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THE CANADA INSTITUTE

One Issue, Two Voices

Threat Perceptions in the United States and Canada

Assessing the public's attitudes toward security and risk in North America

In this fourth issue of the Canada Institute's *One Issue, Two Voices* publication series, authors Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute and Frank Graves of EKOS Research Associates explore the public's perceptions of threats and security issues in both the United States and Canada. As with past issues in the series, this publication brings expertise from both sides of the border to address policy-relevant questions of significance to the bilateral relationship.

This publication explores how Canadians and Americans appreciate and perceive threats to their respective countries, to their national security, and to their societies' psyche. It is the perceptions of threat, rather than the true, statistical incidence of it, that drives public opinion.

Some policy differences between the two neighbors are noteworthy, such as the disagreement over ballistic missile defense or the war in Iraq. But so too are moves to enact comparable legislation—the Anti-Terrorsim Act in Canada and the Patriot Act in the United States. To what extent do perceptions of threats in each country explain similar approaches on public safety but different opinions regarding foreign and defense policy?

In her essay, Karlyn Bowman examines public opinion trends in the United States, noting that the September 11 terrorist attacks catapulted terrorism to the forefront of the U.S. public's assessment of threats. Frank Graves explains that Canadians, too, were affected by September 11th, if less directly, in their own assessment of security risks. Each author discusses how the public has reacted to new government powers and security policies. In their responses to each other, they draw attention to similarities between both countries, but also identify some key differences.

The Canada Institute thanks both authors for their contributions to a key topic in the ongoing bilateral dialogue. We would also like to thank the Canada Institute on North American Issues for their support of the *One Issue, Two Voices* series. The Canada Institute will hold a conference at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. on November 10, 2005 to launch this publication. The authors and guest panelists will discuss the policy implications of threat perceptions, incorporating findings from polling data taken since the summer of 2005, when this publication went to press. A webcast of the conference will be broadcast live and then archived on our website, www.wilsoncenter.org/canada.

We look forward to your reactions on a topic that promises to remain relevant for some time yet—and a potent source of ideas for bilateral dialogue.

Christophe J. Leroy
Program Associate, Canada Institute
October 2005

ISSUE FOUR

U.S. Public Opinion and the Terrorist Threat

Karlyn Bowman

In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Americans mourned their dead, flew their country's flag, prayed, and began to think about national security in new ways. Polls are a useful tool to study their responses to the attacks and their perceptions of the terrorist threat today.[1]

In a democracy it is essential to pay attention to public opinion, and today in the United States more than a dozen pollsters in the field regularly assess it. While polls are a good way to measure opinions, they are a crude instrument. For that reason they should not be used to make policy. Their value lies in helping policymakers understand the views of a complex and varied public. For the public and policymakers alike, the attacks of September 11, 2001 thrust security issues to the front ranks of national discourse where they are likely to remain for some time to come. The memories of September 11 connect those issues powerfully to national political affairs.

The Rise of Terrorism

Almost from the start of the modern polling era 70 years ago, pollsters have probed people's views about threats to the United States. Starting in the 1940s, people were asked about the threat posed by Germany and Japan. Gallup asked about the nature of the communist threat and the presence of communists on our soil. Averting a nuclear attack became the overriding priority for Americans during the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet Union gave Americans a breather, but polls from the 1990s make it clear that the public perceived new dangers, including terrorism. Americans were also concerned about weapons of mass destruction (WMD), unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers, the spread of infectious diseases, and international drug cartels, to name only a few problems pollsters inquired about. Interestingly, concerns about problems in individual nations—instability in countries of the former Soviet Union and the emergence of China—seemed to take a back seat to global challenges. In late August-early September 2001 interviews, 53 percent told Pew Research Center interviewers that the world ten years after the Cold War was a more dangerous place. Only 14 percent said it was less dangerous.

Several motifs that bear on how Americans think about the terrorist threat today run through survey data collected before September 11. First, Americans are internationalists, albeit reluctant ones. They have long believed that the country has to play a major global role. They prefer to act with allies—when that is possible. They know that it is not always possible.

Second, Americans are generally inattentive to foreign affairs. The wake-up calls provided by the 1986 report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combating Terrorism,[2] the congressionally mandated report of the National Commission on Terrorism in 2000,[3] and the several reports of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century (also known as the Hart-Rudman Commission) did not stir the public.[4] This may be regrettable, but it is unsurprising in a country in which busy people have confidence in the system of representative government, if not always in its performance.

Security check point—now ubiquitous across North America.

Third, Americans believe that U.S. military strength should be second to none. Since the 1980s, in most polls, that view has included soft support for a missile defense system—an issue about which U.S. and Canadian publics differ. The military is the most popular institution in American life. Scandals about procurement, sexual harassment, and even Abu Ghraib have little effect on the military's standing, because, in the public's mind, the military's mission is clearly defined and people believe it carries out that mission well and deals forthrightly with problems.

Since the 1930s, Gallup has asked Americans to volunteer what they think is the most important problem facing the country. Their responses provide a unique historical record. Before September 11, in dozens of iterations of the question, terrorism was rarely mentioned, and when it was (usually around the time of a terrorist attack abroad), only small numbers volunteered it. After September 11, terrorism was the top problem for many months. In Gallup's latest asking of the question, from August 2005, 27 percent said the war in Iraq was the country's top problem, followed by the economy (13 percent) and terrorism (10 percent).

"Terrorism" made its first appearance in the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations poll series in 1986 when 20 percent volunteered it as one of the country's "two or three biggest foreign policy problems." In the Council's quadrennial surveys, two percent volunteered it in 1992, one percent in 1994, and 12 percent in 1998. Terrorism was emerging as an issue of concern, but concern about it only ticked up when the pollsters asked about it in proximity to a terrorist attack.

In 1998, for the first time in the Council's surveys, "combating international terrorism" was included in a list of foreign policy goals. Seventy-nine percent described it as very important. In another question, 84 percent described international terrorism as a "critical threat," followed by chemical and biological weapons (76 percent). These were

Perceptions of the terrorist threat grew slowly before September 11. Today that threat is part of everyday life, and Americans expect another attack on their soil.

The belief that there will be another terrorist attack keeps security issues in the front ranks of administration and congressional activity.

the top two issues of 13. In a Pew poll from June 2001, WMD were seen as a major threat by 74 percent, while 64 percent mentioned terrorism, and 58 percent Saddam Hussein's continued rule.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 intensified and sharpened concerns about terrorism that had been building. Americans were angry, and more than 80 percent wanted to retaliate against those responsible. The war in Afghanistan had substantial support. In a Pew survey taken soon after September 11, taking military action abroad to destroy terrorist networks was more important than building up defenses at home to prevent future attacks.

