

MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Canadians Question Afghanistan Mission, But Alberta Bucks the Trend

A majority of respondents in the country want the troops to leave before 2011, but Albertans support the established course of action.

[VANCOUVER – Jan. 3, 2009] – The views of Canadians on the mission in Afghanistan did not undergo any significant shift in the last two months of 2008, a new *Toronto Star* / Angus Reid poll has found. A majority of respondents still call for the conclusion of the military deployment before the scheduled end date of 2011, and roughly half of respondents doubt that the Afghan government will be able to sustain itself without international assistance.

Still, while Canadians appear to be both hesitant about the mission and adamant that the presence of Canadian troops is helping the Afghan people, Angus Reid Strategies surveys reveal that there is one province—Alberta—where satisfaction with the federal government's policies on this file remains remarkably high.

In the online survey of a representative national sample, 53 per cent of respondents call for the bulk of Canadian troops to be removed from Afghanistan before 2011, while three-in-ten (30%) would follow the scheduled plan to withdraw most Canadian soldiers by then. Only eight per cent of respondents would agree to an extension beyond 2011.

While solid majorities in Quebec (67%), Atlantic Canada (55%) and Ontario (52%) believe the mission in Afghanistan should conclude before 2011, only three-in-ten Albertans (29%) agree with this rationale. The Western province also has the highest proportion of respondents who support the government's proposal to withdraw in 2011 (43%, compared to 33% or less in every other region) and the highest number of people who would actually extend the mission beyond 2011 (18%, compared to 11% or less in every other region).

KEY FINDINGS

- **53% want the bulk of the troops to be withdrawn from Afghanistan before 2011**
- **58% disagree with the extension of the mission until 2011**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

From December 19 to December 20, 2008, Angus Reid Strategies conducted an online survey among 1,004 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

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While the decision taken by the House of Commons in March to authorize an extension of Canada's mission in Afghanistan until the end of 2011 did not sit well with Canadians, Alberta has bucked the national trend. Since July, a majority of respondents in the entire country have disagreed with the extension (58% in December). In Alberta, three-in-five respondents (60%) support the course of action sanctioned by federal lawmakers.

Albertans are also convinced that the Conservative government headed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper has effectively explained the mission in Afghanistan. While three-in-five Canadians (60%) question the way the federal administration has discussed the military deployment with Canadians, Alberta is the only region where a plurality of respondents (45% to 41%) remains supportive of the government's stance.

On other indicators of the way Canadians relate to the mission, the results are more uniform throughout the country. Three-in-four respondents (76%) believe Canada is shouldering too much of the burden of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission in Afghanistan, 54 per cent think the Afghan people are clearly benefiting from Canadian efforts in their country, and 52 per cent refer to the deployment as a war mission.

The possibility of reaching out to the Taliban was first discussed openly in July, as a way to allow the Afghan government to advance its peace efforts. Respondents in Canada have not welcomed this idea, with 52 per cent disagreeing with the Canadian government actively negotiating with the Taliban. This course of action finds some support in Quebec (48%), but considerable opposition in British Columbia (52%), Ontario (56%) and Alberta (62%).

The views of Canadians on the future of Afghanistan are particularly pessimistic. Half of respondents (49%) believe the Afghan government will not be able to take care of its own security needs without assistance from international troops in 2011, while only 15 per cent believe this is possible.

Analysis

Canada currently has the fifth largest contingent of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) led by NATO, and the third highest casualty total (106 fatalities, behind the U.S. and Britain). As things stand, the federal government appears adamant on fulfilling its obligations in Afghanistan without a new extension. There has already been a call for additional Canadian support from the incoming American administration, which was summarily dismissed by both Defence Minister Peter MacKay and Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon.

Almost a year after the Manley Report called on the prime minister to "take a more active role" in the way the Afghanistan mission is being discussed with Canadians, the federal administration continues to fare poorly in its communications efforts. Since July, roughly three-in-five Canadians are dissatisfied with the way the military deployment is being explained, with the bulk of sympathy for the government coming in the Conservative stronghold of Alberta.

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The decision to extend the mission until 2011 was taken in March, when the Conservatives retained a large advantage over the Liberal Party in Angus Reid Strategies voting intention surveys. Tories and Grits ended up supporting the motion, while the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Bloc Québécois opposed it. Harper chose the early stages of the federal electoral campaign in September to assure that there would be no new extension of the mission, effectively defusing a thorny issue in his quest—ultimately unsuccessful—to achieve a majority with the support of voters in Quebec.

