



Millennial Mosaic Election Musings

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by

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Canadians Big on Justice and Equality – Forgiveness, Not so Much: Implications for Justin Trudeau

In a fourth year seminar on Millennials that I am leading this fall at the University of Lethbridge, **the reality** stood out starkly as we looked at some important social developments in the past week, prior to examining findings on the current values of Canadians of all ages.

We reflected together on the controversy surrounding Justin Trudeau's blackface and brownface gaffes at social events some two decades ago. Everyone by now is well aware of the subsequent uproar, where he was accused of being a racist in the past and, for that matter, the present. For his part, the Prime Minister openly acknowledged that what he had done was inappropriate and apologized for his behaviour. Speaking in Winnipeg, he said that he deeply regretted his actions and that he had let a lot of people down, adding, "I stand here today to ask for forgiveness."

My extensive examination of Canadians of all ages over time brings an enormous amount of current and trend data to the discussion. That research, reported in my recently-released book with Joel Thiessen and Monetta Bailey, *The Millennial Mosaic*, solidly documents what we all know – that **at this time in Canadian history, we are a nation in which our diversity has come to be accompanied by a pluralistic mindset**. We have our social and demographic differences. But we call for respect for those differences. And we fully assume that our leaders and everyone else will be just and fair. Hence, the furor over Trudeau's alleged disrespect of racialized groups. Without question, justice and equality are supremely valued in Canada. In recent years, we frequently have heard people speak of "zero tolerance" for this and "zero tolerance" for that. It all sounds like significant social progress.

But our data – and the responses to Justin Trudeau's perceived inappropriate behaviour – also raise a noteworthy red flag. We have found that only about 1 in 2 Canadians say that another value essential to optimum social life – forgiveness – is "very important" to them. The figures range decreasingly from 63% for Pre-Boomers through 60% for Boomers, 52% for Gen Xers, and 49% for Millennials. The overall forgiveness level of 56% is well below the importance accorded a trait like honesty (84%), for example. Perhaps coinciding with our accelerated emphasis on justice, **the forgiveness figure levelled off at about 55% around 1990 after standing at some 75% in the mid-1980s.**

Regardless of how you personally want to respond in this specific Trudeau instance, a much broader issue is involved. **Any society that does not allow for mistakes and errors and downright bungling will not be a place where people with imperfections can survive, let alone thrive.** People – pretty much all of us – need some second and third chances and the possibility of new beginnings.

The problem Justin Trudeau faces in saying, "I'm sorry" and asking for forgiveness is that, apart from having to deal with the responses of those who want to exploit his bad behaviour for political gain, **he is the Prime Minister of a country in which only one in two people place a high value on what he is pleading for – forgiveness.** Collectively, with his help, we are widely embracing justice and equality. But vocal proponents of forgiveness are scarce.

Dr. Reginald Bibby's (www.reginaldbibby.com) latest book is *The Millennial Mosaic: How Pluralism and Choice Are Shaping Canadian Youth and the Future of Canada* with Joel Thiessen and Monetta Bailey (Toronto: Dundurn).