



## NAVIGATING RISK AND OPPORTUNITY IN A CLOSER WORLD: PUBLIC PERSPECTIVES

**Presentation by Frank Graves at the Annual Conference of  
the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada  
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When J.S Mill wrote, “in politics it is almost a trivialeity to say that public opinion now rules the world”, he was not speaking approvingly. Whatever the accuracy of the statement nearly 150 years ago, there is little question that the claim is even more plausible today. The pervasiveness and power of polls has done little to dampen the reservations of critics. Recently, Jeffery Rosen spoke of the tyranny of public opinions, resurrecting Gustav Le Bon’s notion that the sentiments of crowds are “simplistic, exaggerated and over confident”.

Against this notion of polling as a reflection of the irrational vagaries of an incompetent mob, we have much more positive endorsements, varying from Daniel Yankelovich’s notion of public judgment, to James Surowiecki’s recent “Wisdom of Crowds” and how the “many are smarter than the few”.

Given my obvious commercial and intellectual biases, I favour the latter views. But, I also think it is uncontroversial to argue that public opinion is: 1) ubiquitous, and 2) influential. I would also argue that, citizens in our post-deferential, trust-challenged society are increasingly loath to relinquish complete control of their destinies to the deliberations of experts – regardless of how intelligent and well meaning they may be.

So why is public opinion – or perhaps, more broadly, representatives of public perspectives – so scantily connected to the debate about Canada and the world? In our view, a careful consideration of public perspective can only enhance the ultimate legitimacy of foreign policy, reducing the sense of not having a voice in this increasingly important area of Canadians’ lives. It is also important to check assumptions about where the public is now and where they are going with respect to their own self-expressed views, as there are a number of areas where there are sharp gaps between the expert view of public preferences, priorities and attitudes, and what the public actually want.

Undeniably, public literacy on complex issues of foreign policy is limited. Moreover, there are contradictions and ambiguities in public attitudes. Yet, if we step back far enough, there are important discernable patterns and trends, which can and should be taken into account in charting Canada's future place in the world.

Today, we will focus on a limited assessment of key trends and judgements, which are more stable and important than the ephemera of day-to-day shifts in public opinion. In particular, reflections of value choices are important because, while the public may not wish to construct the plumbing or even the architecture of foreign policy, they do feel that it should be accountable to their broad value choices. In some areas the public's choices are fairly clear, while other areas demonstrate turbulence and contradiction. We have selected four areas to highlight.

- The New Canadian Outlook
- A More Potent, Closer World (division of the world into fear and opportunity)
- In the U.S. Shadow – The Prism of the U.S.-Canada-N.A. Context
- Public Vision and Broad Values – Public Directional Preferences

## THE NEW CANADIAN OUTLOOK

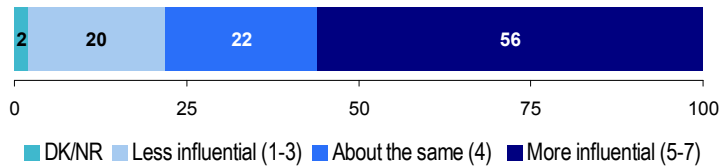
In many key respects, citizens today are profoundly different than those of even a decade ago – let alone 50 years ago. For example:

- Trust in Government and institutions in steep decline in most advanced western societies over past 50 years.
- Canadians much more confident and optimistic (particularly young Canadians) about the economy, technology, public finances, and our place in the world.
- Trade liberalization is now seen as a strong positive. Citizens of all three North America partners have all arrived at the same destination; not only do they support NAFTA, but they also support deepened economic integration.

