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NEWS RELEASE

Canadians Overwhelmingly Support Limits to Accommodation

In Quebec more than three-quarters of the population thinks immigrants should “fully adapt” to the culture of the province, according to SES Research-Policy Options Survey

Montreal – Nearly two Canadians in three and nine Quebecers in 10 have heard of “reasonable accommodation,” according to an SES Research poll conducted for *Policy Options*.

However, by a significant majority in Canada as a whole, and by an overwhelming majority in Quebec, Canadians and Quebecers declare limits to accommodation. When asked whether it was reasonable to accommodate religious and cultural minorities or whether immigrants should fully adapt to culture in Canada, only 18.0 percent of respondents said reasonable accommodation best reflected their personal views, as opposed to 53.1 percent who thought immigrants should fully adapt, and 21.3 percent who agreed with neither statement.

In Quebec (295 persons in the sample of 1,083), only 5.4 percent of respondents thought reasonable accommodation reflected their views, while fully 76.9 percent thought immigrants should fully adapt.

The on-line survey was conducted September 17 and 18, since the Bouchard-Taylor Commission began its hearings, which are receiving saturation coverage in the Quebec news media and wide coverage across the country. The random representative on-line sample of 1,083 Canadians is considered accurate to within three percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

“It seems that Quebecers have the strongest sense of Canada as a country of two founding peoples, two founding language communities,” observes Nik Nanos, president of SES Research, the national public opinion research firm based in Ottawa. “And when Quebecers look at a debate like reasonable accommodation, they see this vision of the two founding peoples being eroded. Interestingly, the parts of Canada with fewer new Canadians were more likely to support accommodation. Leaders from across Canada should be watching the developments in Quebec, because they may well be a precursor of things to come in other parts of Canada.”

When SES asked, for example, whether the menu requirements of religious and cultural groups should be accommodated, only 5.6 percent of Canadians said they should be accommodated all the time, while 22.3 percent said they should be accommodated most of the time. However, 50.3 percent did say they should be accommodated “some of the time.”

In Quebec, opinion that menu requirements should be accommodated all the time (4.1 percent) or most of the time (13.6 percent) was not all that different from that of Canada as a whole, while those who thought these requirements should be accommodated at least some of the time (50.8 percent) were right in line with the national result.

When SES Research asked respondents whether they supported prayer spaces being provided free of charge in public facilities to accommodate religious minorities, a majority of Quebecers were opposed (57.6 percent) or somewhat opposed (23.1 percent), while only 12.6 percent supported (3.4 percent) or somewhat supported (9.2 percent) free prayer space.

In Canada as a whole 58.6 percent opposed or somewhat opposed the provision of free prayer space, while 31.4 percent supported (10.2 percent) or somewhat supported (21.2 percent) the idea.

"Quebecers have more intense views on the reasonable accommodation issue," says Nanos, "and are more attached to the principle of the founding peoples." But the debate is by no means confined to Quebec. "This debate is coming to your province soon," says Nanos. "There are huge ramifications, for public policy, for what kind of country we want, and how we accept new Canadians."

-30-

SES Research is one of Canada's leading public opinion research firms. The detailed statistical results from the survey are available at www.sesresearch.com or at www.irpp.org. *Policy Options*, published 10 times a year by the Institute for Research on Public Policy, is Canada's leading public policy magazine. All articles from the magazine can be downloaded free of charge from www.irpp.org.

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