

Wave I: Surveys of the General Public in Canada and the United States

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART OF THE
RETHINKING NORTH AMERICA
STUDY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigration, Security, and Borders

Survey results reveal that Canadian and American attitudes toward immigration continue to track in opposite directions. Despite having a rate of immigration that is more than twice that of the U.S. (as a proportion of the population), only 26 per cent of Canadians say there are too many immigrants coming to the country, compared to 60 per cent of Americans. Tracking this data reveals that following the events of September 11, 2001, opposition to immigration rose in both countries, however, over time opposition subsided in Canada (settling in the mid-twenties), whereas in the U.S., opposition has continued to climb.

Survey results also suggest that few Americans or Canadians say they are confident in their country's immigration system to screen out security threats (17 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively). Indeed, residents in both countries are much more likely to indicate they have little confidence in their country's ability to screen out threats (37 per cent of Canadians and 43 per cent of Americans). Moreover, confidence in both countries' immigration systems has declined over the past year (down five points in Canada, and down seven points in the U.S.).

Given their rather modest levels of confidence in the screening of immigrants to their country, it is not surprising to find that the majority of both Canadians (71 per cent) and Americans (83 per cent) favour increased screening of newcomers, although a substantial minority of Canadians worry that stringent screening criteria may keep out immigrants needed to help the country prosper (27 per cent, versus 15 per cent of Americans). Results also reveal that Canadians express higher levels of concern about keeping out legitimate immigrants than they did in previous years (up six per cent since 2003).

Survey results also indicate that both Canadians and Americans rate security and safety as the dominant consideration in terms of their shared border (among four options tested). In fact, safety and security outranks all of the other issues examined (i.e., freedom of movement, national sovereignty, and economic advantages) by a margin of at least two to one in Canada, and three to one in the U.S. Tracking this data reveals that Canadians and Americans place more of an emphasis on security and safety than they did in 2005 (up six points in Canada, and three points in the U.S.). Over the longer-term, this issue has become less important to Canadians (down seven points since 2002), but more important to Americans (up eight points since 2002).

Terrorism

Since 9/11, some American politicians and pundits have suggested that terrorists are entering the U.S. through Canada. However, when we ask the U.S. public about this issue, we find very few Americans (nine per cent) think that terrorists enter their country by way of the Canada-U.S. border. In fact, among the options tested, Canada is seen as the least likely source for terrorists entering the U.S. – a perception that has remained consistent since 2005. Instead, the majority view (54 per cent) continues to be that terrorists come directly into the U.S. from abroad (up six percentage points since 2005). Other options tested (i.e., terrorists entering through Mexico, or from within the U.S.) are chosen by just over one in ten Americans.

The lack of concern about Canada as a source for terrorism may be rooted in a belief that Canada is doing enough to ensure that terrorists do not enter the U.S. by way of the Canada-U.S. border: 61 per cent of Americans express confidence in Canadian efforts in this area.

Survey results also reveal some noteworthy differences between Canadians and Americans in terms of views on their countries' security response to terrorism. Most Canadians (55 per cent) see their country's response as being commensurate with existing threats. In the U.S. however, the lean is to characterizing the response as inadequate, with a plurality (38 per cent) indicating their country's response has not gone far enough. Interestingly, Americans are also more concerned about going too far with these efforts (23 per cent, compared to 15 per cent of Canadians).

NAFTA & Trade in North America

Despite the recent resolution of the decades-long softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the U.S., survey results indicate that Canadian support for free trade between the three North American countries has declined over the past year (down six points to 73 per cent). In the U.S., support for North American free trade is identical to that found at this time last year (71 per cent). Interestingly, support for free trade increases somewhat when the focus of the question is narrowed to free trade between Canada and the U.S. only (five per cent higher in Canada and 14 per cent higher in the United States).

Survey results also reveal that, despite generally strong support for NAFTA, both Canadians and Americans express mixed views as to whether NAFTA has had an overall positive or negative effect on their country. In Canada, the lean is towards seeing the impacts as positive (37 per cent), although about three in ten (28 per cent) feel the impact has been negative. The plurality of Americans (33 per cent) say NAFTA's impact on their country has been negative, and only one in four (26 per cent — down four points since June 2005) say the impact has been positive.

Integration and Policy Unification

The issue of closer integration between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico has garnered a great deal of attention in recent years as leaders in the three countries have committed to increased cooperation on issues such as security, energy, and border management through the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership.

Survey results reveal that while the plurality of Canadians and Americans agree that Canada, the U.S. and Mexico should further integrate their economies in order to make North America more competitive in the global economy, support for this idea is by no means overwhelming. Nearly one in two Canadians (45 per cent) believe further integration should be pursued as a policy goal, but one in three (32 per cent) disagree, and one in five (21 per cent) are neutral on the matter. Among Americans, views are even more mixed: 40 per cent agree with closer economic integration as a way of making North America more globally competitive, however 35 per cent disagree, and one in four (24 per cent) are neutral.

Looking at the issue of integration in more detail, respondents were asked whether they would like to see their countries develop integrated or independent policies across a range of key social and economic areas. Survey results reveal that support varies greatly by policy area, and in some cases, by country of residence.

Overall, environmental quality continues to be seen as the most logical place for policy integration, with the majority of Canadians (63 per cent) and Americans (55 per cent) endorsing this type of integration. A majority of Canadians (51 per cent) and plurality of Americans (42 per cent) also believe border security should be more closely integrated. Support varies between the two countries in terms of energy policy: the plurality of Americans (45 per cent) want greater integration in this area, while the plurality of Canadians (44 per cent) would prefer to manage their own policies. Results are fairly consistent between the two countries in terms of defence, immigration, the economy, and foreign policy, with a plurality from both countries preferring that independent policies be developed in all these areas.

