

## Wave 2

## Overview

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## **Overview**

### **The Security Landscape**

There are some interesting changes occurring in the broader security landscape in Canada. As a starting point, there has been a major shift in public outlook on the world. Canadians have – at least in recent history – tended to see the world as a “more dangerous” place than in the past. Most recently, however, we have witnessed a precipitous drop in this view. This does not mean that the world is now considered safer (this remains the position of only about 1 in 10). Instead, a plurality now believes that the world is no different than it was just a year or so after 9/11. Although this shift is amongst the most dramatic we have seen on this indicator, movement towards viewing the world as “about the same” is a trend that began just over a year ago.

If Canadians are becoming less fearful of the external world, the obvious question is what kind of an affect does this have on their commitment to security? While the general public in Canada has always (and in many ways still does) exhibit a high level of tolerance for security measures put in place since September 11<sup>th</sup>, there are sizable and rising concerns that the current focus on security could be detrimental to the civil liberties and privacy of the next generation. Moreover, a surprisingly sizable segment of the population is worried that these trends are leading Canada down a dangerous path towards authoritarianism.

Despite these concerns, majorities still approve of the way in which threats such as crime and terrorism are handled in Canada (though there is also a growing perception among a small number that efforts to address the latter have been somewhat overzealous). The public’s expectations for government can perhaps be best summed up by the finding that Canadians consistently and overwhelmingly say that they want a solution that achieves a balance between protecting public security and guaranteeing the civil liberties.

One of the more curious and important features of the public outlook on security is the presence of profound contradictions and gaps on certain areas of public opinion. Not only are there sharp segmentations within the population (e.g., young, well-educated respondents are much more blasé about risks and more civil liberty-oriented than their older, more economically insecure counterparts), we also find significant contradictions within the same individuals. For instance, a sizable number of Canadians believe that we are approaching a police state, but also believe that security measures are well worth the costs for the peace of mind they bring.

This is not simply an illustration of the capricious or irrational nature of public attitudes (although that is a factor). These intense levels of ambivalence can also serve as harbingers of potential fault lines and future shifts in public opinion. Eventually the process of public judgment tends to resolve or iron out areas of excessive tension. When we couple these high levels of ambiguity with rapid changes on other key tracking indicators it merits special attention as a potential signal of future change

All of these conditions are evident in the recent research. We have seen a very rapid fall in the sense that the external world is becoming ever more dangerous. This may be reflected in some of the recent unexpected turns in the American political landscape. Hope and fear, like business cycles, tend to oscillate over the longer term. A rapid diminution of generalized risk, coupled with unsustainably large tensions across fears of loss of liberties and continued support for strong security agenda may signal the potential for a major reordering of these key public priorities.

The remainder of this chapter provides brief summaries of the trends we are seeing in the key areas of interest explored in Wave 2.

## **Special topics explored in Wave 2**

### *Immigration and Cultural sensitivities – Health of Newcomers in Canada*

General awareness of health issues related to immigrants and refugees in Canada is modest and recollection of specific issues is even more limited.

Even in a climate of declining risk perception, there are nonetheless concerns that newcomers could pose a risk to the health of Canadians. At the same time, however, it appears that these risks are seen as balanced by the economic and social benefits of immigration to Canada.

### *Canada-U.S. relations – Closer Ties in North America?*

There is a strong shared sentiment among many Canadians that current geopolitical instabilities will lead Canada and the U.S. to develop closer ties, which is not necessarily seen as a bad thing. On the contrary, most say they would like to see a closer working relationship than what currently exists in the areas of emergency management, border security, and national security.

### *Security intelligence – Views on the Canadian Security Intelligence Service*

Although awareness of CSIS is relatively high, most do not have a well-formed impression of the agency. This finding is underscored by the existence of significant misconceptions of how the organization conducts its investigations (i.e. at least 1 in 2 believes that CSIS might treat certain Canadians differently because of their ethnicity, race, or religion, and almost as many thinks that that CSIS sometimes bends the rules). Despite these views, most Canadians express a moderate to high level of confidence in the organization.

In terms of protecting national security, the preference is for CSIS to focus its resources on domestic affairs. At the same time, CSIS is also seen as the most obvious choice for collecting foreign intelligence (selected ahead of the options of creating a new foreign intelligence service or tasking another government agency with this responsibility).

### *Law enforcement – The RCMP and Concerns about Marijuana Grow-Operations*

The Canadian public is currently paying a great deal of attention to the RCMP. As might be expected given the timing of the survey, stories of slain RCMP officers and the Taser incident at the Vancouver International Airport are the most resonant. Despite some of the negative imagery currently associated with the federal police force, most say that their opinion of the RCMP has not changed. This assertion is supported by the finding that confidence in the RCMP – even in a context in which the public are both highly aware of and divided on the use of Tasers by law enforcement – remains robust.

The public expresses significant concerns with existence of marijuana grow-operations not only in Canada, but within their own communities. Most concerning for the public is the potential for increased criminal activity and violence resulting from these illicit operations.

### *Transportation safety – Perceptions of the Safety and Security of Air Travel*

Canadians are, for the most part, confident in the safety of air travel. While some express concern, most think that steps have been taken to ensure safe and reliable air travel in Canada. Confidence in the air travel system exists even though awareness of some of the specific security procedures being implemented is low (e.g., only about 1 in 3 has heard of the Passenger Protect Program).

### *Canada's role on the world stage – Afghanistan*

Canada's reconstruction and development efforts Afghanistan are not very well-understood by the public (i.e. contributions are often attributed solely to the Canadian Forces). The public nonetheless leans towards believing that Canada's contributions are effective and appreciated by the Afghan people.

There has been a sharp drop in public awareness of detainees in Afghanistan. Moreover, understanding of Canadian Forces' policy with respect to the handling of detainees has also declined (though a majority still correctly thinks that Canada monitors the prisoners it transfers). Perhaps because their preferred approach is the one that is taken, Canadians are confident that all efforts are being made to ensure that the detainees transferred by the Canadian Forces are not mistreated.