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CANADIAN PERCEPTIONS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

SURVEY REPORT
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Executive Summary

The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), in partnership with the Association of Canadian Studies (ACS), commissioned Léger Marketing to include two questions in the company's August 2007 national poll about Canadian views on regions and countries that are most important for Canada. Given the Canadian government's recent policy shift towards the region, as well as Canada's increasing trade relationships with Mexico and other key Latin American countries, FOCAL and the Association of Canadian Studies thought that a survey of Canadian views on foreign policy priorities, especially in regards to Latin America and the Caribbean, was overdue. Léger Marketing surveyed 1,500 Canadians from August 22-28, 2007, based on the following two questions:

1. In seeking out partners for collaboration on international issues, how closely do we share values and goals with the following countries:

USA	UK	Australia	Colombia
Caribbean	Israel	France	Lebanon
Mexico	Brazil	Chile	

2. When it comes to advancing Canada's national interests, how much of a priority should be given to the following areas of the developing world? Should it be a very important priority, a somewhat important priority, not a very important priority or not a priority at all?

Afghanistan	Latin America	Europe	Haiti and the Caribbean
India	Middle East	China	

Summary of Results

- Margin of error is +/- 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20
- Responses were broken down by sex, language, education level, income, occupation and province of residence.

Question One Results:

- In sharing values and goals, 85 per cent of Canadians believed that Canada is very or somewhat similar to the United States, with very close results between French and English speakers. The U.S. came out as a clear priority among all groups, including French speakers and residents of Quebec.
- 80 per cent of Canadians believed that Canada shares values and goals with the United Kingdom.
- 72 per cent of Canadians believed that Canada shares values and goals with France and Australia. However, when broken down by language, 88 per cent of French speakers and 68 per cent of English speakers believed that Canada is very or somewhat similar to France.
- Chile, Colombia and Lebanon ranked ninth, tenth and eleventh, respectively, on shared goals and values. A significant percentage of Canadians responded that they "did not know" or refused to answer regarding several Latin American countries. For example, 20 percent of respondents answered that they "did not know" or refused to answer in regards to whether Canada shares goals and values with Chile.

Question Two Results

- Canadians ranked Latin America as the second highest priority area for advancing Canada's interests: 75 per cent of Canadians surveyed agreed that Latin America was very or somewhat important (Europe ranked first at 78 per cent, and China came in third at 74 per cent).
- Afghanistan was ranked last as a priority country/area for advancing Canada's national interests, with 62 per cent of Canadians agreeing that the area was very or somewhat important.
- English speaking Canadians ranked the Middle East and Afghanistan significantly higher than French speakers:
 - » 69 per cent of English speakers ranked Afghanistan as very or somewhat important, while only 48 per cent of French speakers did the same.
 - » 73 per cent of English speakers ranked the Middle East as very or somewhat important, while only 58 per cent of French speakers did so.

While this survey can only provide initial results on what is a much more complex issue, it is a valuable starting point for a larger debate on Canadian values, goals and national interests. Future questions to consider are:

- Why do Canadians not feel closer in values and goals to Latin American countries?
- Why do students and professionals recognize Latin America as a priority while other demographic groups do not feel as strongly about the region?
- How can Canada best approach its relationship with the region?
- Why do French Canadians feel closer to Latin America in shared values and goals than English Canadians?
- How can the Canadian government better educate Canadians about its foreign policy shift towards the Americas?

Survey Report

1. Introduction

Despite the recent Canadian foreign policy shift towards the Americas, very little analysis has occurred regarding Canadian perceptions of and attitudes towards the region. The purpose of this report is to present and analyze the results of the survey *Canadian Perceptions of Latin America and the Caribbean*. Given the Canadian government's policy shift towards the region, as well as Canada's increasing trade relationships with Mexico and other key Latin American countries, FOCAL and the Association of Canadian Studies thought that a survey of Canadian views on the region was overdue. The two organizations commissioned Léger Marketing to include two questions in the company's August 2007 national poll about Canadian views on regions and countries that are most important for Canada. This survey was designed to identify priority areas for Canadians in order to assess whether the governmental shift towards Latin America fits with the overall public perception of Canada's national interests.

2. Methodology

Léger Marketing surveyed 1,500 Canadians by telephone from August 22-28, 2007, based on the following two questions:

1. In seeking out partners for collaboration on international issues, how closely do we share values and goals with the following countries:

USA	UK	Australia	Colombia
Caribbean	Israel	France	Lebanon
Mexico	Brazil	Chile	

2. When it comes to advancing Canada's national interests, how much of a priority should be given to the following areas of the developing world? Should it be a very important priority, a somewhat important priority, not a very important priority or not a priority at all?

