

Wave 6

Overview

June 2008

PART OF THE
SECURITY MONITOR
STUDY



2007 | 2008

Overview

The Security Landscape

Consistent with what we have witnessed for more than a year now, a majority of Canadians approves of the direction the Government of Canada is taking on the security file (although very few could tell you what measures are actually being taken). This strong support for security has remained elevated, despite declining risk perception. Indeed, even with cases of “homegrown terrorism” currently on trial in Canada, the perception that Canada is “more dangerous” has declined very significantly over the past 2 years. In effect, security efforts appear to have worked in the minds of many Canadians.

It is our view, however, that the public’s staunch commitment to security (which emerged post-9/11) may be increasingly hard to justify in the current environment. While Canadians will not want to back away from security entirely, tracking of several indicators over the past year indicate that they may be shifting their priorities to other areas (i.e., to seeking greater balance between security and other objectives such as civil liberties). We will continue to test hypotheses as we move towards concluding this study in the coming month.

Special topics explored in Wave 6

Terrorism in Canada – perceived threat & the role for law enforcement

Most Canadians are aware of the case of the 18 terrorist suspects arrested in Toronto in 2006 and, despite media criticisms, most also support the way law enforcement and security agencies have handled this case. It is interestingly to note that there is a growing sense in Canada that adequate resources have been devoted to combating the threat of terrorism in general. By contrast, most Canadians continue to believe resources are lacking in the fight against organized crime and, when given the choice, would prefer to see law enforcement focus on investigating crimes other than terrorism.

Even with the trial of a member of the “Toronto 18” terrorist suspects currently underway, the perception that Canada has a “serious problem” with terrorism has declined quite significantly over the past several years. At the same time, there is still a majority (6 in 10) that believes that terrorist activities are being financed by organizations operating in Canada. The Government of Canada’s current response to this activity (i.e., the publication of a list of terrorist financiers) is not seen as particularly effective, nor, however, is it well understood.

Crime & Justice – Cyber crime & Gun violence

Cyber crime, defined as crimes involving computers and the Internet (e.g., hacking) or the facilitation of crime through the use of computers (e.g., fraud) is not a very common occurrence in Canada (1 in 10 reports having been a victim such a crime). Unlike other serious offences, very few say they involved the authorities when this happened. Instead, many handled this issue themselves, while others relied on outside assistance (e.g., private corporations, Internet service providers, computer experts). Even though the incidence of cyber crimes is relatively low, most Canadians consider this a priority for law enforcement and security agencies.

In June 2006, as part of the “Tackling Crime” agenda, the Government of Canada introduced reforms to sections of the Criminal Code that pertained to gun offences. At the time of these amendments, Canadians were highly concerned with gun violence in Canada (i.e., 1 in 2 thought it was at least a “somewhat serious” threat). Today, the majority position is that the threat of gun violence in Canada is “not very serious”. These figures are now an exact reflection the perceived threat of gun violence in Canadian communities (which is unchanged from 2006).

Security intelligence – Awareness of CSIS

Awareness of CSIS is robust (7 in 10 clear / vague recall) and up slightly from the last sounding. Those aware of CSIS tend to recall its investigative role first and foremost, followed by its role in protecting national security. Importantly, very few recall anything negative about the Service.

Transportation safety & security

In the summer of 2006, United Kingdom police thwarted an alleged terrorist plot to detonate liquid explosives on several airliners travelling from the United Kingdom to the United States and Canada. As a result, restrictions on bringing liquids, aerosols, and gels (LAGs) through security screening were immediately put in place. In this month's *Security Monitor*, we asked a sub-sample of air travellers about the restrictions LAGs. Not only is claimed awareness of this policy extremely high (9 in 10 "know" these restrictions exist), most also seem to understand and accept the reasons for why these restrictions are in place.

By comparison, claimed awareness of the RCMP Air Marshal Program is much more modest (only 4 in 10 clear / vague recall), as is understanding of the Program. While most acknowledge its involvement in providing security on an aircraft, many others incorrectly attribute the responsibilities of other organizations to the Air Marshals (e.g., baggage security).

Canada's role on the world stage – Canada's presence in Afghanistan

Canada's military's mission in Afghanistan continues to garner the attention of many Canadians. Attitudes towards the mission, however, are highly divided. Although a majority has consistently supported the mission, there has also always been a fairly sizable (and stable) group that opposes Canada's military role in this country.

Awareness of Canada's reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan, on the other hand, is much lower (and has even declined in recent months). Despite the overall modest awareness levels, the public believes that these efforts are having a positive impact. Moreover, Canadians are optimistic that the future is even brighter for the people in Afghanistan.