

Backgrounder

Medicare, Bilingualism, Peacekeeping, CBC Essential to Canada's Nature, but not the monarchy

Ottawa, October 25, 2005 – Significant majorities of Canadians feel that medicare (85%), two official languages (73%), peacekeeping (69%), and the CBC (60%) are essential characteristics of the country, and that their disappearance would fundamentally alter its nature. However, less than half (43%) believes that cutting Canada's ties with the monarchy would result in a fundamental change to Canada's nature.

These were central findings of the 2005 edition of *Portraits of Canada*, the annual tracking poll conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC).

Respondents were offered seven choices and asked if they thought any one of them would change Canada fundamentally. They were:

- abandoning Canada's two official languages;
- cutting ties with the monarchy;
- eliminating public health care;
- getting rid of the CBC;
- ceasing to engage in peacekeeping operations;
- more visible minorities in the Canadian population;
- and closer ties with the US.

Those who said "yes" were then asked whether this would be a positive or a negative change.

Abandoning English and French as Canada's official languages would be considered a fundamental change by nearly three out of four Canadians (73%). Among those, nearly eight in ten feel that the disappearance of bilingualism would be negative (79%). Among all Canadians, Quebecers see official languages as most fundamental (81%), with 86% of this group viewing their abandonment as negative. However, there is strong opposition in all regions to abandoning official bilingualism. Of those who consider bilingualism an essential characteristic of Canada, 73% in Atlantic Canada, 78% in Ontario and 75% in Western Canada feel that the elimination of bilingualism would be negative.

"These findings are consistent with past polls showing widespread support for bilingualism in Canada. What is encouraging is that Canadians rank our official languages as vital in defining the nature of the country. Clearly, there is a deeply felt recognition that linguistic duality is part of being Canadian and people are very attached to it," says Michel Desjardins, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Unity Council (CUC).

CRIC is the research, communications and citizen participation program of the CUC.

In regard to cutting ties with the monarchy, 54% of Canadians said it would not change the nature of the country, while 43% said it would.

Regionally, majorities in every part of Canada, except the Atlantic Region and the North, said it would not change the country. Sixty-two percent of Quebecers took this view. In Ontario and the

West 51% and 52% respectively shared this opinion. In Atlantic Canada, 46% said abandoning the monarchy would not change Canada, but 50% said it would.

Across Canada, among those who said abandoning the monarchy would change the country, 53% thought the change would be negative while 46% said it would be positive. In Quebec, 71% thought such a change would be positive while 27% saw it as negative.

Of those who indicated that eliminating public health care would result in a fundamental change, 87% said that it would be negative. Northerners (90%) and Ontarians (89%) are most likely to say that eliminating universal health care would be negative, followed by 88% in Western Canada, 85% in Atlantic Canada, and 83% in Quebec.

Getting rid of the CBC would be a fundamental change in the opinion of 60% of Canadians, with 81% of those who feel this way taking the position that it would be negative. Regionally, Atlantic Canadians stood out. Seventy-four percent of them regard the CBC as fundamental to Canada's character. Of this group, 79% would consider such a change negative.

More than two out of three Canadians (69%) consider peacekeeping a defining characteristic of Canada. Among Canadians who saw peacekeeping as fundamental, 80% felt it would be a negative change if it were discontinued.

Finally, respondents were also asked about Canada's changing population. Fifty-seven percent thought that the fact that more and more Canadians are part of visible minorities changes the country's nature while 38% disagreed. Of those who thought it did change the nature of the country, 52% saw this as a positive development.

There were some marked regional differences on this issue. While both Atlantic and Western Canadians see more visible minorities as a fundamental change (61% and 58% respectively), 59% of Atlantic Canadians who consider it a fundamental change view it as positive while only 47% of westerners who consider it a fundamental change see it as positive.

"We know from past surveys that there is strong support among Canadians for multiculturalism and immigration, but this survey cautions us not to assume that all Canadians are equally happy about some of the demographic changes occurring. Among the six out of ten Canadians who feel that visible minorities change the nature of Canada, close to three are not comfortable with what is happening. The variations across regions that we have observed point to a public sentiment that is complex and needs to be more closely scrutinized to ensure that the diversity of our country is embraced by as many Canadians as possible," says Dr. Carsten Quell, CRIC's Director of Research.

When asked whether closer Canada-US ties would result in a fundamental change, two out of three Canadians said yes, but there was less consensus on whether this would be a positive or negative change with 59% considering it negative and 40% saying it would be positive. Interestingly, people in Nunavut (51%) were least inclined to feel that a fundamental change would occur if Canada moved closer to the US. Among those a majority (52%) thought such a change would be a good thing. In all parts of the country, except Quebec (42%), majorities saw closer ties as negative.

The full poll, including graphics, methodology and additional breakdowns, is available on the CRIC website, www.cric.ca.

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