



## BACKGROUND

### *Environics Research Group Poll for the Trudeau Foundation*

#### **Purpose:**

In advance of the third annual Pierre Trudeau Foundation Conference on Public Policy, entitled “Muslims in Western Societies,” the Foundation commissioned Environics Research Group to undertake a survey to address Canadians’ attitudes towards immigration in general, and Muslims and the religion of Islam in particular. The questions were designed by Environics senior researchers in conjunction with representatives from the Pierre Trudeau Foundation.

#### **Research Highlights:**

*Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements...*

*a) Overall, there is too much immigration to Canada.*

- **The majority of Canadians (54 per cent) disagree with the suggestion that there is too much immigration.**

*b) Non-whites should not be allowed to immigrate to Canada.*

- **Canadians almost unanimously (93 per cent) oppose the suggestion that non-whites should be prevented from immigrating to Canada.**
  - 82 per cent “strongly disagree” and 11 per cent “somewhat disagree.”

*c) People who want to immigrate to Canada should have their religious beliefs and values screened and approved before they are allowed in.*

- **The vast majority of Canadians (68 per cent) disagree with the notion that people who want to immigrate to Canada should have their religious beliefs and values screened and approved before they are allowed in.**
  - Half (49 per cent) “strongly disagree” and another 19 per cent “somewhat disagree.”

*d) Muslim immigrants make a positive contribution to Canada.*

- **Seventy-five per cent of Canadians agree that Muslim immigrants make a positive contribution to Canada.**
  - Even 57 per cent of those who report having a negative impression of Islam agree that Muslim immigrants make a positive contribution to Canada.
  - Just eight per cent “strongly disagree”.

*Some people say that immigrants and minority ethnic groups should blend into Canadian society and not form a separate community. Other people say that immigrants and minority ethnic groups should be free to maintain their religious and cultural practices and traditions. Which of these two points of view is closest to your own?*

- **Half of Canadians (49 per cent) feel immigrants should be free to maintain their religious and cultural practices.**
  - Household income and level of education have little bearing on this opinion, but there is a wide gulf between young adults and seniors: 18-29 year-olds are twice as likely to agree as those 60+ (63 per cent vs. 33 per cent)
  - The opinions of immigrants from outside of Europe mirror the national average.

*Some immigrant and minority ethnic communities have very traditional practices and beliefs when it comes to the role and rights of women. Some people say Canada should accept and accommodate these traditional beliefs about the rights and role of women. Other people say that immigrants and ethnic minorities should adapt to mainstream Canadian beliefs about the rights and role of women. Which one of these two points of view is closest to your own?*

- **Canadians are much less accepting of multiculturalism when it conflicts with gender equality. The vast majority (81 per cent) feel that immigrants should adapt to mainstream Canadian beliefs about the rights and role of women.**
  - This view is almost equally shared among the regions, major cities, population sizes, employment levels, household incomes, education, genders and ages.
  - Interestingly, the opinions of both those who report a positive and a negative impression of Islam are similar (79 and 85 per cent respectively).

*Do you personally have contact with Muslims?*

- More than half (53 per cent) of Canadians have little to no contact with Muslims, while 46 per cent “occasionally” or “often” have contact.
  - Twenty-two per cent say “rarely” and 31 per cent say “never”.
  - Those 18-29 are the most likely to have contact with Muslims (58 per cent); those 60+ the least (35 per cent).
  - Those living in large cities are far more likely to have contact with Muslims than those who live in rural areas.

*Is your impression of Islam generally positive or negative?*

- **Half of all Canadians (49 per cent) say their impression of the religion of Islam is “generally positive.”**
  - This represents a four point increase from opinions expressed by Canadians in 2003, despite three years of intense media coverage of domestic and international terrorist plots and activities by Islamic extremists.
  - Thirty-seven per cent describe their impression of Islam as “generally negative”; 10 per cent said their impression is “neither positive nor negative.”
  - Sixty-six percent of those who report “often” having contact with Muslims have a generally positive impression of the religion of Islam, but just 28 per cent of those who report “never” having contact with Muslims agree. In other words, the more contact Canadians have with Muslims, the more positive their impression of Islam.
  - Those with a university degree are more than twice as likely to have a generally positive impression of the religion of Islam as those with less than a high school education (63 per cent vs. 30 per cent).

*What are the main reasons you have a negative impression of the religion of Islam? [Subsample: those with a negative impression of Islam.]*

- **Among those who report having a negative impression of Islam, the single most commonly stated reason was “treatment of women” (21 per cent).** Other stated reasons were:
  - Violent (19 per cent)
  - Association with terrorism (17 per cent)
  - Intolerant (11 per cent)
  - Extremism/fanaticism (11 per cent)

*Do you think that Muslims are portrayed fairly in the media?*

- **One in three Canadians (29 per cent) say Muslims are “rarely” portrayed fairly in the media and seven per cent say Muslims are “never” portrayed fairly.**
  - Those 18-29 are the most critical of the media’s portrayal of Muslims; 46 per cent say they are “rarely” portrayed fairly and 10 per cent say they are “never” portrayed fairly.
  - This criticism is shared by just 16 per cent and four per cent respectively of those 60+.

*How likely do you think it is that Canada will experience terrorist attacks in the near future carried out by Canadians with a Muslim background? Is it very, somewhat, not very or not at all likely?*

- **Just 19 per cent of Canadians feel it is “very likely” that Canada will experience terrorist attacks in the near future carried out by Canadians with a Muslim background. Another 40 percent think this is “somewhat likely”**
  - Eleven per cent of those with a positive impression of Islam think an attack is “very likely” compared to 32 per cent of those with a negative impression.

*Do you think ordinary, law-abiding Muslim-Canadians should personally feel very, somewhat or not at all responsible for violent crimes carried out by others in the name of the religion of Islam (i.e. the religion of Muslims)?*

- **Almost seven in ten (68 per cent) Canadians reject the notion that ordinary, law-abiding Canadian Muslims should personally feel “very” or “somewhat” responsible for violent crimes carried out by others in the name of the religion of Islam (i.e. the religion of Muslims).**
  - A majority (58 per cent) of those who report having a negative impression of Islam also completely reject this notion.

*Some people say that a cause of Islamic extremism and acts of terror done in the name of Islam is the foreign policy of western countries, such as the United States. Do you think that American foreign policy is a major cause, a minor cause or not at all a cause of Islamic extremism and terrorism?*

- **Almost eight in ten (78 per cent) of Canadians think American foreign policy is a cause of Islamic extremism and terrorism.**
  - Forty-five per cent say it is a “major cause”; 33 per cent say it is a “minor cause.”
  - Just 18 per cent reject the notion outright and say it is “not a cause at all.”

**Methodology:**

The results are based on omnibus questions placed on an Environics' FOCUS CANADA telephone survey, conducted with a representative sample of adult Canadians between September 18 and October 12, 2006. A total of 2,021 interviews were completed. A sample of this size will produce a sampling error of plus or minus 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is greater for results pertaining to regional or socio-demographic subgroups of the total sample. The questions were pre-tested as part of the overall survey, prior to being finalized.

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**For more information:**

Catharine Marion / Josh Cobden (English media)  
Environics Communications  
416.969.2809 / 416.969.2746

Alida Alepian (French media)  
Capital Image  
514.739.1188 ext. 225