**ANALYSIS**

**How do you screen beliefs? The troublesome task of testing for 'anti-Canadian values'**

**It's not yet clear how Kellie Leitch imagines we would evaluate such values — or even how we'd define them**

By Aaron Wherry, [CBC News](http://www.cbc.ca/news/cbc-news-online-news-staff-list-1.1294364) Posted: Sep 04, 2016 5:00 AM ET Last Updated: Sep 04, 2016 8:55 AM ET

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When Kellie Leitch, one of four candidates officially seeking the leadership of the Conservative party, was first reported to have [**asked her supporters**](http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/kellie-leitch-survey-question-1.3744948) whether immigrants to this country should be screened for "anti-Canadian values," it was tempting to assume she believed that prospective citizens should be handed a cup of Tim Hortons coffee, sent to a professional hockey game and made to at least pretend that they were enjoying themselves.

But, as it turns out, the "anti-Canadian values" Leitch believes new immigrants should be checked for include "intolerance towards other religions, cultures and sexual orientations, violent and/or misogynist behaviour and/or a lack of acceptance of our Canadian tradition of personal and economic freedoms."

And this, Leitch explained in a statement on Friday, is "a policy proposal that I feel very strongly about."

Indeed, she later enthused to her supporters that, "We are going to have an open discussion about what Canadian values are and what they are not."

"If you are tired of feeling like we can't discuss what our Canadian values are, then please help me to fight back by making a donation," she added.

So as to assist those who feel like this can't be discussed, let's discuss it.

**Precedents for a values test**

Leitch's proposal is not without precedents.

Two weeks ago, noted wall-enthusiast Donald Trump [**suggested**](http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trumps-proposed-ideological-tests/story?id=41418195) that those hoping to become American citizens would undergo ideological screening, hearkening back to a [**Cold War policy**](http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/23/opinions/cold-war-immigration-bier/) that was meant to keep communists out.

"Those who do not believe in our Constitution or who support bigotry and hatred will not be admitted for immigration into our country," he said. "Only those who we expect to flourish in our country and to embrace a tolerant American society should be issued visas."

Belgium recently began to require that non-European migrants [**sign a pledge**](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/01/belgium-to-require-immigrants-to-sign-up-to-european-values) committing themselves to certain "values."

In Canada, we do present potential citizens with a guide that explains our history and speaks of values, but we do not then check to make sure every newcomer believes fully and completely in each and every one of those ideals.

At the moment, it is not clear how Leitch imagines we should.

**How would we screen for beliefs?**

Would immigrants be asked to confirm their agreement with a series of statements about equality? How would we know they were telling the truth? Would we hook them up to a lie detector? Would we have public servants checking Twitter histories and Facebook profiles for evidence of intolerance or unacceptable views?

Are we comfortable with the idea of regulating beliefs? Who defines the values and how they will be measured? How specific would we get?

Would immigrants have to be fully supportive of same-sex marriage? (To pick a right that Conservative party members have only just come around to not opposing and which some current Canadian citizens still don't support.) What about transgender rights? (To pick an issue that Parliament will soon be considering.)

What constitutes an intolerance for economic freedom? Would that rule out socialists? What about anyone with an inclination to vote for the NDP?

What great benefit would we derive from the effort? And what would be the effect of such a test?

We might, for instance, imagine that living in Canada could open the mind of a homophobe, or at least provide his or her children with a good atmosphere in which to grow up.

But, while we're on the topic, what of the bigots and misogynists who were born here?

**What problem does this mean to solve?**

But perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us go back to the premise, or at least try to understand what it might be.

What problem does this debate over Canadian values mean to solve? Are great hordes of bigots and misogynists entering our country at present? Are their beliefs having some kind of deleterious impact on our society? Are we faced with some kind of threat that must be dealt with?

The implication that we are is inherent in Leitch's idea: That immigrants with "anti-Canadian values" are coming to this country. That Canada is faced with a meaningful problem. That even though we have become a tolerant, pluralistic society alongside decades of mass immigration (and despite whatever prejudices were held by our naturally born citizens and new arrivals), we are somehow now in need of greater protection.

That is a troubling suggestion to leave hanging in the air as thousands of newcomers continue to try to settle into our country. We should not uncarefully implicate an entire class of people.

Conservative MP Michael Chong, a rival candidate for the Conservative Party leadership, says the suggestion 'that some immigrants are 'anti-Canadian', does not represent our Conservative Party or our Canada.' (Adrian Wyld/Canadian Press)

"This suggestion, that some immigrants are 'anti-Canadian', does not represent our Conservative Party or our Canada," Michael Chong, a fellow leadership candidate, [**said in a statement on Friday**](https://www.facebook.com/michaelchongCPC/posts/505987569599173). "The language and context that Kellie used has led key Conservatives, including Prime Minister [Stephen] Harper's former director of policy, to criticize this move as the worst of dog-whistle politics.‎"

(Interim Leader Rona Ambrose has since joined Chong in questioning Leitch's proposal, noting there are already criminal background checks for potential immigrants.)

**Does someone wearing a niqab make us vulnerable?**

The suggestion of a threat also suggests a vulnerability.

In this way, screening for anti-Canadian values seems similar to the previous government's fretting about some women [**wearing the niqab during the citizenship oath**](http://www.macleans.ca/politics/what-principle-would-banning-the-niqab-uphold/).

We might not like what we imagine the niqab to represent, just as we might not like the idea of anyone with even a single misogynistic, bigoted or homophobic thought making a home in this country.

But we might believe that we are collectively strong enough to welcome a vast array of beliefs and practices without losing ourselves. That we are not so fragile or weak.

That, [**in contradiction to the implication found in Donald Trump's proposal**](http://www.vox.com/2016/8/16/12491000/trump-extreme-vetting-test-immigrant), our best and noblest ideas will prevail and win out. And that our values might indeed spread, as newcomers arrive and settle here.

If some of us are worried, we might try to understand why. But we might decide that a proper Canadian value is to not be fearful.