



Darrell Bricker

We Know What You're Thinking
ISBN13: 9781554682614

Sex, Laundry and Armageddon: Poll Results May Surprise You
Forget politics. Here are Canada's real regional disparities...

In Alberta, the dirty underwear is piling up. More Quebeckers sleep naked than anywhere else in the country. On the Prairies, you're more likely to get dumped in a bar. The average Canadian spends 7.7 minutes in the shower, and parents are more tempted than their childless friends to touch fresh cement.

Four in 10 Atlantic Canadians believe the world will end with a Battle of Armageddon. And faced with the option of food or a cellphone if they are ever stranded on a desert island, Ontarians are the most likely in the country to say the question is 'too tough to answer' (though three out of four go with guaranteeing a full stomach).

These are the quirks that distinguish Canadians from each other ' if you trust the polls that is. (And, according to polls, only four out of 10 of you actually do.) But this fall, as election fever rises, Canadians will be inundated with surveys telling them what they think ' or at the very least, what they thought when they answered the phone at suppertime on a certain weeknight.

The idea behind polls, points out John Wright, senior vice-president of Ipsos Reid, the largest public opinion company in Canada, is 'let's just let people speak, and try not to impose stuff on them.' To that end, Mr. Wright, together with Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Global Public Affairs, have written a lighthearted new book, boldly titled *We Know What You're Thinking*, a collection of polling data about everything from who's wishing most for a wealthy relative to show up in their lives (people with kids), to whom we trust most (firefighters), to how many of us know what happened on D-Day (not many).

'It's all small truths that are real, that tell you a little something about people,' Mr. Bricker says. 'When you read through the regional data, it really does have a personality. And some of it corresponds to what our stereotypes are of certain places, and some of it is so widely contrary, you just really sit back and question what you think.'

Polling is big business: Ipsos Reid does \$1.6-billion worth of research a year in 100 countries, mostly for big companies such as Procter & Gamble and Nestlé. But polling is also an imperfect science, especially in a nation of wanderers, immigrants and cellphones ' to say nothing of a public more likely than ever to hang up when the pollster calls.

Despite the boast of their book's title, neither Mr. Bricker nor Mr. Wright denies this ' small sample sizes can skew results and people, after all, change their minds ' but they claim pollsters get things pretty close 19 times out of 20.

And they point out that that 25 years ago, polls were kept private by politicians and businesses. These days, everybody can decide what they think of the findings, especially when it comes to the twists and turns of an election campaign.

On Monday, for instance, an Ipsos Reid poll gave the federal Conservatives a huge 11-point lead over the Liberals. The same day, a poll by Harris-Decima, another Canadian-based public opinion company, put the parties at a dead heat. But Mr. Bricker says his poll was conducted over three days, and the most important question wasn't the voting one, but how people generally felt about the Liberals. The other poll was done over two weeks.

Political junkies, Mr. Bricker suggests, would do best to assess trends in polls, rather than a single snapshot ' that's why some of the most interesting findings compare polls back in time.

In the meantime, though, both authors suggest that Canadians are sometimes too serious for their own good ' and their sampling of polls in the new book is intended to be voyeuristic fun. Debating who takes the longest showers in the country (Albertans, apparently, at 8.4 minutes), or why most Canadians would rather have the superhero power to heal themselves than travel in time, won't alter the course of the nation. You probably won't pick a partner based on which part of Canada boasts the best lovers. But, depending on where you come from, you might get bragging rights.

PYRAMIDS OR RUBY SLIPPERS?

Canadians may pray to see it hoisted by a homegrown team, but fewer than 20 per cent picked the Stanley Cup as the thing they most wanted to touch, on a list that included the Oscar, the Holy Grail and the Hope Diamond. Canadians had more exotic goals ' about half chose 'the very top of an Egyptian pyramid.' Only among Atlantic Canadians, who tend to be among the most religious in the country, did the Holy Grail lead the touchstone wish list. But if you're a *Wizard of Oz* fan, you may find compatriots in the Prairies: 12 per cent of respondents there went with Dorothy's famous sparkling shoes as the item on the list they'd most like to touch.

GOING GREEN

British Columbians have the reputation of being the greenest citizens in the country but Ipsos Reid polling suggests otherwise. In a province never short on rain, people on the West Coast appear to be obsessed with their lawns: 45 per cent said they water their lawn two to three times a week in the summer ' way more than neighbouring Alberta: Adults on Canada's West Coast were actually less likely to say they felt a personal responsibility for the province's environment, and only about one in five said the need to be green would have

a 'very significant' impact on their choice of car or their food. They were much better when it came to sorting garbage ' except when that garbage gets tossed on the ground: B.C. teenagers were the least likely to confront a stranger for littering. (But then, 78 per cent of teenagers there picked 'laid-back' when asked to describe their stance on the environment; in Prince Edward Island, by comparison, 39 per cent of teenagers said they were 'green fiends.')

