



The 'evil empire' is next door, youth say

Poll finds teens view some U.S. actions as global threat

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Evil is a word usually reserved for serial killers, Austin Powers villains, and kids who tear the legs off baby spiders.

But, a new poll shows a significant number of young Canadians would use "evil" to describe their U.S. neighbours.

In a telephone poll of 500 teens aged 14 to 18, more than 40 per cent of respondents saw the U.S. as an evil global force. Among French-Canadians, that number jumped to 64 per cent.

Ontario proved the most conflicted on the issue; there, nearly one-fifth of youth were on the fence.

"Teens have taken (Ronald) Reagan's concept of the Soviet Union as an evil empire and turned it back on the U.S.," says Rudyard Griffiths, director of the Dominion Institute.

"Clearly, the anti-American sentiment isn't just something coming from 30-somethings or even 20-somethings."

Avnish Nanda, a 15-year-old from Edmonton, says he sees the American government as neither totally good nor totally bad.

"When George (W.) Bush came into power, he was a real force of evil, getting into a war people say was about oil," Avnish says. "But all over the world, America gives aid to countries whether they deserve it or not, and that's really good for people."

The poll was conducted at the end of March and has a 4.3-per-cent margin of error. It was commissioned by CanWest News Service and sponsored by the Dominion Institute and Navigator Ltd. to engage youth in the election and to give parents, teachers and politicians a look at where young people stand on key issues.

"Stephen Harper is saying we need to integrate more with the U.S.," says Avnish, a youth volunteer for the Liberal party. "Well, I don't see how that helps us increase our sovereignty as a nation."

Greg Lyle, a principal at Navigator Ltd. with a long history in politics, says the poll results suggest "the emotion we saw in the '88 campaign about our relationship with the Americans" still lingers in "a very major way."

Conflicting views on the role of the military were also revealed in the poll.

Although 51 per cent of teens want Canada to be known through its peacekeeping efforts, a majority -- 69 per cent -- wouldn't consider a career in the military.

In terms of this election, Mr. Lyle says the findings don't have huge domestic implications.

But they do foreshadow big things for future elections, particularly given the Conservatives' stance on military spending and defence.

"Stephen Harper and his colleagues are more likely to talk about peacemaking than peacekeeping, and that's somewhat out of step with young people," he says.

"Youth have a very, very strong desire to be seen as peacekeepers, so long as it doesn't mean they have to do the peacekeeping themselves."

Mr. Lyle calls the underlying trend chequebook activism -- showing commitment to a cause by throwing tax dollars at it, not by getting physically involved. And Mr. Griffiths believes it's a result of Canada's role as "the fireproof attic of North America" over the past 10 years.

"It's a pretty good time to be a young Canadian in terms of the opportunities, the general affluence of society, and the absence of a direct threat to the country," Mr. Griffiths says.

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