Afghanistan	Latin America	Europe	Haiti and the Caribbean
India	Middle East	China	

The two questions were designed by the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) and the Association for Canadian Studies. The margin of error is 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

3. Survey Results

3.1 Question One: Shared Goals and values

In question one, the response regarding countries with which Canada shares the most values and goals was not entirely unexpected. Canadians ranked the U.S., the U.K., Australia and France as the top countries with which we have similar goals and values, with 85 per cent of Canadians agreeing that the U.S. is very or somewhat similar to Canada in goals and values (see Figure 1.1).

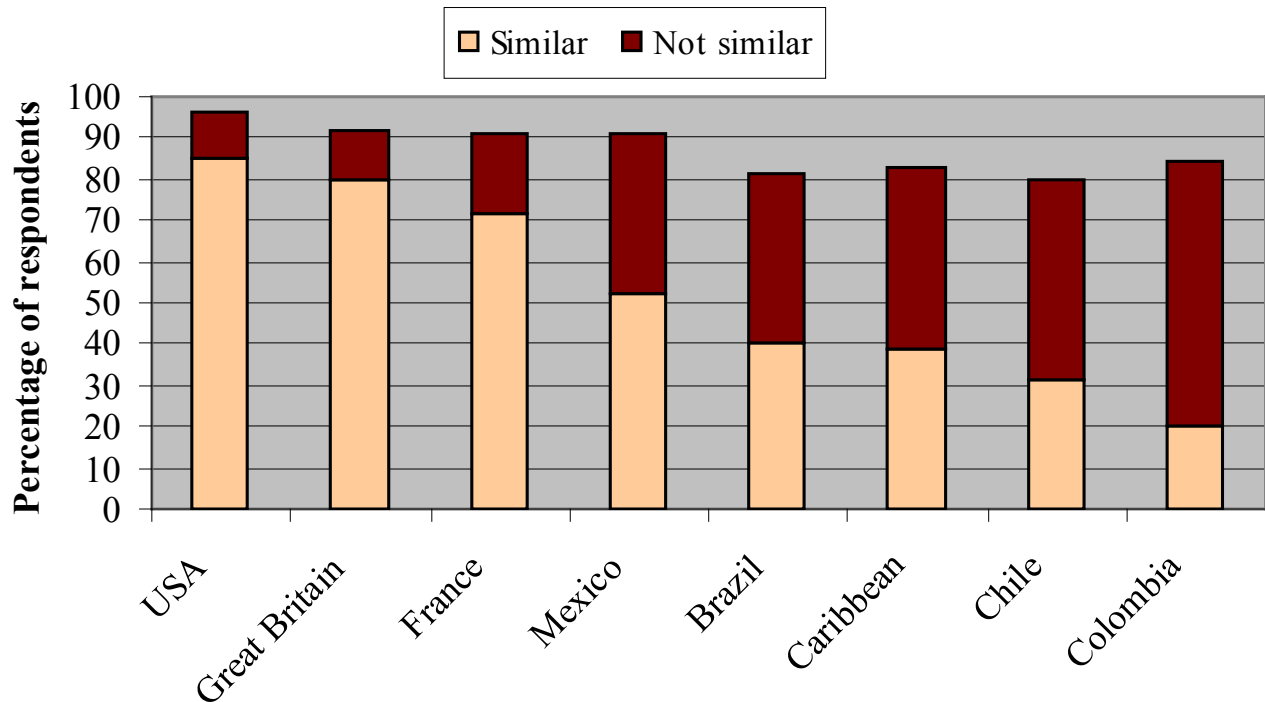
Men were more likely than women to rank Canadian values and goals as matching those of the United States: 50 per cent of males believed that Canada was “very similar” to the U.S., while 41 per cent of females said the same. In addition, 52 per cent of respondents between the ages 55-64 ranked the United States as “very similar,” making it the age group that most identifies with the U.S.

Another group that ranked the U.S. quite highly was French speakers: 55 per cent of all French speakers surveyed said that the U.S. was “very similar” to Canada in goals and values, while 30 per cent said it was “somewhat similar.” In comparison, 42 per cent of English speakers said the U.S. was “very similar” and 44 per cent said that it was “somewhat similar.”