It was clear to the public that the war on terrorism would not be won overnight. In late September 2001, 92 percent told Gallup, CNN, and *USA Today* interviewers that the war on terrorism would be a long war. In November, a similar 87 percent gave that response. A Martilla Communications Group poll shows that this is still true: 70 percent said in January 2005 that "while we can greatly reduce the threat of terror, we can never eliminate the threat completely," while 27 percent believed the war on terrorism could "be won in the long term if we defeat Al Qaeda and break up other terror networks."

These days most public pollsters follow the media's ever-moving searchlight. Few questions are asked about Afghanistan anymore. A July 2005 Harris poll, however, concluded that U.S. adults felt "quite negative about the prospects for success."

The New Normal

The polls after September 11 provided an indication of the public's deep emotional reaction to the tragedy. A majority of men and women told Gallup they cried after the September 11 attacks, and sadness was an almost universal emotion. But America is a very resilient country. Six months after the tragedy, solid majorities described the country as completely or somewhat back to normal. Fewer people said they had cried in the past two weeks as a direct result of the events of September 11. Worries about flying and traveling overseas also diminished quickly after immediate post-September 11 reactions.

A National Opinion Research Center study of emotional and physical symptoms found the nation "on track toward a psychological recovery" soon after the attacks, though some groups, such as women, minorities, low-income groups, and people in poor mental health, did not recover as quickly as others. People who watched a lot of television were less resilient than those who spent little time watching television.

Even though 20 percent of New York City residents reported that they had a relative or close friend missing, injured, or killed, by June 2002 most residents told *CBS News/New York Times* interviewers that their lives had gotten back to normal. Thirty-six percent were still uneasy about riding the subways. Despite their worries, however, most had no intention of leaving.

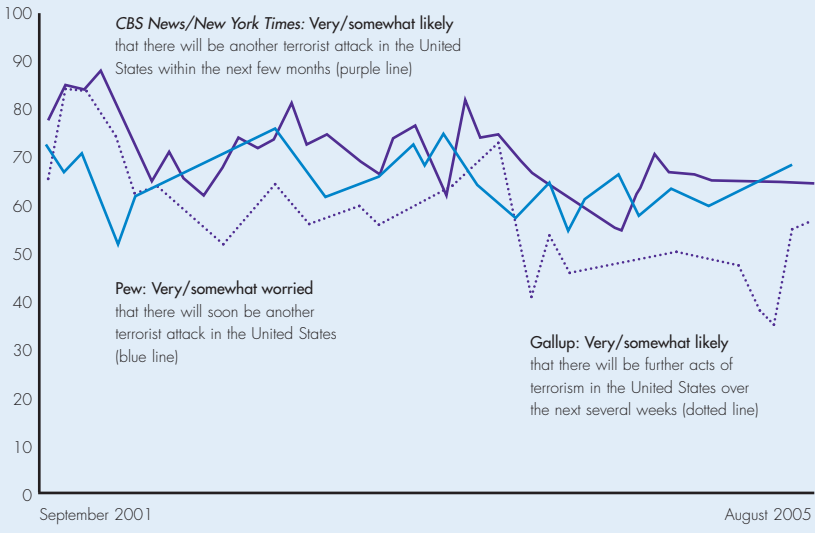
A 2002 Gallup survey taken in early 2002 of New York City, Washington, D.C., and Oklahoma City residents showed that New York City residents were more likely to be "very" worried (19 percent) about the possibility of another terrorist attack than D.C. residents (9 percent), Oklahoma City residents (6 percent), or the nation as a whole (8 percent). Still, the proportion with acute worries was small.[5]

For Americans, living with the terrorist threat is now "the new normal." Nearly 75 percent told Pew interviewers in 2003 that occasional acts of terrorism will be part of life in the future. Only 22 percent disagreed. Security risks today mean terrorism.

Since September 11 several pollsters have asked regularly about the threat of another terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The Pew Research Center asks people how worried they

are that there will "soon" be another terrorist attack. *CBS News* and the *New York Times* ask about the likelihood of another attack "within the next few months," and Gallup, CNN, and *USA Today* ask about "further" acts of terrorism "over the next several weeks." All show that only a small proportion thinks another attack is not at all likely. Concern edged up after the July 2005 London bombings.

Figure 1 LIKELIHOOD OF ANOTHER TERRORIST ATTACK



Gallup asks a more specific question about risk, whether "you or someone in your family" will become a victim of terrorism. Since November 2001, around 10 percent have said that they are very worried this may happen. Between 18 and 31 percent have said they are not worried at all. Worry tends to be higher among women than men in this area as in many others. But differences among generations, partisans, or regions on this question are small. A March 2005 poll by *AP* and Ipsos Public Affairs puts concerns about becoming a victim of terrorism into some context. Thirty percent said they worried *frequently* about not being able to pay their bills, 20 percent about getting hurt in a car accident, 13 percent about a terrorist attack using nuclear weapons, 12 percent becoming a victim of terrorism, and 11 percent a nuclear attack on one country by another. As for becoming a victim of terrorism, 28 percent worried about it occasionally, 35 percent rarely, and 25 percent, never.

In 2003, 92 percent told *Fox News*/Opinion Dynamics interviewers that there were members of Al Qaeda here; four percent said there were not. Ninety-four percent in the mid-July 2005 *CBS News/New York Times* poll said there were terrorists living in the United States today who are planning to launch future attacks, while three percent said there were not. This conviction and the belief that there will be another terrorist attack keep security issues in the front ranks of administration and congressional activity.

However, beliefs about the likelihood of another attack do not seem to be spurring Americans to action, a pattern observed in public opinion polls from earlier periods. A 2004 survey by Wirthlin Worldwide for the Red Cross found that only about one in ten had done the things the Red Cross thinks are essential to respond to a catastrophic disaster described as an earthquake, hurricane, or terrorist attack. Americans recognize the "importance of being personally prepared," Wirthlin concluded, but few people have done things to prepare. Other surveys confirm these findings. Around three in ten told Harris Interactive pollsters immediately after September 11 that they considered stocking up on supplies. About one in ten told Gallup in March 2002 that they actually did. In the 1950s, Wirthlin tells us, Americans favored public bomb shelters, but only two in ten had thought about building or paying for one themselves. The polls do not tell us why Americans haven't taken these actions since September 11. Perhaps it is because they believe it is the federal government's responsibility to protect them, or perhaps it is because they feel that there is very little they can realistically do to prevent or prepare for a terrorist attack similar to September 11 or to the London subway bombings.

Although many pundits have expressed cynical attitudes about the government's terror alerts, suggesting that they are a political device to boost President Bush's popularity, most Americans think they are good idea. Between 66 and 71 percent gave that response to *CBS News* interviewers in four questions between 2001 and 2004. In a June 2003 *Fox News*/Opinion Dynamics poll, 51 percent said the color-coded system was helpful; 38 percent said it was not.

