

CRIME LEGISLATION

Canadians Clearly Support Ideas to Deal with Gang Violence

Vast majority agrees with tougher sentences for gang and drug related crimes. Support for legal marijuana remains high across the country.

[VANCOUVER – Mar. 5, 2009] – Canadians are overwhelmingly supportive of introducing tougher laws to deal with an apparent surge in gang activity, a new Angus Reid Strategies poll has found.

In the online survey of a representative national sample, 45 per cent of Canadian adults say that there is a serious national gang problem currently affecting everyone. Half of respondents, on the other hand, believe that Canada's gang problem is confined to specific areas and people.

Respondents across the country are clearly supportive of tougher legislation to deal with gang problems. The vast majority of respondents (at least 93%) agree with two measures recently proposed by the Conservative government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper: treating any gang-related homicide as a first-degree murder, and ensuring mandatory minimum prison sentences for serious drug-crimes, such as drive-by shootings.

There is also a high level of support for three initiatives recently discussed by British Columbia Attorney General Wally Oppal: loosening the evidence disclosure law to allow for a speedy prosecution of gang members

KEY FINDINGS

- **45% say Canada has a national gang problem**
- **At least 76% support tougher legislation to deal with gang-related crime**
- **89% endorse a national drug prevention campaign**
- **76% support proposal to send marijuana growers and dealers to jail**
- **51% want to keep “harm-reduction” programs, such as supervised injection sites**
- **50% support legalizing marijuana**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

From February 26 to February 27, 2009 Angus Reid Strategies conducted an online survey among 1,007 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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(81%); eliminating the sentencing provision that grants offenders two days credit for every one day spent in custody awaiting trial (76%), and allowing law enforcement officials to have wiretap access to intercept cell phone conversations and other wireless communications (68%).

In BC, where people have been exposed to several news stories related to gang violence this year, support for the five measures is just as high as everywhere else in Canada.

While support for tougher legislation on gang activity runs high from coast to coast, Canadians are not as warm to the Harper administration's initiatives to fight the consumption and trafficking of illicit drugs—a package introduced in 2007 that was never endorsed by the House of Commons.

Half of Canadians (49%) say the country faces a national drug abuse problem, although one third (34%) say this problem is confined to specific areas and people.

Three-in-four Canadians (76%) back the proposal to ensure mandatory minimum prison sentences and large fines for marijuana grow operators and drug dealers. However, 50 per cent also support the legalization of this particular drug—less than eight per cent of Canadians would legalize hard drugs such as cocaine or crystal meth.

Almost half of Canadians (48%) oppose the current federal administration's decision to scrap the previous government's marijuana decriminalization legislation. A majority (51%) also rejects the elimination of "harm-reduction" programs, such as supervised injection sites and needle-exchange programs. The proportion of respondents who oppose these two initiatives has decreased since May 2008.

The one idea that is clearly backed by Canadians is the introduction of a National Anti-Drug Strategy to discourage young Canadians from using drugs. Nine-in-ten respondents (89%) support this initiative.

Analysis

The survey shows a country that appears to relate differently to gangs and drugs. While roughly the same proportion of Canadians believe Canada's gang and drug problems are serious (45% for gangs, 49% for drugs), respondents are more likely to deem gangs as a situation that only affects specific areas and people (50%) than to think of drug abuse in the same light (34%).

The high level of support for the proposals to deal with gang violence shows that Canadians are willing to amend existing guidelines to deal with gang violence. Even the controversial policy to allow wiretaps is supported by two-thirds of respondents, and the two ideas recently introduced by the federal government—mandatory minimum sentences for serious drug crimes and making gang-related homicides a first-degree murder charge—are almost universally backed.

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Drugs, as has been the case for the past two years, continue to be seen differently. Half of Canadians—and 64 per cent of respondents in BC—continue to endorse the legalization of marijuana, but less than one-in-ten believe other drugs should be readily available.

While at least three-in-four respondents back a National Anti-Drug Strategy and mandatory prison sentences for and large fines for marijuana grow operators and drug dealers, the government's approach to "harm reduction" and its decision to steer clear from decriminalization is not as widely supported.