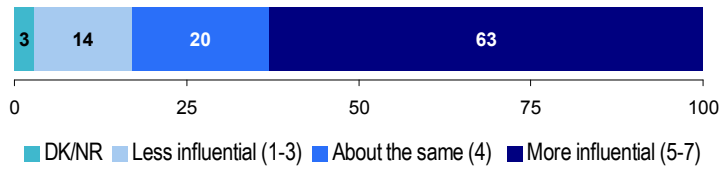
In essence, Canadians are not fearful/pessimistic about their place in the world. They are quite confident (perhaps delusional) in conviction that Canada is a potent "northern tiger". Further, Canadian identity and distinct values are strengthening, despite economic integration; and the nation-state (Canada in particular) seems increasingly viable, which was less clear a decade ago (identity, values, *and* interdependence).

### Influence on global affairs seen as increasing in recent years, and Canada thought to be more influential in the future

Q: Do you think Canada has become more or less influential in global affairs over the past 50 years?



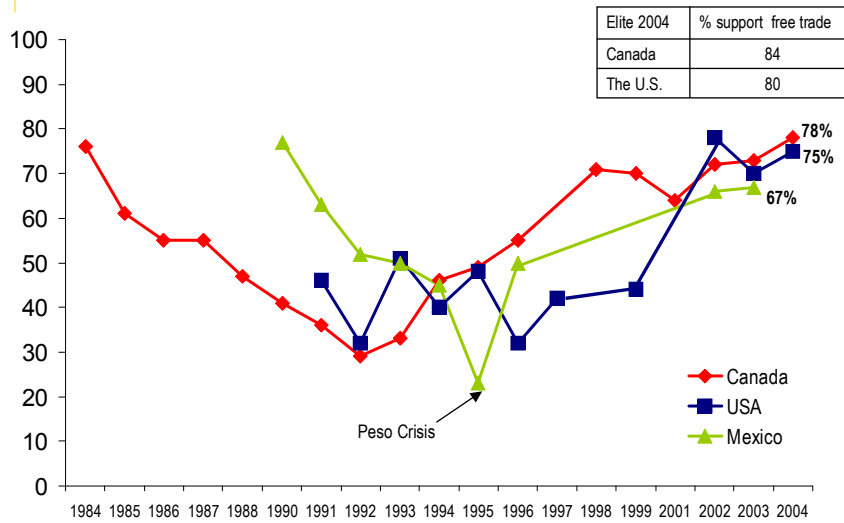
Q: Do you think Canada will become more or less influential in global affairs 50 years from now?



Base: All Canadians; Jan. 05

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### Support for NAFTA: 1984-2004



Base: Most recent data points - Canada, Jun. 04; U.S., May/Jun. 04; Mexico Sep./Oct. 03

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We may have been sleeping, but this certainly is not the public's view.

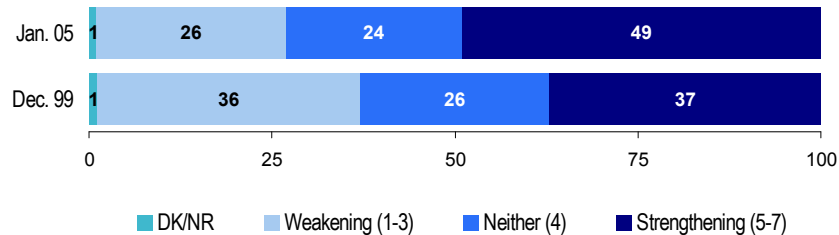
- Canada and North America are following a separate path and, contrary to theory and the European experience (homogenization of values and identity) have not occurred.
- National identity (measured through world values indicators) is up, local identity down; and international identity is trivial.
- There is also a declining sense that globalization and technology preclude national identity.

So, Canadians stand as a poised and optimistic society, confident about their place in the world and anxious to strengthen their already enviable position.

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### Canadian identity strengthening in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Q: In your view, is Canadian identity weakening or strengthening in the 21st century?



