



NEWS RELEASE

***CANADIANS TOLERANT OF RELIGIOUS
DRESS AND PRACTICES***

**But cracks are apparent in
Canada's multiculturalism**

Although Canadians continue to show high levels of tolerance for people of different faiths and backgrounds, there are some cracks in the façade as revealed by a recent survey, commissioned by the La Presse newspaper.

By large margins, Canadians say that public-school teachers should be permitted to wear an Islamic hidjab, a Jewish yarmulke or a Sikh turban. A majority also favours public institutions permitting employees to take a day off on their Sabbath or to pause to pray. An overwhelming majority also says that a Muslim woman's request to be treated by a female doctor in a hospital should be accommodated.

"Canadians have come a long way since the 1990's, when the issue of Mounties wearing turbans was so hugely controversial," said EKOS President Frank Graves. "Strikingly, British Columbians, approve of turbans in the schools by a margin of 80 percent to 15 percent."

However, it is not so much that tolerance of religious practices has displaced intolerance. Rather, that the line has shifted. For example, two-thirds of Canadians disapprove of the Supreme Court of Canada's decision to allow Sikh students to wear a kirpan (or ceremonial dagger) in school, even if sealed in a case and concealed.

"What we may be seeing here is that security trumps rights where there is a plausible rationale," said Graves. "A kirpan sounds like a weapon to many people, and we know that Canadians are concerned about security in schools. Something similar seems to be happening with the issue of ethnic profiling."

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When reminded of the ethnic profile of those recently arrested in terrorism-related cases in Toronto and London, most Canadians say they think security forces should focus greater attention and resources on individuals from those ethnic backgrounds.

“We should treat this result with a little caution,” said Mr. Graves. “We know that Canadians have not entirely resolved their feelings about ethnic profiling, and they will express somewhat different views if reminded of the human rights issues involved.”

Within the Canadian public, there were striking demographic differences revealed in this survey. Quebecers, for example, were much less tolerant of religious garb such as hidjabs, yarmulkes and turbans in public-school teachers than other Canadians – in fact a majority of Quebecers were opposed to hidjabs and turbans, and they were closely divided on the issue of yarmulkes. However, Quebecers were somewhat closer to the Canadian average on questions involving the private sphere, such as provisions for the Sabbath and accommodations in hospitals.

There were other differences among Canadians as well. Generally speaking, Bloc Quebecois and Conservative Party supporters tended to be less open to displays of or accommodations to multicultural practices. Lower-income and less-educated Canadians as well as seniors were also less tolerant on these issues than more advantaged Canadians and younger people.

“We need to bear in mind that attitudes to these issues are extremely complex and any individual survey provides a snapshot, capturing certain elements but excluding others. The picture we see here needs to be seen in context,” said Graves. “We do see over time, for example, that Canadians are generally more tolerant than citizens of their major trading partners, such as the United States and Europe.”

METHODOLOGY

The EKOS survey sampled 1,004 Canadians between September 12 and September 14, 2006. A sample of this size produces a statistical margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The statistical error margin of for questions posed on half of the sample is +/- 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when the results are subdivided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as regions).

All the data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample’s regional, gender and age composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.