When moving to the Latin American and Caribbean, the percentage of those who think Canada shares similar values drops considerably. Mexico came in first in the region, with 52 per cent saying that it is similar to Canada; however, only nine per cent agreed that it was “very similar” while 42 per cent said it was “somewhat similar.” Interestingly, 67 per cent of French speakers felt that Mexico was similar, while only 47 per cent of English speakers felt the same.

FIGURE 1.1

Question One: In seeking out partners for collaboration on international issues, how closely do we share values and goals with the following countries:



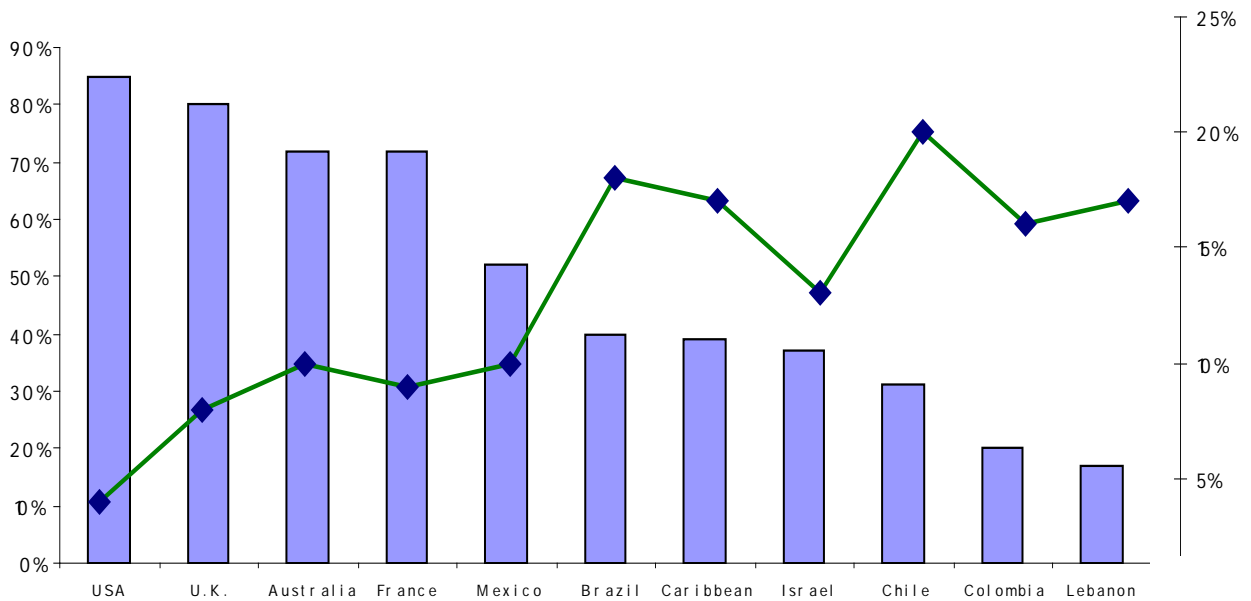
In fact, for Mexico, Brazil, Chile and Colombia, significantly more Francophones than Anglophones felt that Canada was similar. In contrast, more English speakers (42 per cent versus 36 per cent of French speakers) felt that the Caribbean was similar to Canada.

Regarding Chile, only three per cent of Canadians felt that Chile was “very similar,” while 28 per cent said it was “somewhat similar.” Most notable for Chile, however, is that 20 per cent of respondents said they did not know or refused to answer (see Figure 1.2), suggesting that Canadians did not feel informed enough about the country to make a judgment on shared values. Similarly, 18 per cent of those polled did not know or refused to answer about Brazil, while 16 per cent did the same for Colombia and 17 per cent did the same for the Caribbean. In comparison, only four per cent did not know or did not answer regarding the United States.

FIGURE 1.2

Question One: In seeking out partners for collaboration on international issues, how closely do we share values and goals with the following countries:

The graph below reflects countries ranked as very or somewhat similar, with the green line representing those who did not know or refused to answer.



The above diagram illustrates that the countries with which Canadians felt least similar are also those where the most respondents refused to answer or did not know. What this suggests is that Canadians are not entirely comfortable with assessing or comparing themselves to Latin American countries. Considering the recent move of the Canadian government to focus on the Americas, this poll suggests that more public outreach is needed to explain this shift to Canadians. In other words, if most Canadians cannot relate to issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, it will be difficult to sell them on an increased Canadian focus on the region.