Government Performance

Americans believe that the actions of Congress and the Bush administration have made the nation safer since September 11. In a Pew question from mid-July 2005, 70 percent (down from 88 percent in October 2001) felt the U.S. government was doing very or somewhat well in reducing the terrorist threat. In eight repetitions of this question, no more than eight percent have given the response "not at all well." As for the Bush administration, in July 2005, 61 percent told Gallup interviewers that they had a great deal or a moderate amount of confidence in it to protect U.S. citizens from future acts of terrorism. Seventy-nine percent gave that response in May 2004. In a question last asked in 2004 by *CBS News/New York Times* interviewers, 54 percent said administration policies had made the United States safer while 29 percent believed these policies had made the country less safe.

In a July 2005 poll, 54 percent of respondents told *CBS News/New York Times* interviewers that the federal government had done all it could reasonably be expected to do to improve airport security since September 11, while 42 percent said it could have done more. Twenty-six percent said it had done all it could to improve security on trains and mass transit systems, while 61 percent said it could have done more.

For Americans, living with the terrorist threat is now "the new normal." Security risks today mean terrorism.

Civil Liberties

People seem to be willing to let authorities cast a wide net in dealing with potential terrorists. In July 2005, 71 percent of people told *CBS News* that surveillance cameras were a good idea "because they may help to reduce the threat of terrorism," while 23 percent said the cameras were a bad idea because they "may infringe on people's privacy rights." However, the American people do not want their own liberties compromised and object to monitoring of e-mails or phone calls. A Harris Interactive survey from June 2005 showed that 81 percent supported stronger document and physical security checks for travelers, 76 percent expanded undercover activities to penetrate groups under suspicion, 62 percent closer monitoring of banking and credit card transactions to trace funding sources, and 61 percent adoption of a national ID system for all citizens. Just 37 percent supported expanded monitoring of cell phones and e-mail, while 60 percent were opposed.

As time goes by, and in the absence of new attacks in the United States, Americans seem less willing to give up civil liberties. In a *Los Angeles Times* poll in September 2001, 61 percent of respondents said it would be necessary "for the average person to give up some civil liberties" in order to curb terrorism; 33 percent said it would not be necessary. In a mid-July 2005 Pew poll, those responses were 40 and 53 percent, respectively. The change may be explained by a reduced fear factor or by Americans' familiar suspicion of federal government power.

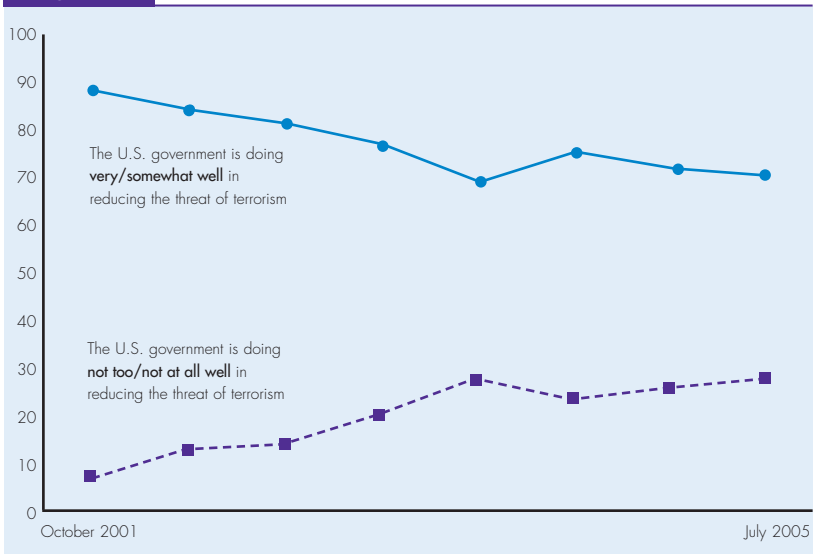
Although pollsters did not explore attitudes toward Arabs systematically before September 11, Gallup suggests that the public held "somewhat negative views" about them.[6] Immediately after September 11, majorities opposed "singling out" Arab-

Americans or putting them under "special surveillance." They supported increased security requirements such as more extensive security checks and tighter immigration requirements. In a June 2005 Public Agenda/*Foreign Affairs* poll, people rated tighter immigration controls second only to the improvement of intelligence operations as important proposals to increase security.

In a late July 2005 *Fox News*/Opinion Dynamics poll, 76 percent favored "random searches of bags and packages on subways, trains, and buses in major cities." Nine percent saw this as a violation of civil liberties. Sixty percent said the searches were effective in preventing terrorist attacks, while 26 percent said they were "mostly for show." Thirteen percent said they would mind having their own bags searched.

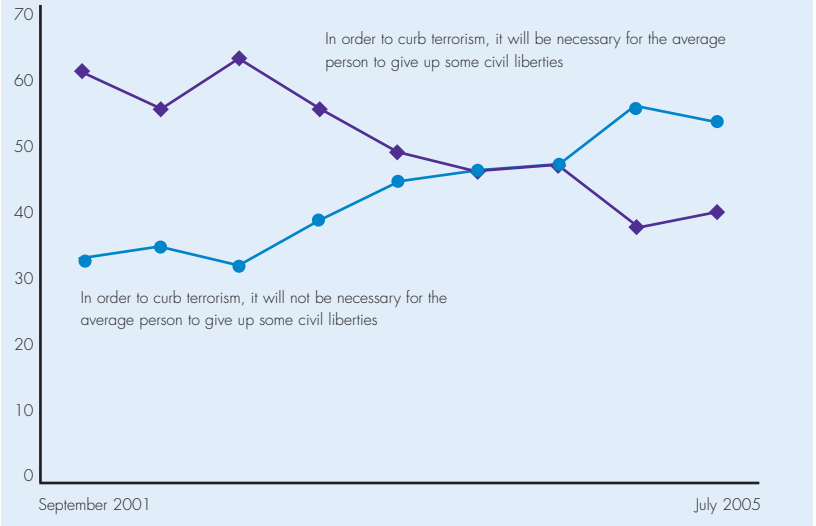
Three times since 2003, *Fox News* and Opinion Dynamics have asked people whether the Patriot Act is a good thing, a "necessary and effective tool in preventing terrorist attacks," or a bad one that "goes too far and could violate the civil liberties of average Americans." In June 2005, 57 percent said it was a good thing and 30 percent a bad thing. Opinion has been stable on this question, with little significant change from previous years.[7] As for extending it, opinion is stable once again, with 56 percent supporting an extension of Act in 2005, compared to 53 percent in 2004.

Figure 2 PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIONS ON TERRORISM



Source: Pew Research Center

Figure 3 CIVIL LIBERTIES AND THE TERRORIST THREAT



Source: *Los Angeles Times*/Pew Research Center/*Newsweek*

Iraq

Large majorities of Americans supported the decision to go to war in Iraq. The belief at the time that Iraq had WMD contributed to the support of the decision, but WMD were not the sole (or perhaps even the most important) rationale for going to war. Americans did not support a war in Iraq out of the blue; they had made up their minds about Saddam Hussein more than a decade earlier. On nine occasions between 1991 and 2001, they told *CBS News* pollsters that the United States should have gotten rid of him instead of bringing the troops home after the 1991 war.

