



## ***Bushwhacking*<sup>1</sup> and Other Ingredients of Canadian Outlook on the USA**

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# 0. CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Canadians see the U.S. as their closest friend, **but** beneath this overall positive orientation they hold deep and growing concerns about recent American direction. While Canadians may see Americans as our best friend, we remain deeply troubled that our southern friend has lost its way. Indeed, Canadians sense that they have gone from merely sleeping with an elephant, to sleeping with an elephant who is an insomniac.

There is a clear and profound distinction in sentiments towards Americans (which lean to the positive) and sentiments towards President George W. Bush (which lean decisively to the negative). Put simply, President Bush is regarded as anathema to Canadians, an untrustworthy bungler who has wreaked havoc and mischief on the world stage. It would appear that Canadian attitudes towards the President border on a somewhat irrational demonization, with Bushwhacking emerging as our new national sport. Indeed, more than any other factor, the imagery of President Bush as a sorcerer's apprentice leading the U.S. and the world to the brink of disaster, underpins our angst about the current American trajectory.

Canadians demonstrate a remarkable conviction of moral superiority *vis-à-vis* the U.S., from their comfortable northern pew. The collective mirror used to compare Canadians to Americans is highly flattering: we see ourselves as unremittingly more decent and tolerant, although we do acknowledge American dominance in the realms of power and wealth. Essentially, we paint a picture of ourselves as smarter, nicer, more decent; but weaker and poorer: the "nice" northern tiger.

There is also evidence that there are widening differences between Canada and the U.S., with a sharp decline in the conviction that Canada is becoming "Americanized". In fact, the sense of impending and pervasive "Americanization", which coloured Canadian nationalism in the last half of the twentieth century, has been displaced, and we are now witnessing the emergence of a more mature Canadian national identity, one which no longer seeks meaning in not being American (a more positive sense of identity "for" rather than identity "from").

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<sup>1</sup> With apologies to Molly Ivins

There has, however, been a recent resurgence in American antipathy. This shift is not deeply rooted, but it is significant and is in part driven by a spurious conviction that Americans are punishing Canada for its dissenting position on Iraq. Our recent research with the American public suggests, however, that although there have been some negative effects – particularly amongst Republicans and conservatives – the net effects have been neutral or even positive (particularly among Democrat voters). In fact, Canada has become something of a poster child for lost Liberal aspirations in America.

## 2. VIEWS ON THE ELECTION

It is difficult to overstate Canadian perceptions of the importance of the looming U.S. election. Indeed, Canadians believe that the U.S. stands precariously at the crossroads of fundamental national choice about the kind of society they wish to be and the place they want to occupy in an increasingly frightening world (ironically made scarier by what Canadians regard as the ham-fisted efforts of President Bush and his administration to reduce risk). In fact, the image of a triumphant President Bush leading a frightened hyper-power produces near apoplexy amongst Canadians.

Another vivid indication of the level of significance attached to the American election is the fact that more Canadians feel that the U.S. election will have greater consequences for Canada than our own recent federal election. Being passive bystanders in this election has bred a certain sense of alienation and this disconnection is reinforced by the deep conviction that this is not merely another U.S. election, but a fundamental choice with very different futures in store for the U.S., Canada and the world.

Not only is the sense that the stakes are very high, so is the Canadian attention level. There is a near cartoonish polarization of Canadian optic on President Bush and Senator Kerry — Bush bad, Kerry good. We have become, what some might call, a nation of Michael Moore's, with President Bush becoming emblematic of the dark side of America for a great many Canadians. Even in areas where Canadians might rightfully be wary of Senator Kerry's protectionist rhetoric, they overwhelmingly say his victory would have better trade and economic impacts on Canada. Yet, Canadians are more likely to see Senator Kerry as producing positive changes – particularly in the areas of world peace and Canada-U.S. relations. On the other hand, foreign policy and the environment are seen as the first and most serious casualties of another President Bush term in office.

Thus, despite having an overwhelming preference for Senator Kerry (3:1), Canadians seem clearly aware of the closeness of the American election and there is still a slight lean to seeing President Bush as the likely winner.

### 3. SECURITY AND WAR

There is troubling news for the Liberal minority government in the area of missile defence. Although Canadians lean to a more integrated North American defence strategy, there is (slight majority) opposition to Canada participation in this program. Indeed, the recent trend lines show declining support for this initiative, which may be linked to strengthening conviction that the Iraq invasion was a profound error. If this was so wrong why believe that missile defence is right?

Focussing on the issue of the risk of a terrorist attack, although about half consider it plausible, we find that only a scant minority of Canadians think this is an imminent risk (1 in 20 rate the risk as very likely which is down considerably from the past few years). Somewhat surprisingly, the relatively low risk perception does not produce a low security commitment amongst Canadians.

While September 11<sup>th</sup> and shared security concerns may have drawn us together in an increasingly isolated “fortress North America”, Iraq has driven an ever-deepening wedge across the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. At the time of the outbreak of the war in Iraq, there was a sense of ambiguity that perhaps both the U.S. and Canada were right in their different positions, with the majority supporting the decision for Canada to opt out, and nearly half feeling that the U.S. was also justified in its decision to go. Today, however, 82 per cent support Canada’s decision and support for the US decision has plummeted from 44 to 23 per cent. The former sense of ambivalence has been displaced by a virtual consensus that we were right and the U.S. was tragically wrong.

### 4. FAULT LINES, DIVISIONS AND THE FUTURE

Although the consensus on most of these attitudes is more notable than the divisions, there are some important recurring fault lines. In general, conservatives, males, Albertans (and residents of the Prairies) are much more pro-Bush and more Amerophile in their outlook. Quebeckers, Bloc Québécois and NDP supporters, younger Canadians, women and higher socio-economic status Canadians are more fearful of President Bush and less sympathetic to recent American direction.

Interestingly, we have found conservatives in Canada look more longingly to some key features and values of American society, whereas America’s Democrats and liberals look more favourably at Canada as a balance to some of America’s right wing tendencies. Perhaps this normative dialogue augers well for North America’s future; or perhaps more gloomily we will continue to see greater polarization and division.

## **Methodology**

This analysis based on the results of a telephone survey of 1,237 interviews with a national random sample of Canadians 18 years of age and older. Interviews were conducted between October 13 to 17, 2004. A sample of this size provides a statistical error margin of +/- 2.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. This margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (e.g., by region, gender, etc.). It should also be noted that the refusal rate and other measurement errors could also increase the margin of error. All the data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, gender and age composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.