3.2 Question Two: Priority Areas for Canada's National Interest

The results for the second question were perhaps more surprising than the first. Considering Canada's significant military involvement in Afghanistan, one might expect that this country would rank high on the list of priorities. However, Afghanistan ranked last (in seventh place), with 62 per cent of Canadians believing it was very or somewhat important to advancing Canada's national interests. Only 23 per cent agreed that it was "very important" while 39 per cent said that it was "somewhat important."

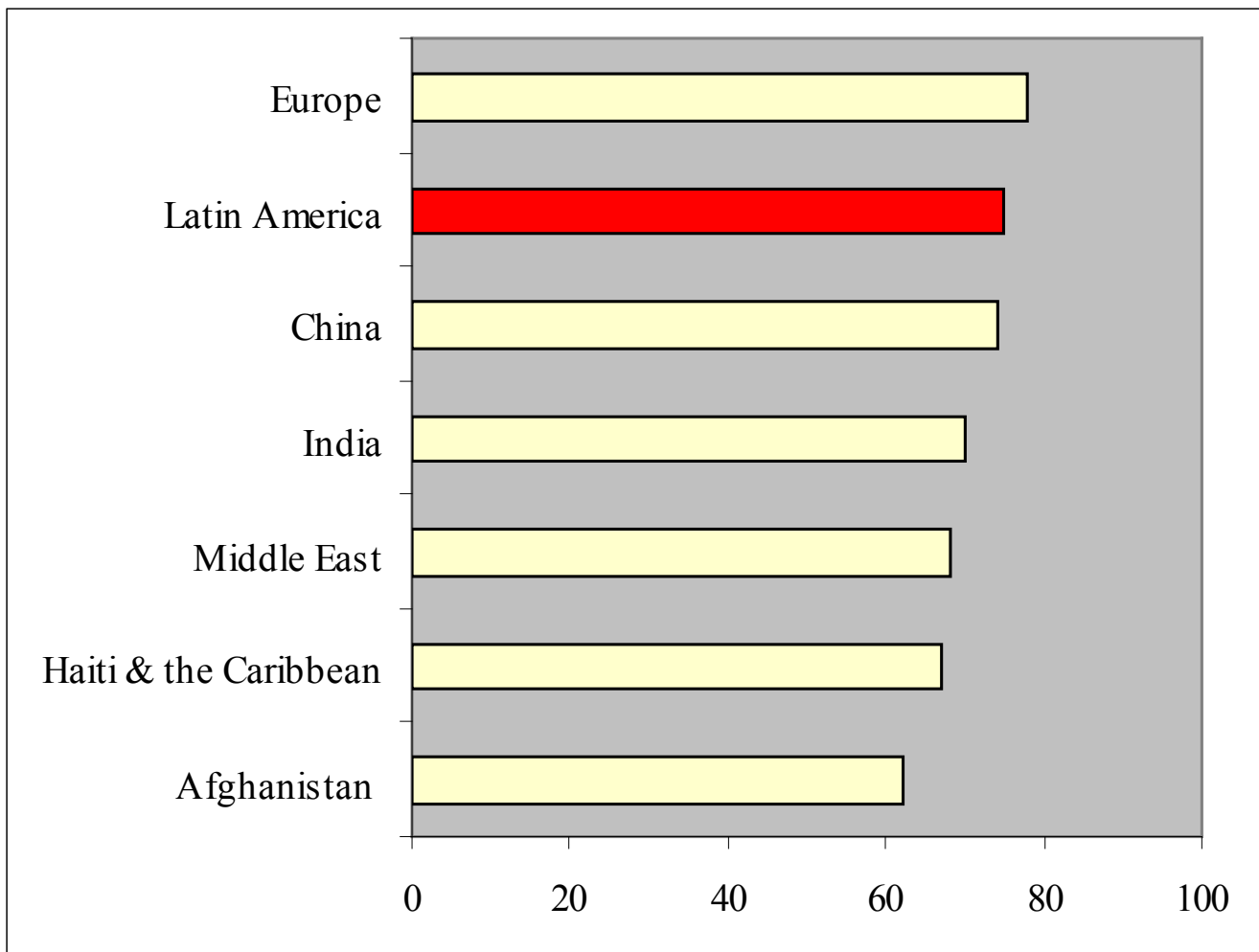
The difference between French and English speakers was also quite distinct in this regard. Only 16 per cent of French Canadians thought that Afghanistan was "very important" while 26 per cent of English-speaking Canadians thought the same (see Figure 2.2).

