

Diversity, freedoms make us unique

BY PETER EVANS
National Post

As conservatives seek to define the kind of Canada they want, a new survey says the country's ethnic diversity is cited more than any other factor as the characteristic that makes it unique.

As part of the Canadian Values Study, a joint project of the National Post, the Dominion Institute and Innovative Research, 649 Canadians from coast to coast were asked: What makes Canada unique?

The results show that Canada's diverse, multicultural nature plays a large part in how Canadians see themselves.

<i>DEFINING A COUNTRY</i>	
<i>What do you think makes Canada unique?</i>	
Diversity/Multiculturalism	23%
Freedom	12%
The people	7%
Land/Geography	7%
Peacefulness	6%
Tolerance	3%
Political and legal system	3%
Friendly/Humble/Nice	3%
Bilingualism	2%
Universal health care/ Medical system	2%
Economic opportunities/ Economy	2%
Weather	2%
Natural resources	2%
Values	1%
Social services	1%
Hockey	0.4%
Other	12%

Note: Don't know/refused not shown

SOURCE: THE CANADIAN VALUES STUDY:
A JOINT PROJECT OF NATIONAL POST,
THE DOMINION INSTITUTE, INNOVATIVE
RESEARCH GROUP

"More than anything else, diversity is what people say makes us what we are," said Greg Lyle, managing director of Innovative Research Group, which conducted the poll.

"And with an issue like diversity, there's nothing to limit the scope of liberals or conservatives in [how they appreciate] Canadian culture," he added.

Among the 649 poll participants asked the open-ended question, the responses generally fell into 16 different categories. Of those, diversity was clearly the frontrunner, mentioned 23% of the time.

"Multiculturalism has gone from a state policy to a bona fide, embraced Canadian value," said Rudyard Griffiths, executive director of the Dominion Institute.

"Successful political parties are going to have to have a prodiversity message," he added.

Canada's health care system, always a contentious issue for candidates across the political spectrum, barely registered among poll respondents in terms of its role in defining the national identity — only 2% of respondents said it was what makes the country unique.

And despite our national obsession with the game, to respondents hockey mattered little: Only three people (or 0.4% of respondents) said hockey is what makes Canada unique.

Next to diversity, the most frequently cited factor was the freedoms Canadians enjoy, which was mentioned 12% of the time.

"You hear people say that people take freedom for granted," Mr. Lyle said. "This poll says we don't."

The poll of 649 Canadians was conducted Sept. 22-23. It has a margin of error of 3.85 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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The Canadian Values Study is a joint project of the National Post, the Dominion Institute and Innovative Research. Visit www.innovativeresearch.ca for more information.