Base: All Canadians

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# A MORE POTENT, AND CLOSER WORLD

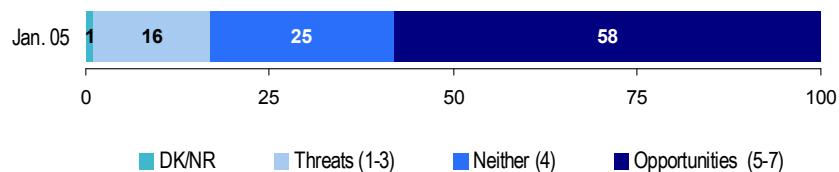
Evidence shows that Canadians increasingly believe that social, economic, environmental, and security issues are shaped more by events outside our borders than inside. This sentiment is growing, and the belief is that, in the future, we will be even more interdependent. Attitudes to globalization, like attitudes to trade and technology have shifted from wary to welcoming over the past decade or so.

- By over a 3:1 margin Canadians (particularly younger) see the world outside as containing more opportunities (58 per cent) than threats (16 per cent).
- There is also a broad consensus that the world is now “much closer together” than 10 years ago (and this trend is seen as accelerating).
- Over the past decade, Canadians are also revealing a demonstrably more cosmopolitan ethic (expressed in attitudes to immigration, multiculturalism and diversity); there exists a growing U.S.-Canada cleavage in this regard.

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## Broader world seen as presenting opportunities to Canadians

Q: Thinking about the state of affairs in the broader world outside of Canada, do you tend to see mostly threats or mostly opportunities?

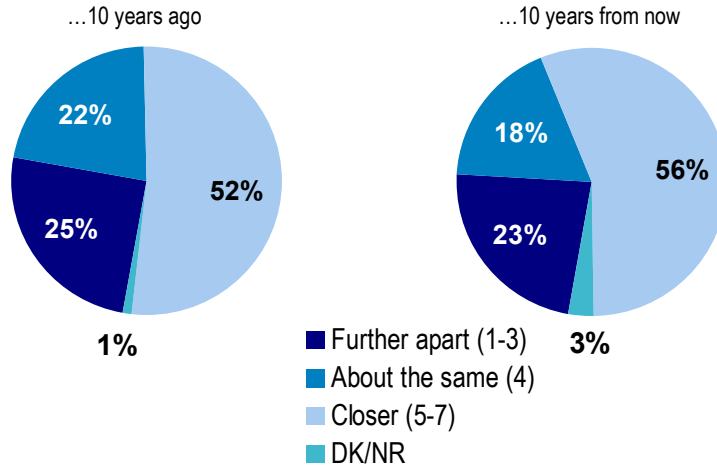


Base: All Canadians

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### Trend towards closer ties within the global community

Q: Overall, do you think that citizens of the world are closer today or further apart than they were...?



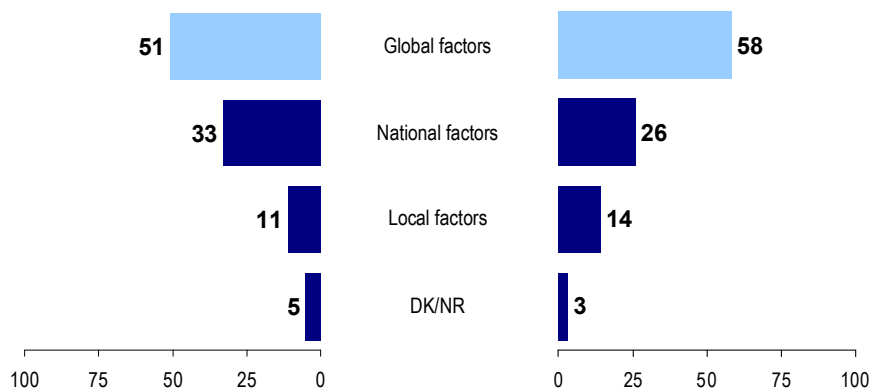
Base: All Canadians

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### Global factors to blame for economic downturn, the environment

Q: When we say that the economy is not performing well enough, would you say this is caused mainly by local, national, or global factors?

Q: Would you say the quality of the environment is the result of mainly local, national, or global factors?