A majority of Canadians expressed, throughout the second half of 2008, their disappointment with the extension of the mission and their wish for a quicker end to Canada's commitment. Canadian public opinion is in tune with the findings of similar surveys conducted in countries that also have deployed troops to Afghanistan.

The initial post-9/11 outpouring of support for military action has dramatically subsided after seven years of hostilities and mounting troop fatalities. Over the past few months, respondents in Australia, Britain, the Czech Republic, France and Sweden have reassessed the situation, and called either for the end of their respective deployments, or for regulations that would prevent their governments from sending more soldiers to Afghanistan.

In 2008, the Afghanistan mission allowed the Conservative minority government to re-energize its base, but the questions raised by the Manley Report, particularly on the communications strategy, persist. The downward trend in support for the military deployment is not exclusive to Canada, but eerily similar to the experience of other NATO allies and contact countries.

This year, the mission faces new challenges. Either a new federal political campaign, or the revival of the proposed opposition coalition, could lead to a re-evaluation of the military deployment, particularly since the two parties that the Liberals need to form a government without a new election—the NDP and the Bloc—have called for the end of Canada's commitment to Afghanistan.

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Mission in Afghanistan							
As you may know, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said that Canada would withdraw the bulk of the troops currently deployed in Afghanistan in 2011. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?							
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
The bulk of the troops should be withdrawn from Afghanistan before 2011	53%	42%	29%	52%	52%	67%	55%
The bulk of the troops should be withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2011 as scheduled	30%	33%	43%	33%	33%	23%	26%
The bulk of the troops should remain in Afghanistan after 2011	8%	11%	18%	6%	7%	5%	8%
Not sure	8%	14%	10%	9%	8%	5%	11%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan		
As you may know, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said that Canada would withdraw the bulk of the troops currently deployed in Afghanistan in 2011. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?		
	December 2008	November 2008
The bulk of the troops should be withdrawn from Afghanistan before 2011	53%	53%
The bulk of the troops should be withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2011 as scheduled	30%	33%
The bulk of the troops should remain in Afghanistan after 2011	8%	7%
Not sure	8%	8%

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Mission in Afghanistan							
Do you think the Afghan government will be able to take care of its own security needs without assistance from international troops in 2011?							
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Yes	15%	13%	9%	14%	16%	19%	10%
No	49%	54%	55%	54%	46%	46%	62%
Not sure	35%	34%	37%	32%	38%	35%	28%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan		
Do you think the Afghan government will be able to take care of its own security needs without assistance from international troops in 2011?		
	December 2008	November 2008
Yes	15%	19%
No	49%	47%
Not sure	35%	34%

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Mission in Afghanistan							
As you may know, the House of Commons has authorized an extension of Canada's mission in Afghanistan until the end of 2011. Do you agree or disagree with the decision to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan until the end of 2011?							
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Agree	35%	38%	60%	39%	36%	24%	33%
Disagree	58%	55%	31%	53%	56%	71%	63%
Not sure	7%	6%	10%	8%	7%	5%	5%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan				
As you may know, the House of Commons has authorized an extension of Canada's mission in Afghanistan until the end of 2011. Do you agree or disagree with the decision to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan until the end of 2011?				
	December 2008	November 2008	September 2008	July 2008
Agree	35%	40%	34%	36%
Disagree	58%	54%	59%	58%
Not sure	7%	6%	7%	6%

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Mission in Afghanistan							
In your view, is the Canadian mission in Afghanistan...							
	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
A peace mission	26%	33%	30%	27%	26%	25%	17%
A war mission	54%	45%	45%	53%	53%	58%	64%
Not sure	20%	22%	24%	20%	21%	17%	19%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan				
In your view, is the Canadian mission in Afghanistan...				
	December 2008	November 2008	September 2008	July 2008
A peace mission	26%	28%	27%	28%
A war mission	54%	52%	54%	53%
Not sure	20%	20%	19%	19%

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Mission in Afghanistan							
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? – The Harper government has effectively explained the mission in Afghanistan.							
		Region					
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Agree	33%	28%	45%	42%	36%	25%	27%
Disagree	60%	63%	41%	54%	55%	69%	72%
Not sure	7%	9%	14%	3%	9%	6%	1%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan				
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? – The Harper government has effectively explained the mission in Afghanistan.				
	December 2008	November 2008	September 2008	July 2008
Agree	33%	35%	29%	28%
Disagree	60%	56%	62%	61%
Not sure	7%	8%	9%	11%

