



Reception for refugees ranks low

Newcomers' job skills deemed more important than immigrants' status, poll of Canadians finds

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Canadians' vision of themselves as hospitable to people fleeing persecution elsewhere doesn't entirely hold up, a poll for a prestigious think-tank says.

While Canadians champion the idea of allowing skilled workers or separated family members into the country, they are less enthusiastic about refugees, concludes the poll by Nanos Research in *Policy Options* magazine, published by the Montreal-based Institute for Research on Public Policy.

"What it's telling us is there's a disconnect between our self-image of welcoming immigrants and how we actually act," said Nik Nanos, president of the polling firm. "We think we have open arms for people from places that are very dangerous but practicality kicks in when they get here."

The poll asked people whether three factors should be important when selecting immigrants. Across Canada, 68.2 per cent chose job skills, 58.8 per cent said family reunification and only 40.1 per cent picked refugee status. The numbers in Ontario were 71.1 per cent, 58.6 per cent and 40.2 per cent.

The strong support for family reunification reflects the "psychological mindset" in this country, Nanos said. "Many Canadians have an uncle or a family member who came here first after the Second World War and brought over other family members."

Family reunification and hand-picking skilled workers are key elements of immigration reform tucked into the Harper government's implementation bill that is on course to receive Commons approval in its entirety by June 20.

"This shows the intent of the bill is generally in sync with voters," said Nanos. "It's an opportunity for the Conservatives, but also a risk.

"It's very important for the government to develop a strategy not just to bring (people) here, but to figure out their transition into the economy. Otherwise, it's not really a fair bargain if they don't do what they're trained to do."

The poll also sought opinions on dual citizenship. Nanos found the majority support it – 51.3 per cent overall and 54.2 per cent in Ontario – surprising, but also a reflection of modern Canada.

"It reflects our multicultural mix," he said. "Most Canadians still believe it is possible to balance being a proud Canadian and holding on to your heritage."

The poll has a margin of error of 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.