Base: All Canadians; Jan. 05

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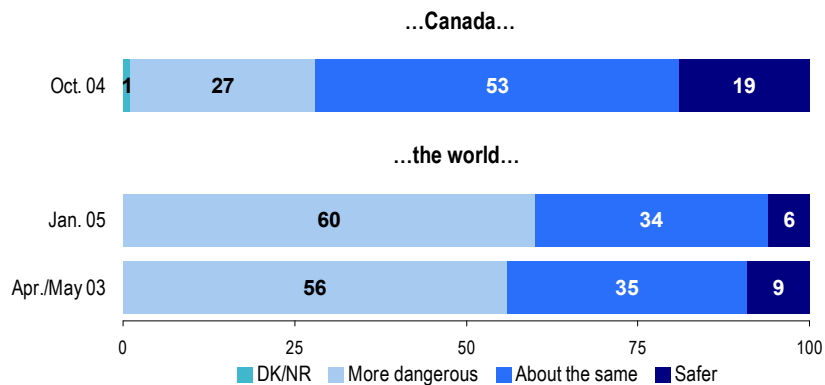
This highly positive blend of economic advantage and social virtue in a more accessible, influential, and interconnected global village was shaken by September 11 and the ensuing events of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the public perspective, the world may be our oyster, but the oyster seems to have sharp teeth.

- Perception of risk is up: 60 per cent of Canadians see the world as more dangerous than it was a decade ago; only six per cent see it as more benign.
- A broad range of risks has coalesced to produce a generalized sense of dread, which coexists and operates in a state of tension with optimistic globalization.
- From the searing images of September 11, to vague fears about global warming, avian flu, and geopolitical instability, the world contains a more pressing inventory of fear, which is altering the public's expectations for the role of government.

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### World, not Canada, seen as becoming more dangerous

Q: From your own point of view, do you feel that, overall, ... is safer, more dangerous, or about the same as it was five years ago?



Base: All Canadians

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# IN THE US SHADOW

The relationship to the United States (and our place in North America) is the most important prism on our place in the world. The United States (or so our respondents tell us) overwhelmingly remains our “best friend”, but Trudeau’s analogy of sleeping next to an elephant must be updated to the more daunting challenge of sleeping next to an elephant that has insomnia.

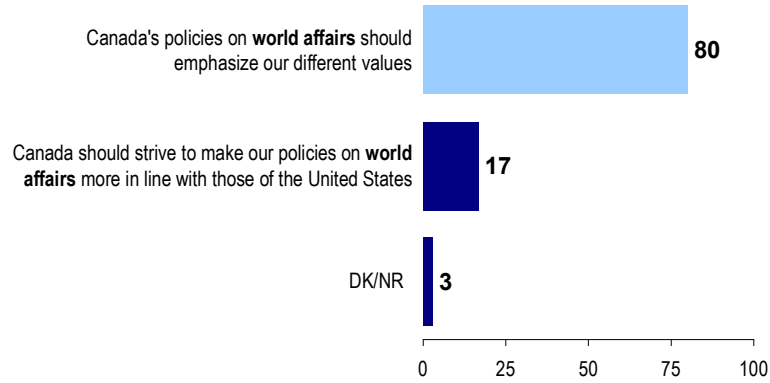
There are two levels to this relationship:

1. In the medium to longer-term, sense of American antipathy has declined as a clearer and more positive sense of Canadian identity and values has emerged.
  - ◇ From defining ourselves as “not American”, to a more positive description of ourselves as “Canadians” in our own right.
  - ◇ Canadians see North America as a mosaic, not a fully integrated community; a separate North American trajectory
  
2. In the medium to shorter-term there are a number of events/issues that have affected this relationship:
  - ◇ Since Sept. 11 = shared solidarity
  - ◇ Since Iraq and Kyoto = widening gap
  - ◇ new shared security ethnic (with different US-Canadian folk theories of roots and remedies)
  - ◇ recent rise in concern with US administration (note Iraq and BMD)
  - ◇ myths of intractable widening value differences. Values are essentially the same; they just have a different/more acute distribution in the U.S.
    - statism/secularism = stable
    - diversity/environment = widening



### Accomodation or divergence?

Q: Given the results of the recent U.S. election, which of the following statements comes closest to your own views?