Every poll that asked the question found that large majorities of Americans felt the peace in Iraq would be more difficult than the war. Today, in most polls, Americans are divided and leaning toward viewing the war as a mistake. About a third in Gallup's early August 2005 poll wanted to pull our troops out now, an increase from 2003, when only 14 percent did.

Public opinion is unsettled on the question of exactly what the war has done for U.S. security and safety. In mid-July 2005, 44 percent told *CBS News* interviewers that as a result of U.S. military action in Iraq, the threat of terrorism had increased, 13 percent said it had decreased, and 42 percent saw the threat as about the same. In an August 2005 *ABC News/Washington Post* poll, 49 percent said the war in Iraq had contributed to long-term security of the United States; 49 percent said it had not. Nine percent of those surveyed in a July 2005 *Fox News*/Opinion Dynamics poll believed that terrorist attacks against the United States would stop if the United States removed its troops from Iraq; 85 percent said they would not.

Summing Up

This review shows that perceptions of the terrorist threat grew slowly before September 11. Today that threat is part of everyday life, and Americans expect another attack on our soil. Immediately after September 11, Americans were not in the mood to assign blame for intelligence failures. Questions that ask Americans to look back aren't asked very often, so we don't know how they feel today about culpability. In general, Americans tend to look to the future, not the past. Today they believe the government has made some progress in dealing with intelligence failures and enhancing security.

Americans tend to give their presidents considerable latitude in the conduct of foreign policy and national security, once a basic level of trust has been established. President Bush had no foreign policy experience before he assumed the presidency. Although Americans felt that he would be a strong leader, it is not clear from the polls conducted in 1999 or 2000 how much trust and confidence they had in his foreign policy skills. But his responses to the terrorist attacks on both a personal and policy level were such that he gained their trust almost overnight. The absence of WMD in Iraq and the difficulties on the ground there have eroded that trust and contributed to a more negative view of President Bush. That said, at this point the president and the Republicans still lead the Democrats as the party better able to handle foreign policy and national security issues.

In the 2004 election, security issues played an important role. The top issue voters selected from a list as most important to their vote was "moral values," cited by 22 percent. But following closely behind in the network consortium's Election Day poll were the economy, cited by 20 percent, and terrorism, cited by 19 percent. Voters who selected terrorism as their top issue voted 86 to 14 percent for President Bush over John Kerry. In another question, only a small number of voters (five percent) said they were not at all worried about terrorism. Twenty-two percent said they were very worried and another 53 percent said they were somewhat worried.

Today concerns about terrorism are on the back burner of the stove at a steady simmer. Concerns about Iraq and the performance of the economy are on the front burner at a full boil. It is difficult to know how much current negative views of the war in Iraq are seeping into the public's view on how the war on terror is being handled. The president's ratings on handling virtually every aspect of his job are down. In a late August 2005 *ABC News/Washington Post* poll, 56 percent approved of the job he is doing handling the U.S. campaign against terrorism. This level of support is about what it has been for the past year, but it is down significantly from 2002, 2003, and early 2004. Of the eight areas the pollsters inquired about, terrorism was the only issue on which positive views of the president's performance outweighed negative ones.

Speaking for myself, I don't think about the terrorist threat every day, but when I walk into the subway or stand in the queue at an airport, I am reminded that the world

is a very different and more dangerous place than in the past. In a poll taken shortly before the terrorist attacks in 2001, 53 percent said the world was a more dangerous place than it had been ten years earlier. Today, 75 percent give that response, and it is a safe bet that fears of some sort of terrorist attack pushed that response up.

I suspect that I am like most Americans in thinking that policymakers are taking the terrorist threat much more seriously than they did before September 11 and making some progress in dealing with it. Americans' resolve to address the threat has not waned, and they will continue to give the president and policymakers considerable scope to deal with it.

U.S. government counterterrorism exercise.

Notes

1. The polling data underpinning this study cover the period up to July 2005. More recent polling data is available at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) website, http://www.aei.org/PublicOpinionStudies. All of the findings reported here are from American Enterprise Institute Public Opinion Studies, which are also available on the AEI website or from the author.

2. *Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combating Terrorism*, February 1986.

3. *Countering the Threat from International Terrorism*, June 2000.

4. The Hart-Rudman Commission addressed policy recommendations dealing with terrorism in the third report, *Roadmap for National Security: Imperative for Change*, February 2001.

5. The Gallup survey of New York City, Washington, D.C., and Oklahoma City residents was co-sponsored by the University of Oklahoma's Department of Psychiatry, and was conducted between January and March 2002.

6. Gallup release, "Americans Felt Uneasy Toward Arabs Even Before September 11," September 28, 2001.

7. The results for the 2003 *Fox News*/Opinion Dynamics question on the Patriot Act were 57:27; in 2004, they were 54:28.

The Shifting Public Outlook on Risk and Security

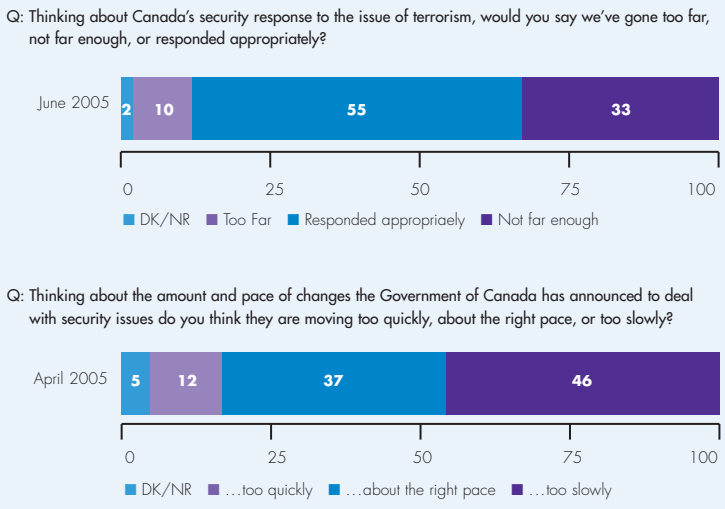
Frank Graves

Public perceptions of threat are a crucial component of public opinion and a key factor shaping national policymaking in North America. Paradoxically, as the safety and security of citizens in North America have objectively improved, a generalized sense of threat has risen. In this decade, issues related to threat and security occupy far greater prominence on the public agenda than they have for some time.

