

# **Wave 4: Surveys of the General Public in Canada, the United States and Mexico**

Executive Summary

PART OF THE  
**RETHINKING NORTH AMERICA  
STUDY**



October 2007



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## *Perceptions of North American Trade, Integration and Collaboration*

This edition of Rethinking North America continued to examine Canadian, American, and Mexican views on free trade. Results indicate strong support for NAFTA, with seven in ten Americans (70 per cent) and Canadians (71 per cent), and eight in ten Mexicans (81 per cent) expressing agreement that there should be free trade between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico

Interestingly (and consistent with previous years' results), support for free trade increases amongst Canadians and Americans when the focus of the question is narrowed to free trade between Canada and the U.S. only (five points higher in Canada, and 10 points higher in the United States). Support for free trade decreases somewhat in Mexico (77 per cent, down four points) when Canada is not included in the equation.

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 Canadians, Americans, and Mexicans hold somewhat mixed views on whether the countries should further integrate their economies in order to make North America more competitive in the global economy. More than four in ten Canadians (45 per cent) believe further integration should be pursued as a policy goal, however, 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, while 35 per cent disagree, and one in four (24 per cent) are neutral. In Mexico, four in ten express agreement with closer economic integration (39 per cent), while one in five (22 per cent) disagree with this idea (the plurality of Mexicans – 40 per cent – are neutral).

Rethinking North America results reveal somewhat different levels of support for the idea of sharing personal information between governments in North America to prevent the spread of a global influenza pandemic. Two-thirds of Canadians (66 per cent) support this type of information sharing between countries, while fewer than one in three (31 per cent) disagree with this idea. Close to two thirds of Mexicans (64 per cent) also support this type of information sharing, and just over one third (36 per cent) disagree with this idea. Results, however, are more divided among the American public: just over half (54 per cent) support information sharing with the other North American governments to help prevent the spread of a global influenza pandemic, however, over four in ten (42 per cent) are opposed to sharing information for this purpose.

## *Energy and the Environment*

Rethinking North America also examined views on the integration of environmental and energy policies. Results reveal that Americans prefer coordinated North American policies over independent national policies in the energy sector (60 per cent vs. 36 per cent, respectively), while Canadians and Mexicans tend to prefer independent national energy policies (54 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively).

Support for coordinated environmental policies is more consistent between Canada and the U.S.: seven in ten Canadians (70 per cent) and two-thirds of Americans (66 per cent) prefer that shared policies on the environment be developed, and only about one in three in either country feel the environment should be addressed by independent national policies. As with energy policies, Mexicans prefer independent national policies when it comes to the environment (57 per cent), rather than coordinated North American policies (43 per cent).

Turning to the issue of global warming, we find that an overwhelming majority of respondents in Canada (94 per cent) the U.S. (81 per cent) and Mexico (96 per cent) feel it is very or somewhat important for their governments to take increased action to reduce global warming. However, Canadians and Mexicans are more likely than Americans to see environmental improvement as an urgent priority: 76 per cent of Canadians and 72 per cent of Mexicans believe taking increased action to reduce global warming is “very” important, compared to 59 per cent of Americans.

Canadians and Mexicans were asked to what extent they support foreign investment in their respective country’s energy sector if it would improve economic performance and energy supply. Survey results reveal mixed views on this issue among Canadians: one-third (36 per cent) indicate support for this idea, while one in four (24 per cent) do not. Mexicans are somewhat more in favour of foreign investment in their energy sector, with four in ten (41 per cent) indicating support, and only one in six (16 per cent) opposed to increased foreign investment in this area.

## *Borders and Security*

Since the 1990s, the United States has increased efforts to secure its borders and to prevent unauthorized migrants from entering the country illegally. As part of efforts to deter such migration, barriers totalling approximately 3,000 kilometres in length have been constructed along sections of the U.S.-Mexico border most commonly used for undocumented entry to the United States.

With this in mind, Canadians, Americans and Mexicans were asked a series of questions regarding their attitudes toward the construction of these barriers. Results reveal that, not surprisingly, awareness of these barriers is higher in the U.S. and Mexico than in Canada (although a fairly large proportion of Canadians say they are familiar with these barriers). More than half of Americans (52 per cent) say they clearly recall hearing about these barriers, and one in four (23 per cent) say they are vaguely familiar. In Mexico, awareness of these barriers is even higher, with seven in ten (72 per cent) saying they clearly recall hearing about these barriers and another one in five (22 per cent) saying they are vaguely familiar. In

Canada, 41 per cent say they clearly recall hearing something about these barriers, and 21 per cent say they vaguely recall hearing or seeing something about the barriers. Tracking this data reveals that in all three countries the proportion who say they recall hearing about the construction of barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border has increased significantly since 2005.

Survey results also reveal that Americans strongly support the construction of barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexicans are overwhelmingly opposed, and Canadian views are more mixed. Two-thirds of Americans (67 per cent) are in favour of this initiative, while three in ten (30 per cent) are opposed. In Mexico, more than eight in ten (85 per cent) oppose the building of the barriers, while only 15 per cent indicate support. The plurality in Canada (44 per cent) indicate support for the construction of these barriers, however, roughly the same proportion (40 per cent) are opposed. Tracking this data reveals that support for these barriers in all three countries has declined somewhat since 2005 (down two points in Canada, and down three points in the U.S. and Mexico).

### *North American Relations*

This edition of Rethinking North America also asked Canadians and Mexicans for their opinion of each other's country. Results suggest that Canadians and Mexicans hold mixed views of the other country. One-third of Canadians (36 per cent) view Mexico in a positive light, while one in four (23 per cent) hold an unfavourable view. Mexicans are somewhat less positive in their appraisal of Canada with 27 per cent describing their view as favourable, and an almost equal number (26 per cent) saying their view is unfavourable. Tracking this data indicates that the proportion of Mexicans who hold a favourable impression of Canada has declined 14 points since 2005, and the proportion of Canadians who view Mexico in a positive light has also declined 14 points over this timeframe. Recent incidents involving Canadian tourists and crime in Mexico are likely responsible for this significant decline in favourable views of the other country.

Looking at American and Mexican impressions of each other's country, results reveal that Mexicans are more likely than Americans to offer a positive assessment. Four in ten Mexicans (39 per cent) view the U.S in a positive light, and only one in seven (14 per cent) hold an unfavourable view. American views of Mexico are considerably more mixed, with one-third (34 per cent) expressing a favourable opinion of Mexico, and roughly the same proportion (30 per cent) holding an unfavourable view. Tracking this data reveals that the proportion of Mexicans who hold a favourable impression of the U.S. has increased somewhat over the past two years (up three points since 2005). However, perhaps due to the ongoing debate about illegal immigration in the United States, the proportion of Americans who view Mexico in a positive light has declined nine points since 2005.