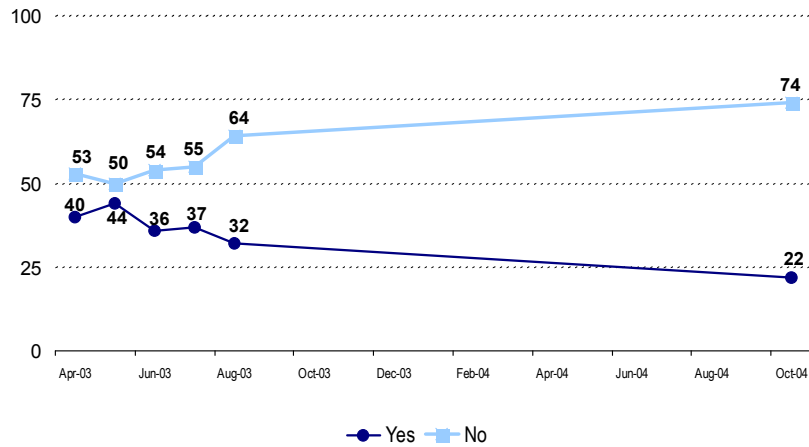


Base: All Canadians; Nov. 04

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### War in Iraq increasingly seen as unjustified

Q: In hindsight, do you think that the **United States was justified** in its decision to invade Iraq?



Base: All Canadians; Oct. 04

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# OPTIONS FOR NORTH AMERICA?

The Canadian trajectory is somewhere between Europe and America/paradise or power. While institutional values of Canada are more European (e.g., tolerance, immigration), exigencies of economics, geography, pop culture, and now security, creates closer ties between Canada and the United States.

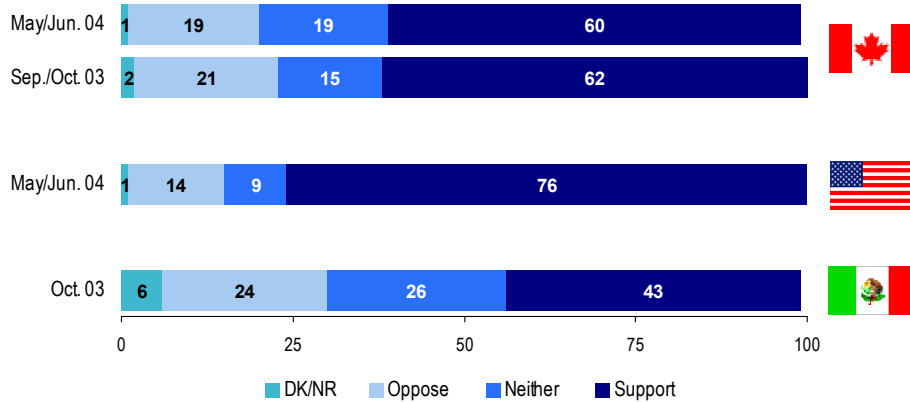
We are left with three options:

- Fortress North America
- North American mosaic
- North American community

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## Support for a common security perimeter

Q: Would you support or oppose Canada, the United States and Mexico establishing a common security perimeter?