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Mission in Afghanistan							
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? – Canada is shouldering too much of the burden of NATO's mission in Afghanistan.							
	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Agree	76%	74%	63%	76%	75%	76%	93%
Disagree	17%	20%	21%	19%	16%	20%	4%
Not sure	7%	6%	16%	5%	9%	4%	3%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan				
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? – Canada is shouldering too much of the burden of NATO's mission in Afghanistan.				
	December 2008	November 2008	September 2008	July 2008
Agree	76%	72%	75%	73%
Disagree	17%	18%	14%	16%
Not sure	7%	10%	11%	11%

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Mission in Afghanistan							
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? – The Afghan people are clearly benefiting from Canadian efforts in their country.							
		Region					
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Agree	54%	58%	61%	66%	55%	47%	48%
Disagree	27%	20%	21%	22%	24%	37%	27%
Not sure	19%	22%	18%	12%	22%	16%	25%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan				
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? – The Afghan people are clearly benefiting from Canadian efforts in their country.				
	December 2008	November 2008	September 2008	July 2008
Agree	54%	52%	55%	59%
Disagree	27%	26%	28%	24%
Not sure	19%	22%	17%	17%

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Mission in Afghanistan

Some people have stated that officials from foreign nations should reach out to the Taliban if this helps the peace efforts led by the elected Afghan government. Would you agree or disagree with the Canadian government actively negotiating with the Taliban?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Agree	36%	34%	25%	37%	28%	48%	43%
Disagree	52%	52%	62%	47%	56%	43%	51%
Not sure	13%	13%	13%	15%	16%	9%	5%

TREND - Mission in Afghanistan

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	December 2008	November 2008	September 2008	July 2008
Agree	36%	42%	34%	35%
Disagree	52%	46%	49%	49%
Not sure	13%	12%	16%	16%

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From the Angus Reid Global Monitor

Australia

More Australians Want to Leave Afghanistan

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/31914>

Oct. 3, 2008

Britain

Britons Object to More Troops in Afghanistan

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/32337>

Dec. 1, 2008

Czech Republic

Czech Oppose More Afghan Deployments

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/31995>

Oct. 12, 2008

France

French Want Soldiers Out of Afghanistan

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/31833>

Sept. 25, 2008

Sweden

Swedes Reject Troop Increase in Afghanistan

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/32295>

Nov. 28, 2008

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Angus Reid Strategies is a full-service polling and market research firm which is a leader in the use of the Internet and rich media technology to collect high-quality, in-depth insights for a wide array of clients. Dr. Angus Reid and the Angus Reid Strategies team are pioneers in online research methodologies, and have been conducting online surveys since 1995.

Angus Reid Strategies, along with its sister company, Vision Critical, is now the largest Canadian-owned market research enterprise. In addition to its five offices in Canada—located in Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Toronto, and Montreal—the firm also has offices in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, London, Paris and Sydney. Its team of specialists provides solutions across every type and sector of research, and currently serves over 200 international clients.

Angus Reid Strategies polls are conducted using the Angus Reid Forum online panel (www.angusreidforum.com), which is recruited via an industry-leading process that incorporates a randomized, widespread invitation approach and a triple opt-in screening procedure. The panel is maintained through state-of-the-art sampling techniques and frequent verifications of personal identity, contact information, and demographic characteristics. This premier online survey platform presents respondents with highly visual, interactive, and engaging surveys, ensuring that panel members provide thoughtful and reliable responses.

Angus Reid Strategies, the only public opinion firm to exclusively use online methods to follow the views of the electorate during the 2008 federal campaign, offered the most accurate prediction of the results of Canada's 40th election.

http://angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/2008.10.15_Election.pdf

Since 2006, Angus Reid Strategies has covered six provincial elections in Canada—more than any other pollster in the country—and the results have accurately predicted the outcome of each of these democratic processes.

http://angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/2008.03.28_Anniversary_1.pdf

http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/2008.12.09_QuebecElection.pdf

More information on the way Angus Reid Strategies conducts public opinion research can be found at <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/ARS.ARF.WP.pdf>

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**For more information, please contact
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

**Copies of this poll are available on our website:
www.angusreidstrategies.com**

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