

Survey says: Top pollsters bullish on Canada

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By [Adam McDowell](#) May 31, 2010 – 12:50 pm

Despite an increasing urban-rural divide, a low birth rate, the possibility of a revival for Quebec separatism and crumbling faith in public institutions, two out of three top pollsters agree: Canada's next 50 years look brighter than its last 50.

At a breakfast debate between at the annual convention of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association in Toronto Monday, a trio of minds behind Ipsos Public Affairs, Environics Group and Harris/Decima Research gathered to debate what survey research has revealed about changes to Canadian society and attitudes since 1960.

However, the men focused more on the future than the past. Ipsos Public Affairs CEO Darrell Bricker said Sir Wifrid Laurier was off by 100 years when he said the 20th century will belong to Canada. "This will be Canada's century. We're getting a lot of things right," he said.

For his part, Michael Adams, founder of Environics and author of several books on Canadians' values, said the country's multicultural youth are brimming (paradoxically) with "Protestant work ethic;" he promised in the decades to come, "there's going to be a huge amount of entrepreneurial energy."

Asked by moderator Kenneth Whyte, publisher and editor-in-chief of Maclean's magazine, if Canada is a society in decline — given its low birth rate and other issues — television pundit and Harris/Decima chairman Allan Gregg countered, "No, I think we're a society in transition." That is, in transition from a relatively homogeneous,

predictable society to a complex and postmodern one, in which identity is more difficult to pin down.

Of the three men, only Mr. Gregg struck a pessimistic note, saying Canadian could emerge on the other side of its multi-decade transition in worse shape.

Pollsters noted Quebec's shrinking share of the national population as a challenge for the future. Mr. Adams talked of the almost inevitable fact that political parties will someday be able to form majorities without substantial support from Quebec.

Already, he said, the relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada compares well to a broken marriage. "She [Quebec] is standing at the door with her bags packed," while an indifferent English Canada watches the Toronto Maple Leafs lose on TV, Mr. Adams said.

Mr. Gregg suggested Quebecers are likewise apathetic about confederation. "Yann Martel was right. For most Quebecers, Canada is a hotel."

Meanwhile, 100% of the self-consciously white male pollsters agreed: Canada is doing a relatively admirable job of integrating immigrants into its social fabric.

"Canada is the most racist country in the world, except for all the others," Mr. Adams quipped.

Again it was Mr. Gregg who provided a skeptical note, painting an image of disaffected young visible minority Canadians bursting with anger as in the suburbs of Paris in the last decade.

That scenario aside, the panellists sounded more concerned about Canada's urban-rural divide, which is widening as values and demographic profiles between city and country diverge.

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