**What is the Difference between Multiculturalism and Pluralism**

The **main difference** between multiculturalism and pluralism is that **multiculturalism doesn’t have a dominant culture, but pluralism has a dominant culture.**

Both multiculturalism and pluralism are phenomena of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism refers to the co-existence of diverse religious, [ethnic](https://pediaa.com/difference-between-ethnicity-and-nationality/) or [cultural](https://pediaa.com/difference-between-ethnicity-and-culture/) groups within a society. In contrast, cultural pluralism refers to a phenomenon where minority groups participate fully in the dominant society, but while maintaining their cultural differences.

## What is Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism basically refers to cultural diversity. To be more specific, it is the co-existence of diverse religious, ethnic or cultural groups within a society. People in a multicultural community retain, celebrate, pass down and share their unique cultural ways of life, [traditions](https://pediaa.com/difference-between-custom-and-tradition/), behaviour, languages, and art. The concept of multiculturalism can describe an area with a mixed ethnic community where multiple cultural groups and traditions exist (e.g. New York City) or a single country within which multiple cultures exist (ex: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, etc.).

In sociology, multiculturalism is a result of either a natural (e.g. immigration) or artificial process (through legislative decrees like in the case of French Canada and English Canada) and can occur on a large national scale or a smaller scale within communities.

### Theories on Multiculturalism

Furthermore, there are two major theories that explain the integration of different cultures into a single society. These are known as a melting pot and salad bowl.

Salad Bowl – This model describes a heterogeneous society where people coexist but retain at least some unique characteristics of their traditional culture. In this model, different cultures are brought together like ingredients in a salad, but these individual cultures retain their own flavours, instead of merging into a single homogeneous culture. For example, multicultural cities with ethnic communities like Little Italy and, Chinatown.

Melting Pot – This model proposes that various immigrant groups will tend to “melt together,” deserting their individual cultures and ultimately becoming fully [assimilated](https://pediaa.com/difference-between-assimilation-and-acculturation/) into the predominant society.

## What is Pluralism

In general, the term pluralism refers to the existence of different types of people having different beliefs and opinions within the same society. There are different forms of pluralism, such as cultural pluralism, legal pluralism, political pluralism, etc. Multiculturalism is often associated with cultural pluralism. Therefore, we will be talking about cultural pluralism in this section.

Cultural pluralism is very similar to multiculturalism. Specifically, it is a phenomenon where minority groups participate fully in the dominant society, but while maintaining their cultural differences. In most occasions, the two terms cultural pluralism and multiculturalism are used as synonyms.

However, if you carefully look at the definitions of these two terms, you’ll notice that pluralism always describe small groups that exist within a larger community. These small groups retain their individual identities, cultural values and practices, which are acceptable in the larger culture as long as they are consistent with the ideals and laws of the bigger society. Thus, there is always a dominant culture in pluralism. However, there is no dominant culture in multiculturalism. Moreover, when the dominant culture is weakened, society could change from pluralism into multiculturalism.

## Similarities Between Multiculturalism and Pluralism

* Both these concepts describe instances of cultural diversity, and the existence of diverse religious, ethnic or cultural groups within a society.
* These two words are often used as synonyms.

## Difference Between Multiculturalism and Pluralism

### Definition

Multiculturalism refers to the co-existence of diverse religious, ethnic or cultural groups within a society. In contrast, cultural pluralism refers to a phenomenon where minority groups participate fully in the dominant society, but while maintaining their cultural differences.

### Dominant Culture

There is no dominant culture in multiculturalism, while there is a dominant culture in pluralism. Moreover, when the dominant culture is weakened, society could change from pluralism into multiculturalism.

### Conclusion

The main difference between multiculturalism and pluralism is that multiculturalism doesn’t have a dominant culture, whereas pluralism has a dominant culture.  Multiculturalism refers to the co-existence of diverse religious, ethnic or cultural groups within a society. In contrast, cultural pluralism refers to a phenomenon where minority groups participate fully in the dominant society.