Related Releases:

May 2008

Canadians Want Federal Government to Retain Drug Harm Reduction Programs

http://www.angus-reid.com/uppdf/2008.05.12_Drugs_1.pdf

October 2007

Canadians support some of the federal government's policies; express concern about a national drug abuse problem

http://www.angus-reid.com/uppdf/2007.10.17_DrugStrategy.pdf

June 2007

Drugs a National Problem - Canadians Would Mix Grit and Tory Policies

http://www.angus-reid.com/uppdf/ARS_Drugs.pdf

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Crime Legislation							
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?							
	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Canada has a serious gang problem and it affects the whole country	45%	57%	59%	52%	42%	40%	37%
Canada's gang problem is confined to specific areas and people	50%	38%	41%	45%	53%	53%	59%
Canada does not have a serious gang problem	3%	2%	0%	3%	3%	5%	1%
Not sure	2%	3%	0%	0%	3%	3%	4%

Crime Legislation							
Do you support or oppose each of these measures to deal with crime? – “Strongly support” and “Moderately support” listed							
	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Ensuring mandatory minimum prison sentences for serious drug-crimes, such as drive-by shootings	94%	95%	96%	95%	95%	92%	92%
Making any gang-related homicide a first-degree murder charge	93%	96%	91%	88%	94%	92%	94%
Loosening the evidence disclosure law to allow for a speedy prosecution of gang members	81%	86%	84%	85%	80%	76%	86%
Eliminating the sentencing provision that grants offenders two days credit for every one day spent in custody awaiting trial	76%	80%	87%	63%	79%	70%	72%
Allowing law enforcement officials to have wiretap access to intercept cell phone conversations and other wireless communications	68%	64%	70%	68%	64%	77%	61%

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Crime Legislation							
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?							
		Region					
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Canada has a serious drug abuse problem and it affects the whole country	49%	58%	54%	58%	44%	43%	62%
Canada's drug abuse problem is confined to specific areas and people	34%	26%	35%	33%	36%	37%	29%
Canada does not have a serious drug abuse problem	8%	9%	3%	5%	10%	10%	4%
Not sure	9%	7%	7%	3%	10%	11%	6%

Crime Legislation							
Do you support or oppose the legalization of each of the following drugs? — “Strongly support” and “Moderately support” listed							
		Region					
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Marijuana	50%	64%	46%	53%	51%	42%	52%
Ecstasy	8%	10%	8%	9%	8%	7%	4%
Powder cocaine	7%	10%	5%	9%	7%	6%	4%
Heroin	7%	11%	7%	10%	6%	7%	4%
Methamphetamine or “crystal meth”	7%	7%	5%	9%	7%	6%	4%
Crack cocaine	6%	8%	5%	9%	6%	6%	4%

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Crime Legislation

Do you support or oppose each of these measures proposed by the federal government to deal with drug abuse? – “**Strongly support**” and “**Moderately support**” listed

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Introducing a National Anti-Drug Strategy, including a nationwide awareness campaign to discourage young Canadians from using drugs	89%	81%	81%	82%	92%	91%	91%
Ensuring mandatory minimum prison sentences and large fines for marijuana grow operators and drug dealers	76%	72%	85%	79%	71%	83%	68%
Eliminating “harm reduction” programs, such as supervised injection sites and needle-exchange programs	41%	30%	48%	55%	43%	39%	29%
Scrapping the previous government’s marijuana decriminalization legislation	40%	33%	41%	43%	41%	45%	30%

Crime Legislation

Do you support or oppose each of these measures proposed by the federal government to deal with drug abuse? – “**Strongly oppose**” and “**Moderately oppose**” responses

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL
Introducing a National Anti-Drug Strategy, including a nationwide awareness campaign to discourage young Canadians from using drugs	8%	14%	16%	18%	6%	3%	5%
Ensuring mandatory minimum prison sentences and large fines for marijuana grow operators and drug dealers	19%	24%	13%	17%	23%	11%	25%
Eliminating “harm reduction” programs, such as supervised injection sites and needle-exchange programs	51%	66%	42%	43%	48%	51%	61%
Scrapping the previous government’s marijuana decriminalization legislation	48%	53%	46%	51%	49%	44%	54%

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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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