The purpose of this brief overview is to try and summarize some of the key features of Canadian public outlook on threat perception.[1] What are the levels of concern with various threats? How are they evolving? And what pressures and expectations do these exert on government, citizens, and other institutions? A crucial backdrop for this are the implications for U.S.-Canada relations and continental security. Although our focus is a synthesis of Canadian public opinion, we will also offer some conclusions about the comparative differences and similarities in the way the Canadian and U.S. publics perceive threats. There are surprising areas of similarity and equally surprising areas of difference in this crucial area, which have direct implications for future national decision making.

Before we begin, we would like to offer a comment on some of the terminology that will be employed throughout this paper. First, it is important to note that, for the public, the terms "threat" and "risk" are roughly interchangeable. Technically speaking, risk is the probability of an undesirable outcome and it can be divided into statistical (or empirical) risk and perceived risk. There is, at best, a loose connection between statistical and perceived risk, but it is the latter that drives the political marketplace. For example, nearly one in five Americans believe they will personally be the victim of a terrorist attack. For this to be statistically true, there would have to be an event of the magnitude of September 11 virtually every day. Yet terrorism and other threats occupy far greater public salience than, for example, traffic deaths, which account for more than one hundred times as many deaths in the United States. Threat is a more vernacular notion. It refers to a sense of latent danger and is more difficult to quantify. From an academic view we can make these differentiations; however, for the purposes of public opinion, the terms are virtually synonymous. Secondly, we will be using the term "security" to refer to the relative absence or freedom from threat or risk. Our research suggests that there is little support for zero-risk. In March 2005, we found that by a margin of nearly four to one, Canadians agree rather than disagree with the following statement: "Realistically, the job of governments is not to pro-

Figure 1 APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO TERRORISM



Base: All Canadians

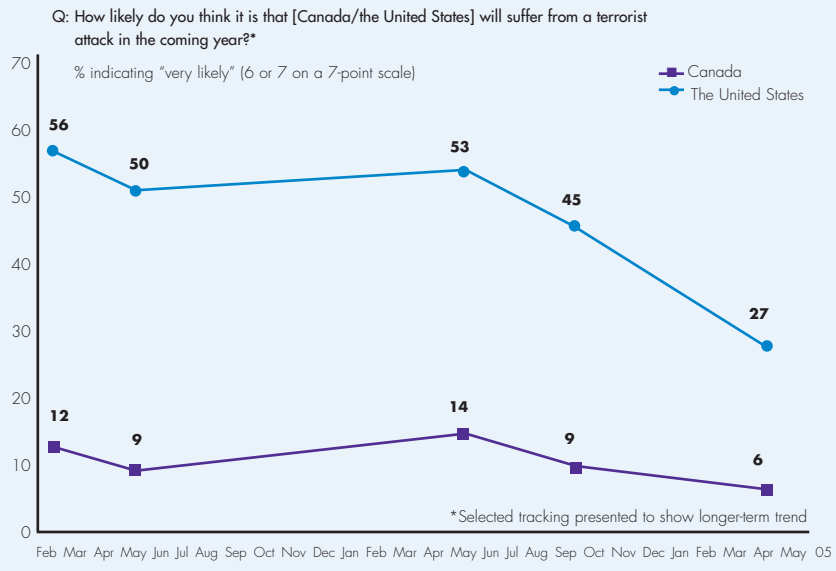
EKOS Research Associates (© 2005/reproduced with permission)

duce a world of zero risks, but to balance overall risks with the financial resources available." This suggests that the public eschews both zero-risk and the laissez-faire notion that risks are unavoidable and natural consequences of the modern world. What they do expect is a prudent equilibrium of resources and results. We also have found a general transformation in public expectations of the role of the state away from some traditional roles (e.g., wealth redistribution) to greater emphasis on risk management and threat reduction.

Evolving Nature of Risk Perception

Undeniably, North American societies have changed indelibly since September 11, 2001. Despite some fluctuations and controversies, the public now views security and safety as among the most important criteria for guiding national policy. Throughout 2004 and into 2005, we saw a great deal of volatility in terms of overall confidence in the Canadian federal government. In stark contrast, marks for the federal government's direction in the security field remained consistently positive. From May 2004 through to April 2005, a consistent majority of Canadians said that the Government of Canada was moving in the "right direction" in terms of national security. Comparatively speaking, marks on general direction peaked at about 46 percent approval over this same timeframe. Likewise, the government's response to the threat of terrorism was, for the most part, deemed appropriate and the public expressed confidence in the balancing of security and civil liberties.[2] Today, Canadians point to a clear security ethic,[3] one that is also reflected in the high levels of confidence in the government's security agencies, particularly in the federal police force (the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), but also in the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. The Canadian public expresses positive but somewhat weaker confidence in the Department of National Defence.

Figure 2 PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD OF TERRORIST ATTACKS



Base: All Canadians; most recent data points from Apr. 05
EKOS Research Associates (© 2005/reproduced with permission)

Reflecting and amplifying these general attitudes is the transcendence of security priorities over a broad range of competing forces and costs seen in a range of more specific tests. These include, among many others, the costs and intrusiveness of security measures at our ports and borders; the introduction of new security measures and techniques such as biometrics and national identity cards; and the broad use of surveillance cameras. Only rarely has either our quantitative or qualitative research found economics, human rights, or even sovereignty outweighing support for specific measures designed to reinforce security. The public also strongly supports the government's Anti-Terrorism Act, despite widespread criticism by civil liberties and human rights advocates.

This commitment to a security ethic is not surprising given that for many the external world has become increasingly frightening in a vague, yet threatening manner, with issues such as strange viruses (like SARS) and geopolitical instabilities invoking a generalized sense of dread.[11] The most fearful aspects of Canadians' lives appear to be the unfa-

miliar, vague global threats that evade their personal locus of control. This generalized sense of a more dangerous world coexists with evidence that specific risky events (such as crime or nuclear disaster) are perceived as less threatening than they were five or ten years ago. In the case of risks associated with terrorism, Canadians have rated these as relatively remote, and the pattern since 2001 has been one of declining fear. Even though there are much higher concerns about U.S. threat exposure, in the past year there has been a substantial decline in the sense that these risks are imminent. For example, there has been a sizable 14-percentage point decline in the perception that an attack on the United States is "very likely" (from 41 percent in January 2005 to 27 percent in April 2005). This drop is even greater when you go back to February 2003 when 56 percent thought an attack was "very likely."

It is crucial to understand that, for most Canadians, "risk" does not simply equal terrorism. In fact, the relative emphasis on the risk of terrorism is fairly small and declining. The sheer plausibility of terrorism, however, remains a huge motivator underpinning the security ethic. If the dominant imagery for those growing up in the shadow of the Second World War was the insidious dangers of totalitarianism and the Orwellian caveat of "big brother," for today's citizens, it is the visceral imagery of September 11. That said, for Canadians—more so than for Americans—security and risk are highly multidimensional and terrorist risks are a relatively modest part of the overall threat hierarchy. For instance, when forced to pick in a hard trade-off between one of two priorities where the government should focus its resources in terms of reducing risks to Canadians, Canadians selected protecting the environment (e.g., the water and air supply) and fighting organized crime at least six in every ten times they are paired against another option. Terrorism-related risks such as attacks on Canadian soil, weapons of mass destruction in Canada, and attacks launched on the United States from Canada rate as much lower priorities.

