

CANADIANS: AFGHAN MISSION DIFFICULT BUT ENHANCES CANADA'S STANDING IN THE WORLD

Nik Nanos



Canadians believe the mission in Afghanistan enhances our reputation in the world, but also believe it is a difficult and complex mission and are highly skeptical of the chances of success. These are the principal findings of a national poll conducted for *Policy Options* by SES Research. Its president and CEO, Nik Nanos, takes us through the numbers. "Canadians understand the daunting nature of these challenges," he concludes. "But they wonder whether we can succeed, whether we've devoted enough resources to success, and how long it's going to take."

Les Canadiens croient que notre présence en Afghanistan renforce notre réputation internationale mais ils jugent notre mission complexe et difficile, ce qui les rend très sceptiques quant à ses chances de réussite. Telles sont les principales conclusions d'un sondage national réalisé pour *Options politiques* par la maison SES Research, dont le président Nik Nanos décortique ici les résultats. « Nos compatriotes comprennent bien les immenses défis de cette mission. Mais ils se demandent si nous pouvons les relever et si nous y avons consacré suffisamment de ressources, tout en s'inquiétant de la durée de notre engagement. »

Canadians think the mission in Afghanistan is good for our reputation in the world, but see the mission as very difficult and aren't convinced we can succeed there. Those are the principal findings of an SES Research poll for *Policy Options*. Conducted by telephone among 1,000 Canadians from April 26 to May 1, the poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percent, 19 times out of 20.

When we asked Canadians whether they thought Canada's mission in Afghanistan "enhances, diminishes or has no impact on Canada's international reputation" (question 1) 48.1 percent they replied that it enhances our reputation, a 2-1 margin over those who said it diminishes it (23.2 percent) and over an equal number (23 percent) who replied it has no impact at all.

There were interesting regional attitudinal differences on this question. The largest percentage of respondents who thought the mission enhanced Canada's reputation (56 percent) was in the Atlantic, while the smallest percentage was in Quebec (38.4 percent). In Ontario and in the West, about 50 percent thought the mission enhanced our standing in the world. In the Atlantic, only 20 percent thought the mission dimin-

ished our international reputation, while 31.2 percent thought so in Quebec. Still, a plurality of respondents, even in Quebec, thought the mission enhanced Canada's stature in the world.

The poll was conducted after the deaths of six Canadian soldiers, five from Camp Gagetown in New Brunswick, who were killed when a roadside bomb blew up their vehicle on patrol in the dangerous Kandahar province in southern Afghanistan.

The other questions in our poll indicate that Canadians understand the enormity of the mission, and what we are trying to accomplish in Afghanistan, but they also clearly see how difficult it is.

It's also interesting how Canadians see the priorities of the mission and the degree of difficulty in achieving them.

When we asked Canadians to rank the most important among three stated objectives for the Canadian mission (question 2), a plurality chose "promoting the rule of law and human rights" (37.9 percent) over "providing security and stability" (33.3 percent), while only 19.7 percent said "supporting economic and social development" was the most important aspect of our mission in Afghanistan.

QUESTION 1. DO YOU THINK CANADA'S MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN ENHANCES, DIMINISHES OR HAS NO IMPACT ON CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION?

		Total responses (N)	Enhances (%)	Diminishes (%)	Has no impact (%)	Unsure (%)
Region	Canada	1,000	48.1	23.2	23.0	5.7
	Atlantic	100	56.0	20.0	20.0	4.0
	Quebec	250	38.4	31.2	25.2	5.2
	Ontario	300	50.3	21.3	23.0	5.3
	West	350	50.9	20.0	22.3	6.9
Gender	Male	495	46.1	23.4	24.8	5.7
	Female	505	50.1	23.0	21.2	5.7
Age	18 to 29	140	37.9	28.6	27.9	5.7
	30 to 39	151	49.7	21.9	23.2	5.3
	40 to 49	223	50.2	22.4	22.4	4.9
	50 to 59	223	52.9	24.2	20.2	2.7
	60 plus	263	46.8	20.9	23.2	9.1
Home	Own	746	50.3	21.2	22.7	5.9
	Rent	254	41.7	29.1	24.0	5.1
Vote profile	Liberal	279	48.4	22.6	25.4	3.6
	Conservative	274	65.0	10.9	19.7	4.4
	NDP	142	35.2	32.4	23.9	8.5
	Bloc	74	39.2	28.4	24.3	8.1
	Green	88	39.8	33.0	25.0	2.3
	Undecided	143	37.8	30.1	21.7	10.5

Source: SES Research National Survey, www.sesresearch.com.

Note: 1,000 Canadians, $\pm 3.1\%$ 19 times out of 20, April 26 to May 1, 2007.