Base: All Canadians/Americans/Mexicans

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# PUBLIC VISION AND BROAD VALUES

While attentive to rising perceived risks, Canadians are looking for a bolder, more ambitious place in the world. The public goals are dominated by:

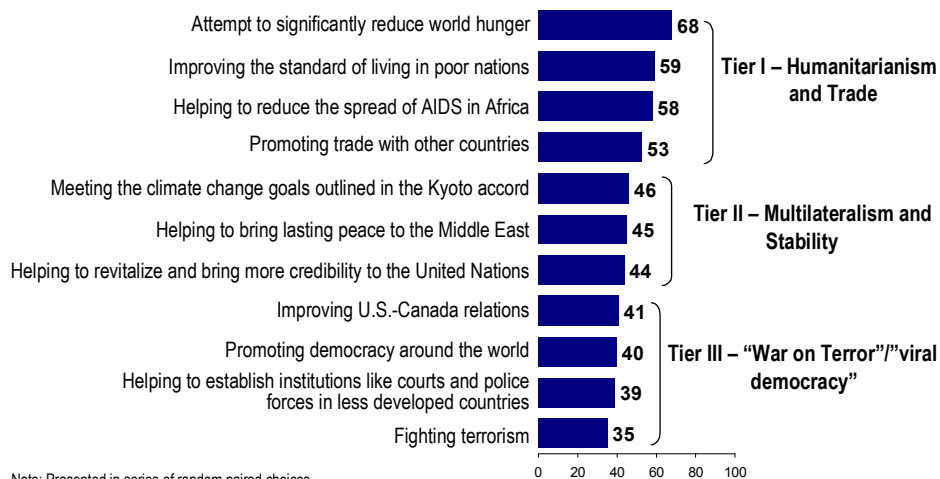
1. Humanitarianism and trade (a blend of values and self interest)
2. Multilateralism and stability
3. "War on terror"/viral democracy (including defence renewal?)

It is worth noting that neither the *diagnostique* (malaise/decline), nor the *prescription* (democratization, military renewal), is entirely consistent across public and elite/experts.

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## Foreign policy goals

**Q:** There are a number of different areas that Canada can turn its attention to in terms of foreign policy. In the future, which of the following priorities do you think should be the most important focus for Canada's foreign policy?



Note: Presented in series of random paired choices

Base: All Canadians; Jan. 05

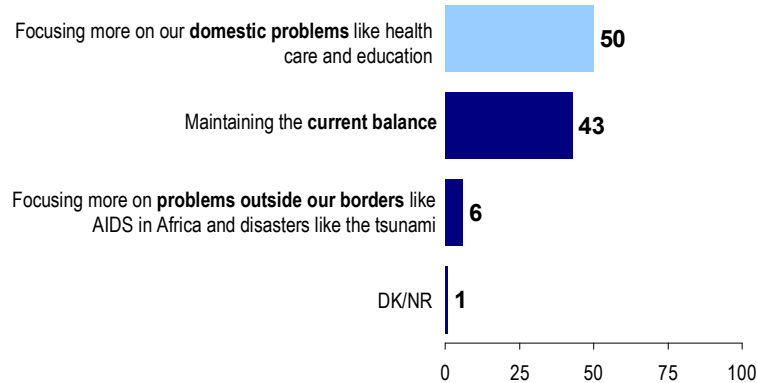
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Despite the rising salience of the external world, there is a tepid-modest quality to the issues of priorities and resources. More yes, but not too much and domestic issues (e.g., health, education, children) are seen as much more pressing. Overall, while there has been a rise in support for more resources, the preferred instruments focus on a blend of some of smarter, innovative tools combining social virtue and economic advantage of:

- sustainable development and investment in science and technology; and
- promotion and diplomacy in the service of economic interests also figure prominently.

## Domestic problems given priority over foreign problems

Q: Given our current priorities and resources, do you think Canada should be . . .



Base: All Canadians; Jan. 05

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## Preferred instruments

Q: Which of the following do you think would be most important to ensure that Canada achieves its full potential in the 21st Century?



Base: All Canadians; Jan. 05

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# CONCLUSIONS

So, where does that leave us? There are four main points:

- For Canadians, the external world is much more immediate and relevant than it has ever been.
- The world contains a potent blend of opportunities *and* danger – Canadians want both currents addressed.
- The relationship to the United States and our place in North America provide a crucial prism.
- The North American trajectory and our place remains quite uncertain (fortress, mosaic or community?)