In fact, the award for the most seriously green part of the country would have to go to the East Coast: Atlantic Canadians are most likely to agree that Canada should take action on climate change, even if it means higher deficits, and want to restrict economic stimulus to environmentally sustainable projects. They are also the most likely to say they are doing their personal part for the environment.

THE NATION'S DIRTY LAUNDRY

Canadians wash four loads of laundry every week, on average. British Columbians are the most likely in the country to say they ruined clothing because they didn't know how to wash it. But it's not because they didn't have the right detergent ' they also claim they have the best stocked laundry rooms. On the other side of the country, Atlantic Canadians are more likely to throw everything in the dryer even if the label tells them not to ' after all, nothing dries in the salt air. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, people have better things to do than laundry 'they are the most likely to say they let their clothes sit for days in the washer or dryer before they bother to finish the load. If those fashion-friendly Quebecers ' and the nation's stain-removing experts ' are doing the most loads, then Ontarians are doing the fewest ' perhaps because they are the most likely, by an admittedly small margin, to say they still get mom to do their wash.

Albertans, on the other hand, lead the country in letting their laundry pile up until they run out of underwear (a habit nearly one in three Canadians will fess up to) ' though, as a back-up, they might have a good shot at getting mom to do it, if they'd ask.

WHO LOVES MOM MOST

That would be Alberta, the only province where the majority of men ' 56 per cent ' would choose to take their moms to a movie premiere over celebrities such as Angelina Jolie. In Atlantic Canada, only 15 per cent were smart enough to give the same answer ' sons there would take Julia Roberts, Ms. Jolie and Hillary Clinton over their moms.

DIAPERING DADS

Speaking of parenting, men in Alberta are the most likely to strongly agree that they knew how to diaper a baby before becoming fathers. Soon-to-be grandmothers in Ontario and Atlantic Canada, on the other hand, might want to give their sons an extra lesson.

But in Quebec, new dads are fearless ' 87 per cent of fathers there said they felt 'completely prepared for children.'

Once the kids are out of diapers, Canadian parents have big plans for their offspring: Nine out of 10 mothers said their children need good marks to win scholarships to university so they can compete in the global career market. For most parents ' especially ones with daughters ' that means pursuing a career in science. (Though one in four mothers said they just want their children to do what makes them happy.)

AGE-TURNERS

The highest percentage of readers ' people who read at least one book last year ' live in British Columbia (76 per cent), and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (78 per cent). But B.C. bookworms are by far the most prolific; on average, they say they read 33 books a year.

For most Canadians, poems don't make the must-read list ' only about 2 per cent have read a book of poetry in the last year, which as the Ipsos Reid researchers observed, is less than the 3 per cent of Canadians who believe Elvis is still alive.

GHOSTS AND ARMAGEDDON

Canadians aren't big believers in the supernatural for the most part. But Albertans are the most likely to say their houses are haunted (though it's a small group). And on the Prairies, believers outnumber skeptics ' 61 per cent say they believe in ghosts and spirits.

The majority of Canadians, however, do express a belief in angels ' in Saskatchewan and Manitoba it's 77 per cent ' though not typically the white-wings-and-halo kind. Mostly, Canadians think of angels as a really good person or someone who is chosen by God to do something good.

On the question of humanity's fate, 41 per cent of Atlantic Canadians say they believe the world will end in 'a Battle of Armageddon' ' about the same percentage of people who share that view in the United States.

MUSHY STUFF

Half of all Canadians would like to get lucky a little bit more often. One tip, polls suggest, might be parking by a beach ' 58 per cent of Canadian women feel most romantic with the waves crashing nearby (As for the driveway, not so much.)

Sleeping sans pyjamas is least popular in Alberta and most popular in Quebec. Perhaps that's because women in Quebec truly feel better about their bodies ' 60 per cent don't think they're fat, a finding that's reversed among women in the rest of the country.

At the request of a card company, Ipsos Reid asked Canadian women to choose which animal best describes their partner. From a list that included stallion, gorilla, and tiger, the most popular answer was 'cuddly bear.' The guys got the same question: The most popular answer was 'don't know.'

In British Columbia, they might be taking the term 'booty call' a little too literally. People on the West Coast are least likely to say it's okay to use their phone while driving but the most likely to answer it in the middle of making love.

And no matter how many times and ways they ask the questions, the pollsters say the answer is always the same: The best lovers, at least as self-reported, live in Newfoundland.

--**THE GLOBE AND MAIL**, *Erin Anderssen*