QUESTION 2. WHICH OF THESE OBJECTIVES IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

		Total responses (N)	Promoting the rule of law and human rights (%)	Supporting economic and social development (%)	Providing security and stability (%)	Unsure (%)
Region	Canada	1,000	37.9	19.7	33.3	9.1
	Atlantic	100	44.0	13.0	34.0	9.0
	Quebec	250	36.8	17.6	40.8	4.8
	Ontario	300	39.0	20.0	31.0	10.0
	West	350	36.0	22.9	29.7	11.4
Gender	Male	495	37.2	19.0	32.5	11.3
	Female	505	38.6	20.4	34.1	6.9
Age	18 to 29	140	47.1	22.1	22.9	7.9
	30 to 39	151	43.0	15.9	32.5	8.6
	40 to 49	223	35.0	19.7	35.4	9.9
	50 to 59	223	37.7	21.5	32.7	8.1
	60 plus	263	32.7	19.0	38.0	10.3
Home	Own	746	35.0	20.6	34.6	9.8
	Rent	254	46.5	16.9	29.5	7.1
Vote profile	Liberal	279	38.7	23.7	30.8	6.8
	Conservative	274	37.2	19.3	36.9	6.6
	NDP	142	38.0	19.0	32.4	10.6
	Bloc	74	44.6	17.6	35.1	2.7
	Green	88	48.9	13.6	28.4	9.1
	Undecided	143	27.3	18.2	34.3	20.3

Source: SES Research National Survey, www.sesresearch.com.

Note: 1,000 Canadians, $\pm 3.1\%$ 19 times out of 20, April 26 to May 1, 2007.

In all regions of the country except Quebec — where a plurality (40.8 percent) who chose security trumped those who selected law/human rights (36.8 percent) — more Canadians thought the humanitarian aspects of

and 1960s Pearsonian peacekeeping model as a lens to view Canada's role in the world.

In any event, and within the margin of error, Canadians see law and human rights, one of the less publi-

three elements of Canada's role in Afghanistan, what came back was a strong sense of the degree of difficulty involved in the mission.

When we asked about our role in promoting the rule of law and human rights (question 3), 24 percent said the likelihood of success was high, as opposed to 40.4 percent who saw it as average, and another 31.2 percent who saw the likelihood of success as low.

When we asked about the likelihood of success in providing security and stability (question 4), 22.5 percent of Canadians said it was high, 41.1 percent saw it as average and 32.1 percent saw it as low.

Stated bluntly, only 1 Canadian in 4 sees the likelihood of a successful security mission as high, while one Canadian in 3 sees the prospects of success as low, while fully 4 Canadians in 10 see the chances of success as only average.

In all regions of the country except Quebec — where a plurality (40.8 percent) who chose security trumped those who selected law/human rights (36.8 percent) — more Canadians thought the humanitarian aspects of the mission were more important than providing security. This may well have to do with Canadians' enduring self-perception of our country as a nation of peacekeepers, even though we are not really in that business anymore. Canadians are still using the 1950s and 1960s Pearsonian peacekeeping model for Canada's role in the world.

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cized roles of Canada in Afghanistan, as no less important than the security role which dominates news coverage to the virtual exclusion of other elements of the mission.

When we asked Canadians about the likelihood of success of the

QUESTION 3. DOES CANADA HAVE A HIGH, AVERAGE OR LOW LIKELIHOOD OF SUCCESS IN PROMOTING THE RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS?

		Total responses (N)	High (%)	Average (%)	Low (%)	Unsure (%)
Region	Canada	1,000	24.0	40.4	31.2	4.4
	Atlantic	100	32.0	39.0	24.0	5.0
	Quebec	250	16.0	46.0	33.2	4.8
	Ontario	300	29.3	38.7	27.7	4.3
	West	350	22.9	38.3	34.9	4.0
Gender	Male	495	23.8	36.8	36.2	3.2
	Female	505	24.2	44.0	26.3	5.5
Age	18 to 29	140	27.9	42.9	26.4	2.9
	30 to 39	151	30.5	40.4	25.2	4.0
	40 to 49	223	21.5	40.8	33.6	4.0
	50 to 59	223	25.6	39.0	32.3	3.1
	60 plus	263	19.0	39.9	34.2	6.8
Home	Own	746	23.3	40.1	32.2	4.4
	Rent	254	26.0	41.3	28.3	4.3
Vote profile	Liberal	279	24.7	44.1	27.6	3.6
	Conservative	274	26.3	46.4	24.1	3.3
	NDP	142	23.9	40.8	31.0	4.2
	Bloc	74	13.5	31.1	51.4	4.1
	Green	88	23.9	35.2	38.6	2.3
	Undecided	143	23.8	29.4	37.1	9.8

Source: SES Research National Survey, www.sesresearch.com.
Note: 1,000 Canadians, ± 3.1% 19 times out of 20, April 26 to May 1, 2007.

QUESTION 4. DOES CANADA HAVE A HIGH, AVERAGE OR LOW LIKELIHOOD OF SUCCESS IN PROVIDING SECURITY AND STABILITY?