Despite support for closer integration in some policy areas, there is little support in Canada for harmonizing social programs with the U.S. Indeed, a growing number of Canadians believe that we should maintain our social programs even if it means being less economically competitive (75 per cent, up from 67 per cent in 2002). Few Canadians believe that Canada should harmonize its social programs with the U.S. (22 per cent, down eight points since 2002).

Energy and the Environment

Energy prices have risen significantly over the last several years, resulting in increased pressure on governments in both Canada and the U.S. to regulate the energy industry. Looking at the public perspective on this issue, we find that sizeable pluralities in both countries (42 per cent each) believe their federal governments are able to set the prices that consumers pay for energy. Results differ, however, when asked whether the federal government *should* set energy prices, with Canadians being significantly more likely than their southern neighbours to favour government intervention in this area.

The Rethinking North America study also asked both Canadians and Americans a number of questions about the environment. Results reveal that while majorities from both sides of the border agree that greater protection of the environment is important, Canadians express a higher level of commitment to this idea.

When asked whether protecting the environment or ensuring an adequate supply of oil and gas to meet energy needs should be given higher priority, majorities in both Canada (67 per cent) and the U.S. (55 per cent) indicate that protecting the environment should be given higher priority. However, in the U.S. a substantial minority prioritize energy needs (41 per cent), while in Canada only one in four (27 per cent) believe energy needs should trump protecting the environment.

Results also reveal that an overwhelming majority of respondents in both Canada (95 per cent) and the U.S. (84 per cent) feel it is somewhat or very important for their governments to take increased action to reduce global warming. However, Canadians are more likely than Americans to see this as an urgent priority: 79 per cent of Canadians believe taking increased action in this area is very important, compared to 61 per cent of Americans.

Survey results also indicate that while the majority of both Canadians and Americans believe that international action is essential to tackling a number of environmental issues (water pollution, air pollution, global warming, loss of species and species habitat) Americans are significantly less likely than Canadians to feel this way.

The survey also asked Canadians and Americans whether they preferred voluntary measures or stricter regulations to protect the environment (and this question was asked in relation to both businesses and individual citizens). Results reveal that both Canadians and Americans strongly prefer a non-voluntary approach to ensure that businesses act in an environmentally friendly manner. Three quarters of Canadians and two-thirds of Americans prefer the implementation of stricter laws and regulations on companies to protect the environment, and relatively few prefer the softer approach of encouraging companies to reduce their impact on the environment on a voluntary basis.

However, results differ considerably in both countries when the focus of this question is changed to individual citizens. Just over half of Canadians (54 per cent) prefer stricter laws and regulations to ensure that citizens act in an environmentally friendly manner, and a substantial minority (44 per cent) believe that individuals should only be encouraged to reduce their impact on the environment. Americans are even more likely to prefer a voluntary approach to encourage individuals to act in an environmentally friendly manner (55 per cent), and just over four in ten prefer implementing stricter laws and regulations on individuals.

North American Relations

This edition of Rethinking North America also continued to examine relations in North America. Results suggest that perceptions of the Canada-U.S. relationship are showing signs of significant improvement. Survey findings indicate that the plurality of Canadians now rate relations between Canada and the U.S. as good (43 per cent – up a full 14 points since 2005), and only one in five (20 per cent) rate relations as poor (down a corresponding 14 points over this same timeframe). Americans express even

more positive views of the Canada-U.S. relationship, with a majority rating current relations with Canada as good (58 per cent, up six points since 2005) and fewer than one in ten characterizing relations as poor.

Looking at overall impressions of the other country, results reveal that two-thirds of Americans (66 per cent) view Canada in a positive light, and only eight per cent hold an unfavourable view. While Canadians are less positive in their appraisal of their southern neighbour, the plurality (41 per cent) hold a favourable view. Tracking this data indicates that Canadians hold a more favourable impression of the U.S. than they did at this time last year (up five points since October 2005), while the proportion of Americans who view Canada in a positive light has remained largely stable over this timeframe.

Despite some significant improvement in Canadian views of the U.S., survey results also reveal serious concerns about the “Americanization” of Canada. Currently, over half of Canadians (52 per cent) feel their country has become more like the U.S. over the past 10 years (up seven per cent since June 2005), and fewer than one in 10 (nine per cent) say that Canada has become less like the U.S. over the past decade (down nine points since 2005).

Findings also clearly indicate that Canadians have little desire to become more like the U.S. in the future. More than four in ten Canadians (45 per cent) say they would like Canada to become less like the U.S. in the future, and only seven per cent of Canadians indicate they would like to be more like the U.S. These results have remained largely stable over the past year.

Identity and Values

Rethinking North America also examined Canadian and American views on national identity and values. Respondents from both countries were asked which of five options (country, province/state, town, North America, or the world) they felt they belonged to, first and foremost. Results reveal that the plurality of both Canadians and Americans (44 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively) primarily associate themselves with their country. Respondents from both countries also have a connection to a number of the other sources of belonging tested, although these vary somewhat by country. One in four Canadians selected province as their dominant source of belonging, whereas fewer than one in seven Americans are similarly connected to their state. Canadians are also more likely to feel connected to their town. Conversely, Americans tend to be somewhat more international in their outlook, with a higher proportion of Americans feeling they belong primarily to the world, or to North America.

Looking at the issue of national identity in more detail, respondents in both Canada and the U.S. were asked the meaning of being Canadian/American. Leaving a healthy environment to future generations and having social and health programs to support all citizens were seen as best representing what it means to be Canadian. Among American respondents, being free to do and think as they please, having the opportunity to pursue a good life, and having a say in the political/social/economic development of the country were seen as most important to their national identity among the options tested.

