

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research reveals a Canadian population that is, as a whole, deeply engaged with the world outside their borders, and keen to be more so. Significant numbers of Canadians closely follow world events, have personal or family connections to other countries and regions, provide financial assistance to organizations and family members overseas, travel to many parts of the globe for a variety of reasons, and are interested in doing even more. Most have a positive view of their country's current role in world affairs, but also believe it can do more in demonstrating leadership in such areas as environmental protection, human rights and famine relief.

The following are key highlights from the research.

How Canadians see the world today

- Global warming and the environment has emerged in the minds of Canadians as the world's most pressing issue, but there is also considerable concern about such issues as war and conflict, hunger and famine in the developing world, human rights abuse, and the gap between rich and poor.
- Canadians are evenly split on whether they are optimistic or pessimistic about the world's future over the coming decade. Positive trends tend to be seen in terms of technological advances, while environmental degradation and world conflict are the most prominent negative trends.
- Most Canadians see their own country as one that stands out as a positive force in today's world, followed distantly by the U.S. and Great Britain. The U.S. stands out as being seen as a negative force in the world, well ahead of such countries as Iran, North Korea and Pakistan.

Canadians' personal orientation to the world outside Canada

- Canadians are paying attention to world events, and follow them as closely as they do local, provincial and national issues. War and conflict (including the mission in Afghanistan) is of greatest interest, followed by world events involving environmental issues and politics.
- Most Canadians have at least one foreign country or region in which they have a personal interest or connection. This is most apt to be Western Europe or the U.S., but noticeable proportions identify other parts of the world. For new Canadians, the attachment is primarily to their place of birth, while for others it stems from general interest, personal experience or having friends overseas.
- Canadians rely on traditional media to stay informed about world events but use of the Internet is also common, especially among youth and new Canadians. There is significant use of foreign-based information sources, but very limited reliance on social networking sites or blogs.
- Three-quarters of Canadians have travelled outside Canada and the U.S., mostly as tourists, but also to visit family or friends, to visit one's place of birth or ancestry, for employment, to study and to volunteer. One-quarter have taken more than 10 trips in the past five years alone.
- More than half of Canadians maintain close personal ties to individuals living in other countries, rising to 80 percent among new Canadians. Many have provided financial assistance either to foreign-based causes and organizations, or to family and friends abroad.

- Canadians demonstrate considerable interest in travelling abroad for new experiences, especially to become immersed in another culture, language and people, but also to do volunteer work, to seek employment and to study.
- Most Canadians have travelled to the U.S. in the past five years, mostly as tourists and, to a lesser extent, to visit family and friends, to shop or to work.
- Many Canadians are paying close attention to the U.S. Presidential race, and believe the outcome matters a great deal to Canada; some would even give up their right to vote in Canada to help elect the next President. At the same time, a majority do not favour one U.S. political party over the other.
- Almost all Canadians believe their country can make a difference in the world by setting an example at home, especially in its environmental practices, but also in such areas as support for human rights and in the area of multiculturalism and immigration.
- Canadians are most confident in the ability of their country's NGOs to make a positive difference on the world stage, followed by the capabilities of individual Canadians. Opinion is more divided on the role that Canadian governments and businesses can play in contributing to world issues.
- Most Canadians consider the large community of Canadians currently living abroad to be a positive benefit to the country, rather than a liability. Expatriate Canadians are viewed as good ambassadors and having experiences that enrich themselves and something they may bring back to enrich their native land as well.

Canada's current and potential role in the world

- Most Canadians believe their country exerts at least some influence in world affairs today, and that it has grown over the past 20 years, largely because of its peacekeeping and/or military activities focusing on fighting terrorism. Those who see a diminishing influence point to less peacekeeping or declining independence from the U.S. on foreign policy.
- Canadians see peacekeeping as their country's most important contribution to the world, while the environment is most apt to be viewed as its greatest missed opportunity for global leadership. Many events are identified as Canada's most significant historical moment on the world stage, but the list is dominated by military conflicts, led by participation in World War II.
- Most Canadians are confident that Canada can increase its influence in the world, particularly in addressing hunger and famine in the developing world, discouraging human rights abuses, and showing leadership on global warming and other environmental issues.

Nuclear weapons

- Canadians believe that nuclear weapons have made the world a more dangerous place, with the greatest threat coming from terrorist attacks. There is overwhelming public support among Canadians for the complete elimination of the world's nuclear weapons.
- Canadians are more likely than not to feel that Canada is safer under the protection of NATO's nuclear arsenal. At the same time, a majority believe the use of NATO's nuclear weapons would never be justified under any circumstances.
- Most Canadians believe Canada should not be exporting its nuclear technology to countries that may end up using it to develop nuclear weapons.