



Poll suggests Canadians overwhelmingly favour integrated border with U.S.

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OTTAWA - Canadians overwhelmingly favour co-operating with the United States to increase border security and ease obstacles to cross-border trade, a new poll suggests.

The Canadian Press Harris-Decima survey found that 75 per cent of respondents supported shared intelligence gathering. Eighty-four per cent supported harmonizing food-safety regulations.

And 70 per cent favoured creation of a bilateral agency to oversee the building of new border infrastructure.

All three elements are likely to be part of a sketchy perimeter security agreement, announced last week by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. President Barack Obama.

Under the agreement, senior officials from both countries have been assigned to develop an action plan aimed at deterring terrorists and improving border infrastructure.

They are also mandated to find ways to ease obstacles to the free flow of goods and services across the border by cutting red tape and harmonizing rules and regulations.

The group is to report directly to Harper and Obama within months.

Opposition parties have been accusing Harper of secretly negotiating a deal that could force Canada to adopt American standards on things like immigration and refugee policy and share detailed information about Canadian travellers with U.S. authorities.

But thus far at least, the poll suggests Canadians don't share concerns of the opposition parties about a possible erosion of Canada's sovereignty or a potential invasion of privacy.

However, 59 per cent are opposed to the idea of needing visas to cross the border — a notion floated last week by Joe Lieberman, chairman of the U.S. Senate's influential homeland security committee. The Harper government has dismissed the idea.

Overall, the polls suggests Canadians are relatively happy with the current state of Canada-U.S. relations, with eight per cent describing them as excellent, 53 per cent as good and 33 per cent as fair. Just four per cent described relations as poor.

That positive view carried over to specific aspects of relations between the two countries:

- Tourism was deemed excellent by 11 per cent, good by 51, fair by 26 and poor by nine.
- Diplomatic relations were judged excellent by nine per cent, good by 46, fair by 34 and poor by six.
- Border security or crossing was deemed excellent by eight per cent, good by 42, fair by 34 and poor by 12.
- Cross-border trade was judged as excellent by six per cent, good by 40, fair by 38 and poor by 10.

Somewhat surprisingly, given Canadians' enthusiasm for Obama, 62 per cent said Canada-U.S. relations today are the same as they were five years ago, when the far less popular George W. Bush was president. Twenty-one per cent said relations are better and 14 per cent said they're worse.

The telephone survey of just over 1,000 Canadians was conducted Feb. 3 to Feb. 7 and is considered accurate to within plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times in 20.