This leads to a crucial question, which we discuss under the rubric of the "risk paradox." If citizens in Canada view security risks as relatively remote, why the apparently boundless subscription to measures designed to reduce risk? Moreover, if on most individual risk perception measures the long-term pattern is flat or declining, why do most see the world as more not less frightening? The answers to these questions are complex and rooted in culture shifts, demographics, and the changing nature of media and popular consumption. September 11 and the war in Iraq arguably produced the most intense media consumption in Canadian history; from "Fear Factor" to "24," popular culture signals and reinforces the ubiquity of threat in a manner unseen since the height of the Cold War and McCarthyism. Whatever the explanation, this risk paradox places enormous pressures on governments trying to rationally manage overall risks against available, scarce resources.

Alternate Currents: Civil Liberties and Multiculturalism

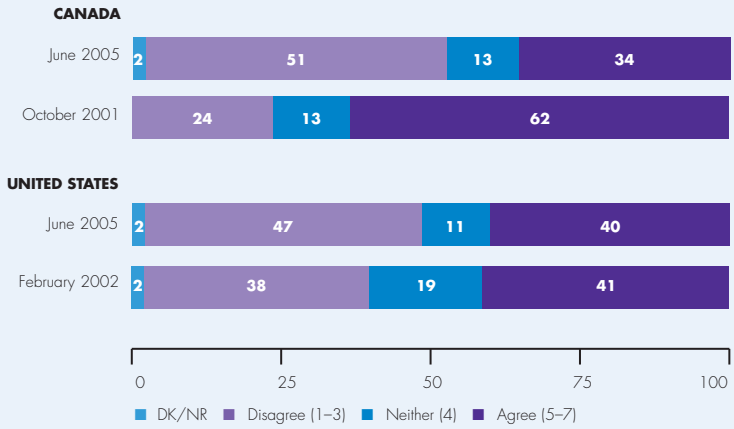
Despite some fluctuations and controversies, a deeply embedded security ethic is now a fundamental feature of contemporary Canadian and U.S. outlooks. Michael Ignatieff has noted that a near universal response in liberal-democratic societies confronting terrorism has been a temporary diminution of concern with human rights.[5] The public opinion record in Canada certainly seems to confirm this historical observation. While the potential costs to civil liberties and privacy are still a strong theoretical consideration, in the real world they are typically eclipsed by safety and security concerns. For most Canadians, security now trumps civil liberties. In a hard trade-off, the majority of Canadians say that

they would prefer the government place emphasis on protecting public security rather than guaranteeing civil liberties. In September 2004, the lean toward security reached a record high, and was nearly two times that for civil liberties (62:32). As of April 2005, however, the gap between these two principles had shrunk considerably, with 52 percent leaning to security compared to 42 percent who preferred an emphasis on civil liberties.

Recently, however, there has been increasing evidence of instability and contrary forces challenging the dominance of the security ethic. The key contrary current of public opinion is found in the area of civil liberties, particularly privacy. Over the past few years, we have seen greater ambiguity concerning state stewardship of human rights. We have also seen a steady and dramatic reversal of the immediate post-September 11 view that privacy intrusions in the form of enhanced police powers were a necessary sacrifice for ensuring security. In October 2001, 62 percent of Canadians supported granting enhanced powers to police and intelligence agencies. Findings from June 2005 now indicate that only about one in three (34 percent) agree with this idea, and the majority (51 percent) actually disagrees.[6] This all occurs against a backdrop where the sense of threat due to terrorism is decreasing, while the perceived intrusiveness of the security agenda is rising. For example, most citizens have noticed changes to their lives because of new security measures; for the most part, these changes are perceived as more of a nuisance than as life altering. There are, however, more profound impacts registering for a large minority of Canadians (in April 2005, one in five say they have been affected to a great extent). Evidence suggests these effects (e.g., delays at borders or a greater sense of fear and racism) are significantly more pronounced (nearly doubled) and focused among members of visible minority groups.

Figure 3 BALANCING SECURITY WITH CIVIL LIBERTIES

Q: Police and intelligence agencies should have more powers to ensure security even if it means citizens have to give up some personal privacy safeguards.



Base: All Canadians and Americans

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The other notable contrary current to the newly entrenched security ethic are attitudes to diversity, multiculturalism, and immigration. Despite the initially corrosive impact of September 11 on multiculturalism, attitudes toward immigration have been considerably more positive in the ensuing years. In fact, Canadians now see multiculturalism and diversity as a crucial component of a long-term solution (or at least inoculation) to terrorist threats.

While the potential costs to civil liberties and privacy are still a strong theoretical consideration, in the real world they are typically eclipsed by safety and security concerns.

Paradoxically, as the safety and security of citizens in North America have objectively improved, a gereralized sense of threat has risen.

Comparative Differences in Canadian and U.S. Outlooks on Threat and Security

As security rises in salience as a value, and as the debate about threat and security deepens, it is important to consider comparative differences in Canadian and U.S. outlooks. This will become clearer in the ensuing responses to the two papers in this series, but we offer some of the following preliminary observations from recent research we have done in both Canada and the United States.

The value of "security" occupies similar positioning in the broad hierarchy of values for both Canadians and Americans.

Public resolve to deal with threats associated with security is very high in both countries. Both Canadians and Americans approve of their broad security strategy and lean to more rather than fewer measures. Canadian outlook on threat, however, is more multidimensional and less focused on terrorism.

In both counties, civil liberties are seen as important, but subordinate to security priorities. In the United States, there has been a somewhat larger pushback by the public on civil liberty issues, but recent evidence suggests that, over the past year, Canadians are also becoming more alert to these issues.

- Attitudes to immigration and diversity are similar, but the post-September 11 trajectory has been different, with Canadians becoming more receptive and Americans less so. There may be evidence that Canadians see diversity and multiculturalism more positively in general and as having a more benign or positive impact on security issues.
- Citizens of both countries emphasize the importance of intelligence, but Americans have higher confidence in and place more emphasis on the role of the military. There has been a recent rise in emphasis on the military in Canada, but it still lags well behind U.S. public outlook.
- Public policy issues on key aspects of foreign policy have shown large cleavages. While citizens of both countries supported the war in Afghanistan, Canadians have increasingly opposed the war in Iraq. (Opposition in the United States has also risen, but is still well behind Canadian public opposition.) In general, Canadians are highly divided on the reality and justification of the "war on terror." Perhaps caught in the wake of declining support for the war in Iraq, Canadian support for participation in ballistic missile defense (BMD) has also declined significantly. It is, however, important to note that Canadians, like Americans, strongly endorse the need for a more coordinated continental security, including the concept of a North American security perimeter.
- Surprisingly, the U.S. public is relatively tolerant of Canadian opposition to the U.S. positions on Iraq and BMD (mainly divided on party and ideological lines). A large, and potentially growing cohort of Americans share similar negative views of the United States' foreign policy including one in four who see it as the root cause of the terrorist threats confronting the West.
- Finally, although threat and security issues are extremely important in both countries, they are far more powerfully connected to national political affairs in the United States than in Canada. For example, "security" was arguably the determining factor shaping the outcome of the last presidential race, whereas in Canada's last federal election, it was simply not on the political radar.

