

Canadians said they valued PM with common touch: poll

Mike Oliveira

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Canadian Press

Friday, February 03, 2006

TORONTO -- In the days leading up to the federal election, Canadians said they most valued a prime minister who is a good communicator and has a "common touch," according to a new poll made available to The Canadian Press.

When asked what characteristics they most wanted in a prime minister, 29 per cent said having the "common touch" was the most important. Some 25 per cent said they wanted a "great communicator," 21 per cent said they were looking for a "decisive" leader and 15 per cent saying they wanted an "intellectual" at the helm.

Only four per cent thought being bilingual was the most important attribute for a prime minister.

"I thought we were still very much in the shadow of Pierre Trudeau and (valuing a prime minister) being an intellectual, being bilingual," said Rudyard Griffiths, executive director of the Dominion Institute, one of the groups that commissioned the poll.

"Instead, they were right at the bottom of the list. Having a common touch, being a great communicator - almost what I call Ronald Reagan-esque characteristics - were those (characteristics) that were overwhelmingly preferred by Canadians."

Griffiths said the common touch refers to a politician's ability to engage average Canadians and humanize issues facing the government and country.

"If we look at our history and prime ministers who had a common touch, I think Chretien in his own way had a bit of that - the little guy from Shawinigan, that was part of his common touch," he said, adding Brian Mulroney was sometimes called the boy from Baie-Comeau and John Diefenbaker was the prairie prophet.

Griffiths said new prime minister Stephen Harper may have appeared to share that characteristic, especially in Quebec, where 51 per cent of those polled said it was the most important attribute for a prime minister.

"Maybe part of Harper's success in Quebec was that perennial question, 'Is this a guy I could have a beer with?' " Griffiths said.

"You could arguably say Harper's success in the last election was the degree to which he seemed like more of a regular Joe than (Paul Martin), with the young family (and becoming) the first baby boomer prime minister."

The poll also asked Canadians what advice they'd have for Harper as prime minister.

Seventeen per cent said Harper should be honest, ethical and have integrity, which is perhaps a reflection on the sponsorship scandal and the Gomery report, Griffiths said.

Fourteen per cent said he should keep his word on election promises, 12 per cent said he should work for Canada and stick up for the little guy, and eight per cent said he should avoid mistakes and make intelligent decisions.

Another eight per cent said he should resign or hand power over and seven per cent said he should "show moderation and not lean too far right."

Survey respondents also flubbed a pop quiz on past prime ministers.

Only 47 per cent were able to correctly identify John A. Macdonald as Canada's first prime minister, 44 per cent could name Trudeau as the prime minister who said "just watch me" when he invoked the War Measures Act, and just 18 per cent identified Wilfrid Laurier as Canada's first francophone prime minister, who declared that the 20th century would belong to Canada.

The survey was conducted by Innovative Research Group between Jan. 19 and 22 in a telephone poll of 1,008 Canadians 18 years of age and older.

The survey results have a margin of error of 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

The poll was commissioned by the Dominion Institute, Magna, and the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs to coincide with the Feb. 4 airing of *The Next Great Prime Minister*, a television special that will see four former prime ministers - Mulroney, Joe Clark, John Turner and Kim Campbell - award \$50,000 and an internship to a young aspiring politician.

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