to feed a “dialogue of the deaf”

## Four stylized visions of society shaping today's discourse over religion

	1. "Faith-based" society	2. "Faith-averse" society
Assumptions re <u>private beliefs</u> of citizens and decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizens and decision-makers both guided by religious principles and doctrines presumed to be shared by all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizens / decision-makers expected to profess secular views only (keeping any religious views private)</li> </ul>
Assumptions re <u>justification of actions</u> by decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Justification based on religious principles and doctrines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Justification based solely on secular principles</li> </ul>
Attitudes toward <u>minority beliefs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generally intolerant of other religious beliefs and non-belief (especially when the society feels itself threatened)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generally intolerant of religious beliefs (especially if publicly manifested)</li> </ul>

## Four stylized visions of society shaping today's discourse over religion

	3. "Faith-guided" society	4. "Faith-neutral" society
Assumptions re <u>private beliefs</u> of citizens and decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizens / decision-makers expected to profess religious principles and doctrines (even if they do not adhere to them strictly – or at all)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizens / decision-makers are free to hold and express religious or secular beliefs publicly and privately (without interfering with rights of others)</li> </ul>
Assumptions re <u>justification of actions</u> by decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Frequent draw on religious principles and doctrines, but may be reinforced by references to secular principles (especially in heterogeneous societies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Justification based mostly on secular (and sometimes ecumenical) principles reflecting extensive public dialogue among competing views</li> </ul>
Attitudes toward <u>minority beliefs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Variable tolerance with tendency to favoritism toward majority faith (especially when threatened), with deeply heterogeneous societies tending toward ecumenism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generally tolerant of wide range of beliefs (though still subject to limits reflecting dominant community beliefs)</li> </ul>

## In practice, most Canadians seem to aspire to a “faith-neutral” view of society...

... as embodied in key foundational texts:

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s.2(a):

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms...freedom of conscience and religion...freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression...

Canadian Multiculturalism Act, s.3(1a):

...hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada...to recognize and promote the understanding of multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledge the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage...

... but, as in other complex societies:

- significant strands of public opinion hold contrary views...
- the country's institutions still retain (and are likely to retain) features of its more homogeneously religious past, e.g.:
  - confessional school rights set out in the *Constitution Act, 1867*
  - references to God in the *Constitution Act, 1982*
  - the crucifix hanging in Québec's *National Assembly*

...though even a “faith-neutral” society may be faced with legitimate demands for reasonable limits to:

- Religious practices or traditional customs that may conflict with firmly held views of the broader society, including:
  - commitments to Charter (or Charter-derived) rights and freedoms, notably:
    - gender equality
    - freedom of association (including the freedom to change one’s religious beliefs and identity)
    - freedom of speech (including freedom to proselytize on behalf of both religious and non-religious beliefs)
    - etc.
  - public morality (e.g. strong opposition to child marriage, certain Doukhobor practices in the past)
- The self-exclusion of individuals (e.g. religiously inspired radicals) – or of whole communities – from the broader society

## Many policy research questions remain in relation to:

### Diagnosis of underlying phenomena and related policy challenges

- When does the inherent tendency of religious communities to congregate raise potential policy challenges (e.g. as symptoms of involuntary exclusion or possible threats to social cohesion/security)? (and how – if at all – can policy-makers tell?)
- Are certain religious groups more vulnerable to involuntary exclusion than others (and why)?
- To what extent are religious identities cross-cutting or reinforcing of other identities?
- How are religious identities evolving (e.g. over time and between generations)?
- What kinds of tensions involving religious communities are least likely to be managed successfully through private accommodations (and why)?
- How receptive/responsive are Canadians in different parts of the country to public information/education relating to religious practices and symbols?

## Many policy research questions remain in relation to:

### Appropriate instruments for meeting those challenges

- Which kinds of tensions involving religious communities are most amenable to resolution through publicly supported mediation, facilitation and information?
- When are regulatory/legislative measures (e.g. human rights legislation) likely to be effective in dealing with tensions (and when may they exacerbate them)?
- When should governments defer to the courts in setting ground rules for private accommodation of religious differences and/or adaptations of public policies?
- In addition to (or instead of) regulatory/legislative measures to prohibit practices unacceptable to the broader society, what alternative mechanisms are there that may both minimize such practices and avoid driving them underground?
- Are there current or emerging practices in other countries that offer potential lessons for Canada (in relation to either what to do or what not to do)?