Final Note

As we have tried to demonstrate in this brief paper, the risk of terrorism and security concerns have profoundly altered the public opinion landscape in Canada, and public attitudes to risk and security have had unprecedented force in shaping national policy. Despite the robustness of the "security ethic," it is grounded in a dynamic setting, which contains both instability and paradox. As the visceral awareness of September 11 continues to recede, and as the sense of intrusiveness continues to rise while threat perception relaxes, we also continue to see heightened strains and contradictions in the security outlook. Notably, there is renewed wind in the sails of civil rights positions after a period where this banner was at half-mast. Similarly, we are seeing a recovery of positive attitudes to diversity and multiculturalism. While we will likely see some short-term drift back to the stronger security emphasis in the aftermath of the London terrorism events of July 2005, the real critical question is how complex contradictory forces currently at play will evolve in the coming years. Undoubtedly, these will continue to pose enormously thorny challenges for decision makers, particularly in the always-complex context of U.S.-Canada relations and continental security.

Notes

1. The findings and observations noted in this analysis are drawn from EKOS' syndicated research product, *The Security Monitor*. Launched in the immediate aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks, EKOS has polled a random sample of 1,000 Canadians aged 18 years and over on risk and security issues on a near monthly basis for a cumulative total number of cases in the tens of thousands. *The Security Monitor* provides a balance of core tracking indicators (many dating back to October 2001) and information on emerging security-related issues.

The author would like to thank the Canada Institute and the editor for the thorough and valuable editorial guidance. He would also like to thank the sponsors of *The Security Monitor*, without whom this study would not be possible. Finally, he would like to acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Malcolm Saravanamuttoo and Ms. Angela Scanlon, who have helped greatly in the development of this paper.

2. In June 2005, 57 percent of Canadians said that the government has responded appropriately to the threat of terrorism. Another 33 percent said the response has not gone far enough and 10 percent said "too far." Likewise, in April 2005, a plurality (46 percent) said they would like the government to accelerate their pace on security issues, compared to 37 percent who approved of the pace and seven percent who wanted a slower pace.

3. We use the term "ethic" not in the sense of "morals," but as a broader system of organized beliefs and outlook. In a sense, this is similar to (although short of) Max Weber's notion of a "protestant ethic."

4. Upon repeated measures, Canadians typically said that, compared to five years ago, the world had become a more dangerous place (in April 2005, 53 percent thought so, compared to 37 percent who said it had stayed "about the same" and nine percent who said it was "safer").

5. Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

6. While support for increasing security to the detriment of privacy safeguards has remained stable at about 40 percent in the United States, the proportion of Americans opposed to this idea went from 38 percent in 2002 to 47 percent in 2005.

Karlyn Bowman's Response:
Similar U.S. and Canadian Attitudes to Security, but Different Focus on Risk

Large numbers of Americans continue to believe that there will be another terrorist attack on our soil. For most, it is not a question of if, but when.

Frank Graves's excellent essay makes a number of important points about Canadian and U.S. perceptions of security issues. His ability to report on the results of identical questions asked in Canada and in the United States through the *EKOS Security Monitor* makes his conclusions especially valuable. We are in broad agreement about what the survey data in both our nations show.

There is no question that the value of security has risen in both countries, and that both the American and Canadian people want to deal with threats aggressively. Only small numbers of Americans object to the lines at airport security check points, for example, or to increased police presence on trains and subways. People in the United States feel that government has made progress in addressing some of the more egregious security lapses that occurred before September 11.

It isn't surprising that security issues are more powerfully connected to national political affairs in the United States than in Canada. The September 11 attacks were on U.S. soil, and although Americans have largely recovered from them, they have left a deep scar on the U.S. psyche, and politicians and policymakers here are aware of this. This may explain why, as Mr. Graves says, the Canadian focus on risk is broader than the U.S. focus. One of the questions being asked about the U.S. government's response to Hurricane Katrina is whether the intense focus on another possible terrorist attack in fact undermined U.S. readiness to deal with the threat this hurricane posed.

I agree with Frank Graves that there has been some pushback in the United States on legislation that some have construed as constraining civil liberties, but the polls show this concern is still limited to a minority of people. A vocal coalition of strange bedfellows—libertarian conservatives and civil libertarians—is joined in opposition to policies that might limit civil liberties. Around 30 percent of Americans think the Patriot Act goes too far. This number does not appear to be growing, but the belief that the average American would have to give up some civil liberties to reduce terrorism has declined as we have gotten further away from September 11. The outlines of how far U.S. authorities could go in restricting civil liberties were clear shortly after September 11. For example, a wide array of enhanced security measures could be taken, but people didn't want authorities to read their e-mails. Americans' suspicions of federal government power are well known, and negative reactions to the Patriot Act are probably the result of both this impulse and of specific objections to provisions of the Act itself.

The immigration issue is a tricky one in the United States. The issue divides both political parties right now, with the divisions on the Republican side of the aisle likely to be more potent in electoral terms in the near future. Americans have never been very enthusiastic about additional immigration, although they believe that immigrants have contributed to the country in many positive ways. Americans' concerns about immigration today seem to be primarily about the impact of immigrants on the economy and secondarily their impact on security or on our national identity.

The war in Iraq and the presidency of George W. Bush have clearly angered many Canadians. Americans are somewhat aware of Canadians' views. "Very favorable" impressions of Canada have declined sharply in Gallup's time series. In 1987, 51 percent of Americans had a very favorable impression of Canada. Today, 38 percent do.

Overall favorable impressions are down from 93 percent to a still robust 86 percent. Three percent had a mostly or very unfavorable view in 1987. Today 10 percent do. The intensity of the country's friendship with Canada appears to be diminishing a bit. Still, Americans are, as Mr. Graves suggests, tolerant of Canadian opposition to U.S. policies. Many Americans are not very happy with the president right now either: more disapprove than approve of the job he is doing. It is not clear whether, for Canadians, deep ties trump current bilateral differences and differences about the United States' role in the world.

I agree that a receding sense of threat will be a challenge for policymakers in both countries. U.S. policymakers have the additional challenge of trying to instill in a reluctant population a sense of the importance of making basic preparations for a possible attack. Television interviews with residents of areas affected by Hurricane Katrina suggest that many residents simply refused to heed the warnings of imminent destruction. Perhaps this is a normal human reaction in the face of imprecise and shadowy threats, but policymakers must deal with it nonetheless.