		Total responses (N)	High (%)	Average (%)	Low (%)	Unsure (%)
Region	Canada	1,000	22.5	41.1	32.1	4.3
	Atlantic	100	34.0	37.0	26.0	3.0
	Quebec	250	16.4	48.8	31.2	3.6
	Ontario	300	26.7	36.7	31.3	5.3
	West	350	20.0	40.6	35.1	4.3
Gender	Male	495	21.2	38.2	37.2	3.4
	Female	505	23.8	44.0	27.1	5.1
Age	18 to 29	140	30.0	29.3	36.4	4.3
	30 to 39	151	27.8	43.7	25.8	2.6
	40 to 49	223	19.3	45.7	30.9	4.0
	50 to 59	223	22.4	40.4	34.1	3.1
	60 plus	263	18.3	42.6	32.7	6.5
Home	Own	746	22.0	41.8	31.5	4.7
	Rent	254	24.0	39.0	33.9	3.1
Vote profile	Liberal	279	20.1	43.4	32.3	4.3
	Conservative	274	27.4	49.6	20.1	2.9
	NDP	142	22.5	33.8	37.3	6.3
	Bloc	74	10.8	44.6	40.5	4.1
	Green	88	21.6	33.0	44.3	1.1
	Undecided	143	24.5	30.8	37.8	7.0

Source: SES Research National Survey, www.sesresearch.com.

Note: 1,000 Canadians, $\pm 3.1\%$ 19 times out of 20, April 26 to May 1, 2007.

QUESTION 5. DOES CANADA HAVE A HIGH, AVERAGE OR LOW LIKELIHOOD OF SUCCESS IN SUPPORTING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT?

		Total responses (N)	High (%)	Average (%)	Low (%)	Unsure (%)
Region	Canada	1,000	21.1	44.9	27.9	6.1
	Atlantic	100	25.0	41.0	30.0	4.0
	Quebec	250	12.8	55.6	26.4	5.2
	Ontario	300	25.0	41.7	26.3	7.0
	West	350	22.6	41.1	29.7	6.6
Gender	Male	495	19.8	43.0	32.5	4.6
	Female	505	22.4	46.7	23.4	7.5
Age	18 to 29	140	23.6	42.9	28.6	5.0
	30 to 39	151	25.2	37.7	31.8	5.3
	40 to 49	223	20.6	44.8	30.0	4.5
	50 to 59	223	19.7	48.4	26.5	5.4
	60 plus	263	19.0	47.1	24.7	9.1
Home	Own	746	20.8	46.8	26.3	6.2
	Rent	254	22.0	39.4	32.7	5.9
Vote profile	Liberal	279	21.9	45.5	27.2	5.4
	Conservative	274	28.1	44.2	23.0	4.7
	NDP	142	19.0	43.7	31.7	5.6
	Bloc	74	4.1	55.4	33.8	6.8
	Green	88	15.9	47.7	33.0	3.4
	Undecided	143	20.3	39.2	28.7	11.9

Source: SES Research National Survey, www.sesresearch.com.

Note: 1,000 Canadians, $\pm 3.1\%$ 19 times out of 20, April 26 to May 1, 2007.

The security aspect of the mission is clearly the most crucial and most volatile in terms of shaping and driving public opinion, and the most susceptible of being influenced by negative news stories on the frequency and scale of Canadian casualties.

Once again, there is a significant cleavage on this question between Quebec and the rest of Canada. While 34 percent of respondents in the Atlantic and 26.7 percent in Ontario thought the prospects for security success were high, only 16.4 percent in Quebec thought so, while 31.2 percent of Quebecers thought the chances for success were low and 48.8 percent thought them only average. Stated another way, twice as many Quebecers think the security mission is more likely to fail than succeed (one in three versus one in six), while nearly half of Quebecers rate the likelihood of success as only average.

But while Quebecers are the group of Canadians who are the least likely to think the mission is capable of success, or that it enhances our reputation, it is clear that committed Conservative Party voters think so on both counts. While the issue of Afghanistan is somewhat divisive on a regional basis, and certainly in linguistic terms, it also tends to mobilize core Conservative support, in all regions and among all language groups in the country.

But even committed Conservatives think the degree of difficulty is high.

Afghanistan is one of the most ambitious and complex missions Canada has ever undertaken. With our Afghan and NATO partners, we are trying to provide security in a country the size of Texas, one with a history not unlike the Wild West; we are trying to build infrastructure in a

country where roads, wells, schools and the rule of law cannot be taken for granted because they barely exist; we are trying to help build the institutions of democracy in a nation broken by decades of Soviet occupation and civil war.

Canadians understand the daunting nature of these challenges. But they wonder whether we can succeed, whether we've devoted enough resources to success, and how long it's going to take.

It's up to the government, and principally the Prime Minister, to make the case, one that, clearly, hasn't yet been made.

Nik Nanos is president and CEO of SES Research, which regularly polls on public policy issues for Policy Options. Ottawa-based SES Research was the most accurate polling firm in the last two federal elections.



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