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Adrian MacNair July 2, 2010 – 9:31 am

Although Canada is a “nation of immigrants” who mainly agree that immigration is a good thing for the country, the vast majority of respondents in a new poll have say the current level of 250,000 a year should not be increased.

The poll, conducted by Nanos Research, shows more than 80% of Canadians agree with the statement that immigration is “a key positive feature of Canada as a country.” But only 20% thought immigration levels should increase.

In 2008, Canada admitted 247,202 permanent residents, the poll states. Then it asks whether Canadians think we should increase, decrease, or maintain that number.

Atlantic Canada, at 26%, was in strongest support of increasing levels, while Quebec’s distinct society was lowest, at 17.1%. Perhaps it’s unsurprising that Atlantic Canada, which has seen its population decline, is least supportive of limiting immigration levels. In Ontario, which attracts the most immigrants, 36% of respondents said Canada should decrease levels.

Although only 19% of respondents who identified as Conservative supported higher immigration, that’s not what the federal party has planned. [The Conservative government has made increasing immigration](#) “a top priority”, even as our population eclipsed the 34 million mark for the first time on April 1.

[According to Statistics Canada](#), our population increased by 88,000 people since it was last counted on January 1, a pace that is slower than 2009. 71% of the growth can be attributed to immigration.

The government wants to increase those levels because of the impending “grey tsunami”, when Canada’s entire baby boomer workforce is put into rocking chairs for good.

How that philosophy will mesh with the opinions reflected in the Nanos Research poll is unclear, since even self-identified Liberal voters didn’t think current levels should be increased. And while NDP and Green voters were strongest in support of increasing immigration levels, the strongest response from people voting for either party was to maintain the current levels.

There’s no clear indication as to why Canadians favour the status quo, though there are further questions in the Nanos poll that offer a clue.

- 41.5% of Canadians rated the integration efforts of immigrants as a “3” on a scale from 1 to 5. On the lower end of the scale, 29% believe immigrants do not really blend into Canadian society, while a smaller percent, 26.2, think that immigrants do blend in.

Integration into Canadian society has been a more robust topic in recent years, as large ethnic enclaves in Canada have sprung up to form insulated and isolated communities that can fuel radicalism. Vancouver Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh [recently spoke out about these issues](#).

- 65.7% agreed that the Canadian government should “do more to help immigrants settle”. It may be that a major obstacle to support for increased immigration levels is that Canadians recognize how much immigrants struggle to settle outside of their own ethnic neighbourhoods, leaving people with a sense that Canada wouldn’t be able to handle the additional numbers.

It will be interesting to see what these poll numbers look like in a few years if the Conservatives go ahead with their plan to dramatically increase the size of Canada’s working population via immigration.

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