As Figure 2.1 shows, Latin America ranked second highest in the list of priorities, with 75 per cent of Canadians saying that the region was very or somewhat important in advancing Canada's national interests.

FIGURE 2.1

Question Two: When it comes to advancing Canada's national interest, how much of a priority should be given to the following areas of the developing world?

(Percentage of those that thought the area was very or somewhat important)



Overall, 20 per cent of Canadians felt that Latin America was “very important” while 55 per cent felt that it was “somewhat important.”

Students and professionals were most likely to rank Latin America as important: 26 per cent of professionals with an annual income over \$80,000 and 24 per cent of those with an income of \$60,000-79,999 believed that the region was “very important,” while 32 per cent of students thought the same. In contrast, only 16 per cent of retired respondents and 15 per cent of unemployed respondents thought the region was “very important.” In fact, 20 per cent of unemployed respondents felt that Latin America was “not a priority at all.”

These results are even more interesting when compared to the results on Afghanistan. French speakers were evenly divided, with 49 per cent agreeing that it was “very” or “somewhat important,” and another 49 per cent saying it was “not very” or “not at all” important. English speakers, however, were more united on the issue: 68 per cent of English speakers felt that Afghanistan was very or somewhat important, while 28 per cent did not.

Students were the mostly likely to feel that Afghanistan was important (75 per cent), while only 52 per cent of retired respondents felt the same.

FIGURE 2.2

Question Two: When it comes to advancing Canada’s national interest, how much of a priority should be given to the following areas of the developing world?

(Percentage of those that thought the area was very or somewhat important)

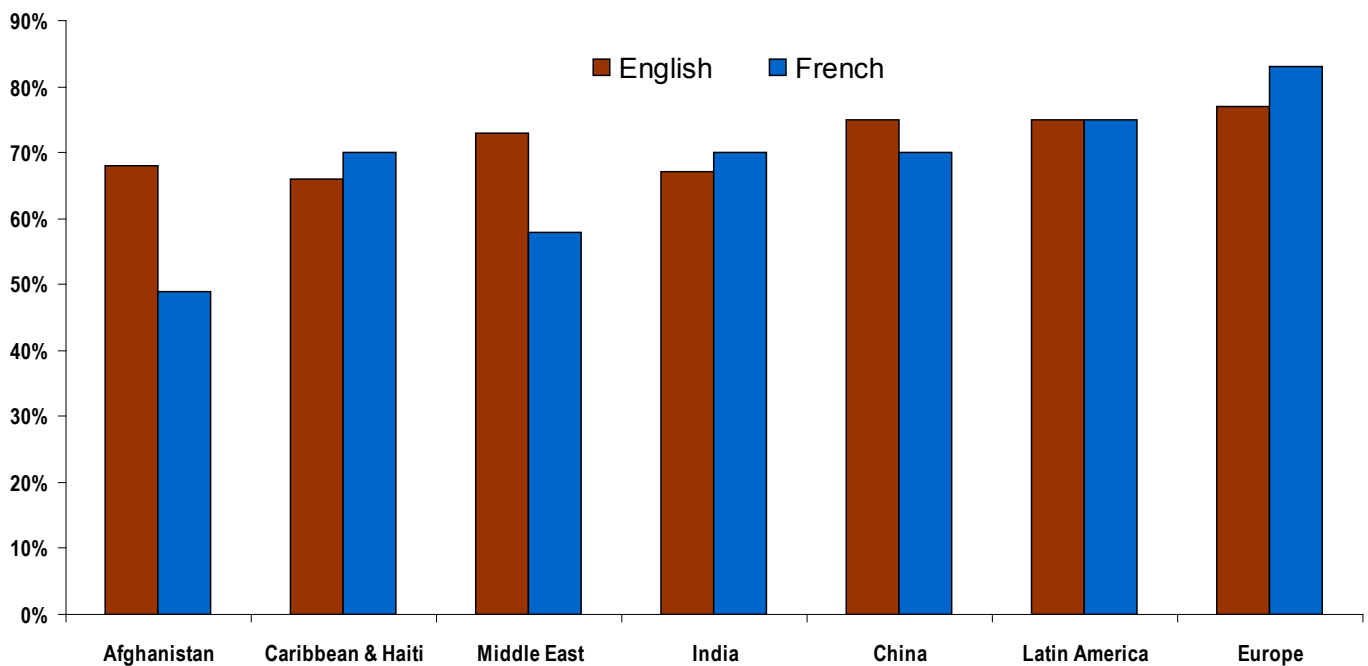
	Total	Male	Female	English	French	Alberta	BC	Quebec	Ontario
Afghanistan	62%	60%	64%	68%	49%	65%	68%	50%	63%
Caribbean & Haiti	67%	67%	68%	66%	70%	62%	64%	70%	68%
Middle East	68%	68%	68%	73%	58%	73%	72%	60%	69%
India	70%	71%	68%	67%	70%	73%	70%	64%	72%
China	74%	77%	71%	75%	70%	74%	78%	68%	74%
Latin America	75%	76%	74%	75%	75%	78%	78%	76%	73%
Europe	78%	79%	77%	77%	83%	75%	76%	81%	77%