Large numbers of Americans continue to believe that there will be another terrorist attack on our soil. For most, it is not a question of if, but when. Clearly, Americans would welcome efforts to enhance security efforts, including more coordinated, continent-wide ones.

Polls give us few clues about how Americans will react to another terrorist attack. They and the U.S. economy were very resilient after September 11. After the attacks, Americans felt an even greater need to be active in world affairs, although this has been a solid majority view for half a century. Paradoxically, Americans support more active involvement abroad at a time when much of the rest of the world appears to want the United States to retreat.

Frank Graves's Response:
U.S. and Canadian Outlooks on Threats—Coherence or Contradiction?

As with many areas of U.S.-Canada comparison, attitudes to threat and security reveal more impressive areas of similarity than difference. While Canadians will focus on the latter, Americans will be largely unconcerned and mostly assume that commonality prevails. Karlyn Bowman's extremely useful overview of evolving U.S. outlook helps provide some useful areas of comparison.

Americans and Canadians are largely consistent in their belief that the world is a more threatening place today than in the recent past. Certainly "terrorism" is a key ingredient of this deeper sense of dread (albeit somewhat less so in Canada), and September 11 was the key catalyst that vaulted these concerns from the mundane to the acute level of concern. Interestingly, public attention paid to September 11 and its aftermath was probably the highest for any single event in North America and media consumption was virtually identical in Canada and the United States.

Since then we have seen a gradual diminution of the extremely elevated sense of threat that had gripped both countries in the immediate shadow of September 11. Yet, despite a clear decline in the sense of imminent threat in Canada and the United States, the

As with many areas of U.S.-Canada comparison, attitudes to threat and security reveal more impressive areas of similarity than difference.

longer-term societal impacts have been indelible. Terrorism and security continue to exert enormous influence on the public agenda: one could argue that Canadian government decisions to opt out of both the Iraq war and ballistic missile defense were strongly influenced by major negative shifts in public support.

Comparing Ms. Bowman's and our results, it appears that both societies also seem to have relaxed traditional strong concerns about civil liberties and human rights in the face of these new threats. More recently, however, both Ms. Bowman's and our data show a resurgence of largely dormant concerns with issues like privacy and civil rights in both Canada and the United States. It is also the case that the public in each country has given strong (albeit recently weaker) approval ratings to their respective government's handling of security issues. In both countries, citizens provide a stronger approval rating to their federal government's handling of security than to its overall performance. Neither society is looking for a relaxation of security efforts.

A fact that may be more surprising to U.S. audiences is that Canadians supported the war in Afghanistan at least as much as Americans did. There was also majority support for the war in Iraq, at least until the outbreak of hostilities. Today this support and ambiguity have been replaced with a near consensus among Canadians that the war in Iraq was an error (a view that is also increasingly held by many Americans). Similarly surprising is the finding that, for a considerable period of time, Canadians were largely receptive to ballistic missile defense. The current majority opposition only occurred in the past couple of years, largely as a contagion effect of declining confidence in U.S. foreign policy and the war in Iraq.

Despite these impressive and occasionally surprising similarities, a comparison of Canadian outlook with the data presented in Ms. Bowman's paper also reveals areas of profound difference in threat perceptions. Ms. Bowman notes the salience of terrorism as a top of mind priority, occasionally eclipsing all other concerns and typically ranging in the top level of public concerns in the United States. In Canada, terrorism has never assumed anything close to this level of salience. Moreover, while Ms. Bowman correctly notes the pivotal role of terrorism and security in the last U.S. presidential election, the issue barely registered on the political radar in the last federal election in Canada. Rather, terrorism is seen as a fairly modest, even minor, component of a much broader and more multidimensional security hierarchy in Canada. Indeed, for nearly half of Canadians, the "war on terror" is an apocryphal exaggeration, whereas this remains a key national project in the United States. Despite the more tepid concern about terrorism in Canada, support for security measures remains stalwart. We suspect this resolve is largely conditioned by an uneasy blend of empathy and self-interest about the ramifications of another terrorism event in the United States (which is considered highly probable by Canadians).

Another area of possible disparity is Ms. Bowman's suggestion that Americans are internationalists. While there is certainly some empirical support for this, it also contradicts other evidence, including her acknowledgement that interest and fluency in foreign affairs is relatively scant among the U.S. public. Canadians, by contrast, are much more likely to favor multilateralism and are also more likely to see immigration and multiculturalism in a more positive light than Americans since September 11.

As demonstrated by the papers presented in this issue, in addition to many areas of resonance between the publics in Canada and the United States, there are a number of areas of contradiction and tension, which will pose considerable challenges for policymakers. In particular, policymakers must always be mindful of Canadians' concerns about sover-

eignty and the appearance of an overly servile relationship with the United States, a view which has renewed force in Canada today. On the other hand, U.S. public resolve about the priority of national security may provide little room for patience about Canada's nationalistic concerns. That said, from a public perspective, there may well be enough common ground on the importance of North American security to manage these tensions. While Canadian and U.S. attitudes to threat are in flux and it is difficult to predict confidently where they will evolve in the coming years, they will undoubtedly continue to have major influence on setting the national and North American public agenda.

Karlyn **Bowman**

Karlyn Bowman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) where she studies public opinion. She joined the Institute in 1979 and was managing editor of *Public Opinion* magazine until 1990. From 1990 to 1995 she was the editor of *The American Enterprise*, the Institute's flagship magazine. Today Ms. Bowman continues to work on the magazine as editor of its public opinion section. In 2002, she inaugurated a series of Public Opinion Studies that are available on AEI's website at http://www.aei.org/PublicOpinionStudies. They include "America After 9/11: Public Opinion on the War on Terrorism, the War with Iraq, and America's Place in the World," "Polls on Patriotism," "Attitudes toward Homosexuality," "Public Opinion on Taxes," "The Nostalgia Impulse: Polls on the Past," and "Attitudes toward Social Security Reform." She has written and co-authored numerous articles and studies; her most recent contribution was a chapter on polling in *The Permanent Campaign and Its Future* (Washington, DC: AEI-Brookings, 2001).

Frank L. **Graves**

Frank Graves is a practicing sociologist with a background in social anthropology. In 1980, he founded EKOS Research Associates Inc., an applied social and economic research firm. Under his leadership, EKOS has become an industry leader in the areas of public policy and program evaluation. In recent years, Mr. Graves has advised Canada's most senior decision makers on key national issues of the day. He also conducts extensive political polling, and is a frequent commentator in the national media. For the past several years, EKOS has been examining public and elite responses to North American integration, with a particular focus on U.S.-Canada relations. EKOS' *Rethinking North America* and *Security Monitor* projects are supported by all three governments of North America.

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