

Decision-Maker Wave

Overview

November 2007

PART OF THE
SECURITY MONITOR
STUDY



2007 | 2008

Overview

Since its inception, EKOS' Security Monitor study has focused exclusively on understanding the attitudes of the Canadian public with respect to the safety and security landscape in Canada. For the past several years, we have expanded this scope to include an examination of the views of Canadian decision-makers in this vital area.

In other studies, EKOS has regularly found many differences when comparing the attitudes of decision-makers and general public, primarily in relation to value-based lines of questioning. When it comes to the area of security, however, results have consistently revealed that the attitudes of decision-makers and the general public tend to converge more often than diverge. The trend towards convergence continues to emerge in this year's examination.

While decision-makers express considerably higher levels of awareness of the federal government's current security efforts, recall of specific measures is very similar to the general public. Moreover, both populations generally approve of the government's approach to security and express confidence in the government's ability to respond to emergency situations (e.g., terrorist attack, natural disaster).

For the most part, attitudes towards civil liberties are also comparable. On some matters (e.g., enhancing police powers), we see that decision-makers tend to be slightly more concerned with the civil liberties side of the equation, although this difference is not overwhelming. Generally speaking, however, both decision-makers and the general public are worried about the impact of the current security focus on the civil liberties of future generations. There is also an overwhelming desire among both groups to see government achieve a balance between security and civil liberties – as opposed to choosing to focus on just one area over the other.

Even in the area of risk perception we see more similarities than differences. Both decision-makers and members of the general public believe that a terrorist attack on Canadian is inevitable, and that the threat to Canada has remained relatively unchanged from five years ago. Somewhat surprisingly, decision-makers appear to have slightly elevated fears when it comes to the potential threats of everyday activities (e.g., breathing air in a major city, buying products made in other countries).

The same trends are evident across several other key areas. For example, like the general public, most decision-makers would like to see Canada strengthen its working relationship with the United States in the areas of national security, emergency management and border security. And while they are somewhat more likely to be aware of the pending passport requirements for travel to the United States, decision-makers are as likely as other Canadians to say that their travel patterns will not be affected. Outlook on Afghanistan is also, though decision-makers are somewhat more inclined to be strong supporters of both Canada's military and reconstruction efforts in this country.

As we have remarked in the past, we have typically found a great number of differences when comparing decision-makers and the general public. The overall results of the current survey, however, point to an unusual level of consensus between Canada's elite and members of the general public. This reiterates our view that Canadians' views on security have become entrenched, making the potential for significant attitudinal changes in this area very low, at least in the short-term.