

## Survey finds ‘dramatic shift’ in Canadian perception of U.S. approach to human rights

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For the first time in 13 years, Canadians think they have more in common with Britain and Germany’s approach to human rights than that of the United States, a new survey suggests.

The finding is the latest in a 13-year tracking of Canadian and American perceptions of the bi-national relationship by Nanos Research and the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Survey participants on both sides of the border were asked which countries are closest to theirs on human rights. Forty-four per cent of Canadian respondents said Canada most closely aligns with Britain on human rights, followed by Germany at 25 per cent and the U.S. at 16 per cent.

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“We’ve seen a dramatic shift in the perceptions of Canadians of Americans on human rights. This has actually hit the lowest level since we first started recording this data under George Bush Jr.,” said pollster Nik Nanos, global fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

“The current number under President [Donald] Trump is lower than George Bush Jr. when he was in the midst of his war on terror.”

Asked the same question, 43 per cent of Americans said the U.S. most closely relates to Canada on human rights, followed by Britain (30 per cent), France (9 per cent), Germany (6 per cent), China (5 per cent), Japan (4 per cent) and Mexico (3 per cent).

As Canadian opinions of human rights in the U.S. started to decline in 2015, perceptions of Germany started to improve, yearly tracking shows.

Germany garnered international attention in 2015 when it welcomed more than one million migrants – many of them Syrian refugee claimants. Meanwhile, the Syrian refugee crisis was also making headlines in Canada, where it became a defining issue in the 2015 federal election after an image of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, dead on a Turkish beach, hit close to home. The boy’s aunt Tima Kurdi was from British Columbia. Federal party leaders came under pressure to present a plan for Syrian refugee resettlement.

Canadians are also concerned about Chinese goods and visitors entering the country, the poll indicated. Half of Canadian respondents said Chinese goods should face the toughest scrutiny from customs officers when entering the country, followed by those from Mexico at 38 per cent and the goods from the U.S. at 8 per cent. Asked whose visitors should be questioned most thoroughly, 40 per cent of Canadians said China, followed by Mexico at 31 per cent and the U.S. at 18 per cent.

“The reputation of China in Canada is still a work in progress. Canadians understand the opportunity that exists, but they have concerns,” Mr. Nanos said.

The poll results come as corporations attempt to change Canadians’ opinions of the world’s second-biggest economy. Bankrolled by major corporations, the Public Policy Forum is leading a two-year campaign to persuade Canadians to embrace a free-trade deal with China.

American respondents were most concerned about Mexican goods and visitors entering the country; 37 per cent said customs officials should closely scrutinize Mexican goods while 35 per cent said Mexican visitors should face the most questioning.

Canadians and Americans appear to have different perceptions of the business relationship with one another, the survey showed. While 51 per cent of Canadians polled said the country’s business values most closely align with the U.S., only 17 per cent of Americans said the same of Canada. Americans more closely identified with Britain (24 per cent), Japan (18 per cent) and China (18 per cent) on business values.

Mr. Nanos also noted a significant decline in the proportion of Americans who support the idea of the U.S. following its own interests, even if it leads to conflict with other nations. Half of American respondents said they agree or strongly agree that the U.S. should pursue its own interests, down from 61 per cent in 2016.

“A lot of this could be a Trump effect for some Americans who are concerned or uneasy with the direction that Donald Trump is taking America – that what they’d like to see is greater engagement with global organizations like the United Nations, like NATO.”

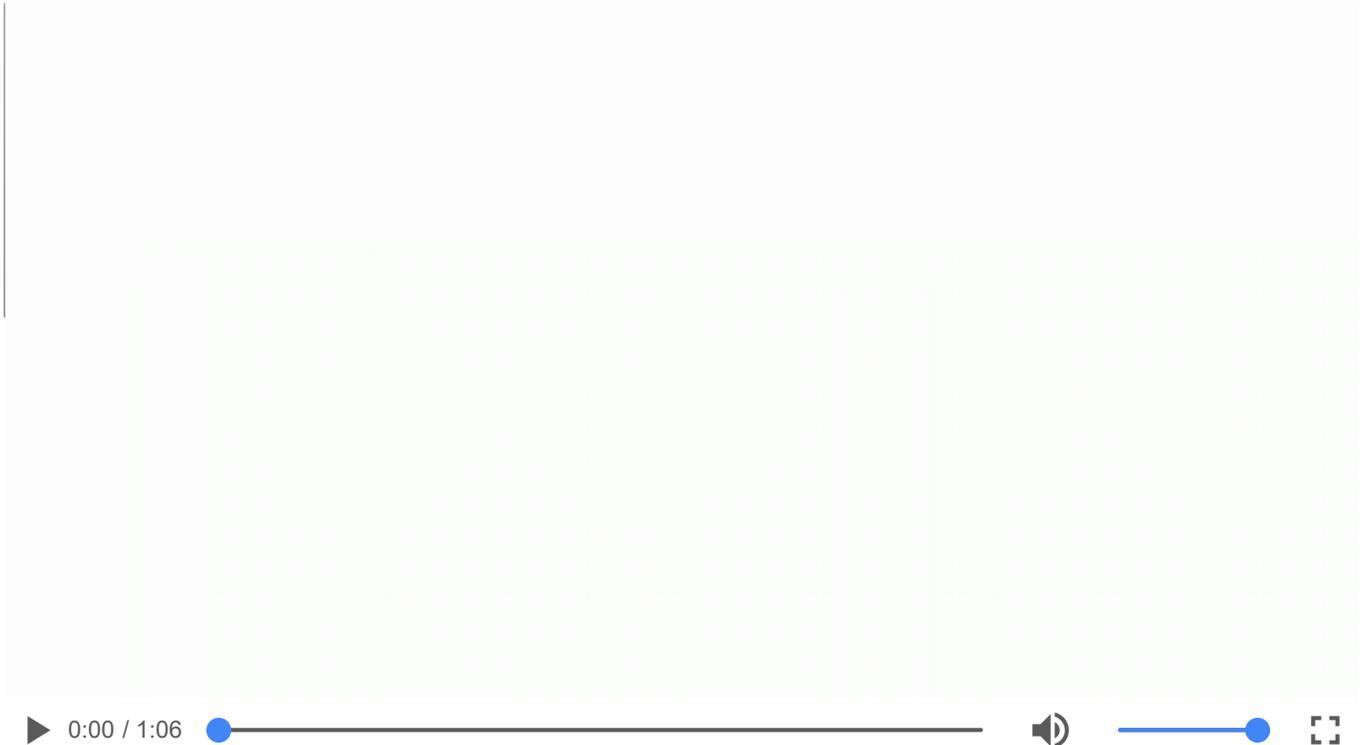
Posed the same question, 62 per cent of Canadians said the country should follow its interests.

This poll, conducted from June 7 to 9, surveyed 1,000 Canadians by phone and online, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. For the U.S. portion, 1,000 Americans were polled online, with no margin of error.

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