

Reasonable Accommodation Series-Part 1 with the Montreal Gazette and Leger Marketing

Day 1: Generation gap

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In terms of Quebec identity debates for some decades it has been customary to think in terms of the constitutional struggles that traditionally pitted federalists and sovereignists. Many observers contend that it is the undecided amongst us that have a decisive affect on the course of action that is ultimately chosen. It has been argued that the undecided or soft supporters of either federalism or sovereignty are vulnerable to mood shifts. While that debate is ever present the dominant existential question confronting Quebecers involves the place of religion in society and the accommodation of religious minorities. This debate is also unlikely to be resolved by virtue of a consensus on the part of the population as the lines are drawn between what might be referred to as “accommodationists” and “non-accommodationists”. If a consensus is to be identified in theory it might be done on the basis of the perspective that occupies the space between the “accommodationists” and “non-accommodationists” (call them the soft accommodationists). The problem is that in the so-called there is a great deal of ambiguity on the issues. Indeed it is the cultivation of this ambiguity that may hold a certain appeal to elements of the political class who give expression to the concerns around certain minority religious practices but are not prepared to deliver any meaningful solutions. They are content with making positive statements about diversity while not responding to anti-accommodationist discourse. That’s possibly because to resolve the issues would involve either rejecting most accommodation or supporting them which in either instance risks alienating important segments of the electorate. Age is perhaps the single most important characteristic determining how Quebecers react to issues of accommodation. As observed below, the younger generation (or the A-Gen for accommodating generation) are more open to immigrant integration than assimilation, less threatened by newcomers and tend to attribute more value to diversity. And while they are less religious (see Table 2) younger Quebecers are much more open to accommodating minority religious practices.

Table 1

The Accommodating Generation

Opinion on Immigration and Related Issues by age cohort

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Agree that .. Quebec immigrants must give up their customs and traditions and become more like the majority of Quebecers	29	48	58	61	65	70
Agree that Quebec society is changing too quickly because of the minorities we have here	31	30	38	43	44	56
Agree that ... Quebec society is threatened by the influx of non- Christian immigrants	27	23	29	46	38	43
Agree that ... Quebec society should give immigrants equal say about Quebec's future	83	77	79	67	65	55
Agree Receives Too Many Immigrants	15	16	24	36	22	24
Agree that ... Quebec society has been strengthened by the diversity of cultural and religious groups	75	86	77	67	73	61

The Accommodating Generation

Table 2

Opinion on Muslims and selected issues of religion by age cohort

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Are you Very or Somewhat Religious	30	23	40	42	50	58
Have a Favorable Opinion of Muslims	65	70	69	54	58	37
Agree with ... Muslim women in public wearing the hijab, the veil covering only the hair but not the face	76	77	73	55	61	53
Agree with ... Muslim women in public wearing the full face veil	55	47	42	25	28	20
Agree with ... Muslim women in hijabs teaching in a public school	56	50	44	32	31	20
Agree with ... Muslim girls wearing hijabs in public schools	59	48	50	27	28	23