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Clark, Catherine. “Canadian values drive us together, not apart”. *The Globe and Mail,* Monday, Nov. 14, 2016 06:00AM EST

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When I was growing up, we didn’t spend a lot of time talking about Canadian values. We just lived them.

That, I suppose, is the value of a political upbringing – you are exposed to every part of the country, to every culture, to every community – and you come to see that Canada isn’t just one kind of place. It is a living, breathing entity with various parts which bind together to create a whole – a community of communities, as my Dad called it so many years ago. I came to learn that the sum of our various unique parts made our country stronger even if, occasionally, those differences bred misunderstandings or arguments that had to be debated and overcome.

I was also fortunate to see Canada from the outside. Few countries in the world have attained the widespread international level of respect that Canada enjoys globally, and most Canadians take tremendous pride in that reputation. When seen abroad, our flag remains a symbol of peace, democracy and hope – whether it’s sewn on a backpack or flying above an international aid camp.

As a young girl, and then a young woman, the progressive, tolerant, pragmatic Canada that I saw at home and abroad shaped and reflected my outlook as a person. Like most Canadians, I was concerned about my neighbours – both those who lived beside me and those who lived across distant borders. I was raised to recognize how lucky I was to have been born into a country which accepted – even celebrated – differences, and which looked for solutions that would draw us together, not drive us apart.

For these reasons, I’ve watched with growing unease the development of a discussion purporting to be about “Canadian values.” I am not at all concerned about the fact that we’re having the discussion – Canadians have always engaged in active conversations about health care, or the environment or the cultivation of an entrepreneurial spirit, or where, how or why Canada acts internationally. Our responses to those questions have always been framed through a uniquely Canadian lens.

What does concern me is what’s not being said, and why this sudden initiative is being framed as a discussion about “values.” The underlying current is that these discussions are less about what we want to celebrate or improve about our country and more about who we want to weed out.

Canada has a long history of welcoming to our shores people from all around the world who must first pass through our robust immigration or refugee system. We regularly welcome the world’s best and brightest, but also people who would be persecuted or in peril in their homelands. I’m not sure I can think of anything more Canadian: a careful system that screens all applicants combined with a tolerant population welcoming of newcomers. And in Canada, with the exception of our indigenous peoples, we are all newcomers of some sort.

A recent Nanos poll highlights what Canadians themselves think of Canadian values. When asked what makes them proud to be Canadian, respondents chose equality, equity and social justice as their top pick, followed by our reputation as peacekeepers and a bit further down by multiculturalism and diversity and respect for others.

When asked to describe their top three Canadian values to someone who was not Canadian, the top choices were rights and freedoms, respect for others, and kindness and compassion.

In a global climate where so many seek to deliberately sow division and fear, Canadians should be justifiably proud of those answers. And we should remember them in the months and years ahead, because those are the values that will keep Canada seen as a beacon of light in a world which needs all the light it can get.