

Issues & Ideas

Immigrants should adapt our values

Melissa Leong

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Despite Canada being referred to as a multicultural mosaic and the United States being a melting pot, the majority of both Canadians and Americans believe that new immigrants should assimilate into their adopted country's way of life.

According to a new poll released by the **Dominion Institute**/CDFAI and conducted by Innovative Research Group, 70% of Canadians and 76% of Americans want new immigrants to adopt the way of life of their new country; only 20% of Canadians and 17% of Americans say the priority of new immigrants should be to sustain the culture of their home country.

Rudyard Griffiths, executive director of the **Dominion Institute**, said he was surprised to discover that Canadian beliefs were so close to those of their southern neighbours.

"One of the real stereotypes that we have about America is that they're the assimilationists. We're the post-modernists. In other words, they're from Mars and we're from Venus," he said.

"But this is showing that we both, within the margin of error, have the same attitudes."

The poll shows that the majority of Canadians believe that Canada has distinct values and its own way of life and they feel that everyone should belong to the same national identity, he said.

"It made me think back to Michaelle Jean's words about the end of solitudes in Canada in her inaugural speech. I think there is something happening in the country. There's a change going on. Canadians don't feel that the old solitudes exist for them anymore," he said.

"We've all got to be a part of something together. It's not acceptable to be off sitting in their silos."

Quebec residents are more likely than those in other regions to believe that new immigrants should adapt to their new country (78%) while Atlantic Canada residents are the least likely to hold that opinion (51%), the poll found.

The view that new immigrants should assimilate into Canada's way of life increases with age. While 18 to 24 year-olds are split on the issue (46% agree with assimilation), 83% of those 55 and older believe in adopting the Canadian way of life.

The same pattern is found in the United States.

The survey revealed that two-thirds of Canadians believe an immigrant to Canada has a better chance of getting ahead than an immigrant to the United States does.

"We've gone through a remarkable decade in Canada -- real prosperity and growing national confidence," Mr. Griffiths said.

Mr. Griffiths said Canadians used to assume Canada was a second choice for immigrants, who preferred the United States because of its economic opportunities. However, results from the poll reveal that more Canadians are confident in their own country's prosperity, he said. As well, Canadians believe that immigrants today measure quality of life using more than a financial yardstick -- especially after the September 11th terrorist attacks. Personal security is now taken into consideration.

"Getting ahead doesn't just mean economics anymore. It means being part of a society that's not dealing head-on with the consequences of the war on terror."

mleong@nationalpost.com