Notably, Haiti and the Caribbean came in sixth at 67 per cent and therefore did not share the same high ranking as Latin America. Perhaps not surprisingly, French speakers ranked Haiti and the Caribbean higher than English speakers: 29 per cent of French speakers agreed that the region was “very important” while only 16 per cent of English speakers felt the same. Students and professionals were also more likely to believe that Haiti and the Caribbean were important: 76 per cent of students and 74 per cent of professionals ranked the area as important.

FIGURE 2.3

Question Two: When it comes to advancing Canada’s national interest, how much of a priority should be given to the following areas of the developing world?

(Percentage of those that thought the area was very or somewhat important, by language)



While Europe did rank first, a quick glance at Figure 2.2 reveals that the top three ranking priority areas (Europe, Latin America and China) were very close. Given a margin of error of +/- 3.1 per cent, the three regions are nearly tied across the board except when it comes to Francophone Canadians, where the spread is significantly larger. French Canadians clearly prioritize Latin America over China, but they also voted more strongly for Europe than English Canadians.

What is particularly striking, however, is not that Latin America ranked second, but that it ranked so high at all. Given the media coverage of China and India’s continual rise in global importance, as well as Canada’s significant investments in Afghanistan and Haiti, it is somewhat surprising that Latin America ranked as high as it did. This is especially true considering the lack of serious Canadian involvement in the region up until recently.

4. Conclusion

At first glance, the results from the two questions appear to contradict each other. While Canadians seem to think that Latin America is important to advancing Canada's national interests, they do not necessarily feel close to the region when it comes to shared goals and values. French Canadians seem to think they have more shared values with Latin America, and professionals and students in particular rank the region as important. Yet this poll indicates that, overall, Canadians do not feel that Canada is similar to many Latin American countries. Or, at the very least, they do not know enough about Latin America to make the comparison. If that is the case, can Canada truly be considered a country "of the Americas"? What would make Canadians feel part of the hemisphere? How can policymakers engage Canadians on "regional" issues if Canadians do not feel that they are really part of the region?

In addition, it is important to note that when it comes to Latin America's importance to Canada's national interests, French, English and "other language" speakers ranked the region equally (with 75 per cent of each saying that it was very or somewhat important). This seems to be an area on which everyone can agree, as opposed to other countries or regions, such as Afghanistan or Haiti and the Caribbean, where French and English speakers were markedly divided.

Another interesting point of analysis is that support for Latin America was strongest in Quebec, the Maritimes, and the western provinces, while it was lower in Ontario and lowest in the prairies. For example, only 10 per cent of respondents from the prairie provinces said that the region was "very important." Overall, however, the number of Canadians believing that Latin America was very or somewhat important was quite high across the country, from 72 per cent in the prairie provinces to 79 per cent in the Maritimes.

Notably, these results occurred with very little information regarding the Canadian government's foreign policy shift towards the Americas. While the survey was conducted in August, one month after Prime Minister Harper's trip to Latin America and the Caribbean, there was arguably little public awareness of the reasons behind this shift. If Canadians are already amenable to a foreign policy focus on the Americas, then a public diplomacy campaign on the reasons behind the shift could only improve Canadian support of the idea. Evidently, Canadians seem receptive to an Americas focus.

The final question, then, is where to go from here. If Canadians think that Latin America is more of a priority for Canada's national interests than Afghanistan, then the Canadian government's shift towards the Americas was a politically astute one. But what happens next? Clearly, Canadians need more information about the countries in the region to understand why a better relationship with Latin America could benefit everyone. A public awareness campaign on the government's plans for its Latin American focus would certainly assist in this effort. More transparency from the government on future plans in the region would also be welcome. Overall, Canada can only play a key role in the Americas if both Canadians and Latin Americans are on board, and the effort must start at home.



Detailed polling results will be available online at www.focal.ca/publications/reports



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