
January 2003

Perceptions and Realities of North America: What the Polls Say about Canadians and Americans Regarding Security and the Economy - U.S. Speaker

Thomas Riehle

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cuslj>

Recommended Citation

Thomas Riehle, *Perceptions and Realities of North America: What the Polls Say about Canadians and Americans Regarding Security and the Economy - U.S. Speaker*, 29 Can.-U.S. L.J. 177 (2003)
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cuslj/vol29/iss1/28>

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canada-United States Law Journal by an authorized administrator of Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES OF NORTH AMERICA:
WHAT THE POLLS SAY ABOUT CANADIANS AND
AMERICANS REGARDING SECURITY AND THE ECONOMY

Thomas Riehle[†]
U.S. Speaker

Michael and I are colleagues, but we do not get to spend nearly enough time together, so I appreciate the opportunity you have given us to get together here. I live in Washington, D.C. and I am already making plans for tomorrow. I have a lot of errands to run and I know there will be a lot of streets closed. I am going to work my way around the protests, in order to get this daughter picked up and this son delivered. You may be saying to yourself, "The war is over." The anti-war protesters are going to be demoralized. There is not going to be much of a protest. If you said that to me, you would be wrong. The plans indicate it is going to be a huge protest. It is not going to be just about the Iraq War.

It is going to be an enormous anti-World Trade Organization protests in Washington tomorrow. Sure, we are back there. The war in Iraq is over. The war that the demonstrators were fighting in Washington prior to September 11th is back. It is Dagos man against Seattle woman. It all starts again tomorrow and that is the theme that I want to pick up on today.

In terms of the relationship between Canada and the U.S., in a lot of ways the war in Iraq is over. So once again, we will be back to the relationship between Canada and the U.S. and the divisions that face the world between globalism and protectionism; between Dagos man and Seattle woman. The Iraq war is over.

[†] Thomas Riehle is the President and COO of Ipsos U.S. Public Affairs. He has been a pollster for over fifteen years in Washington and, prior to his current appointment, has served on several Democratic political campaigns, including those of Michael Dukakis and Alan Cranston, and as primary pollster for such diverse groups as Time-Warner, MCI, Microsoft, the Cousteau Society, and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Mr. Riehle started his career as an associate editor for *Politics Today* and as an assistant editor at *Harper's* magazine. From 1980 to 1984, he held various positions, including serving as the Editor in Chief of *Opinion Outlook* and as the Political Research Director for the *Los Angeles Times*. In 1985, he was a senior staff member for Representative Howard Berman of California, and from 1986 to 1987, he served as Senior Analyst at Cambridge Survey Research. Mr. Riehle received his bachelor's degree from Yale University.

SUPPORT FOR ACTION IN IRAQ

I can sum up what happened in terms of public opinion pretty quickly. During the war in Iraq, there were only three major countries in the world where a majority of the public favored U.S. actions in Iraq. One of them was the United States, where 61 percent were in favor of immediate military action. A little less than 30 percent wanted further inspections. A second country that supported U.S. action was Australia. There a majority, 52 percent, favored immediate military action. I cannot explain why, but there they are. The third country was Israel. In Israel, 70 percent supported immediate action by the United States.

There are only three countries in the world where opinion has changed over the last 21 days; since the shooting started. One of those countries, as you may have guessed, is the United States, where support for the war went from 60 percent to 72 percent and has stayed there. Once the shooting started, people rallied behind Bush and the war. The same can be said in the United Kingdom where a majority opposed the war prior to the shooting, but the majority favors it now. Twenty-one days ago, Tony Blair's hold on government was in danger, especially within the Labor Party. Today, he enjoys majority support. The only other country you can find where opinion has really changed in three weeks is France. France led the opposition to the war and still does. Opposition to the war in France went from 60 percent among the public to 70 percent.

In every other country that I have been able to find polls dealing with both before the shooting started and today, there was no change in public opinion. In every other country that opposed the war before it began, that opposition has firmed up over the course of the last three weeks. Why is that? For United States citizens and for citizens of the United Kingdom, what they saw on television involved their young people, their young men and women, and they rallied to support it. France, for its own reasons, watched what happened on television with intense interest. What they saw caused many people to decide they were opposed to the war after all. In every other country, including Canada, watching the endless war coverage on television was essentially spectating. There was not that sense of involvement. Therefore, no opinions were changed by what people saw.

Price of Opposition

One thing has begun to develop in world public opinion. You are beginning to see a little bit of ambivalence developing about opposition to the war. To put it in the crassest possible terms, people are beginning to ask, "What price are we going to pay for opposing the U.S.?" This question becomes more pressing now that the war is over. This issue applies more to

Canada than just about almost any other country in the world. What price are we going to pay for failing to join this coalition of the willing?

Michael's division conducted a poll that sort of captures that sense of ambivalence. Sixty-seven percent of Canadians said a couple weeks ago, they were glad we made this decision. They are glad we did not get involved in this war. They said we made the right decision. In the same poll, in the same interview with the same people, 62 percent said we are going to pay a price for this. When you add the two up, a slim majority, about 55 percent, said we wish we were fighting with our friends, the Yanks, in this war. So, on the one hand Canadian's feel they made the right decision, but on the other hand the majority say they wish we were there. That sense of ambivalence is beginning to develop.

TRENDS IN CANADA-U.S. RELATIONSHIP AFTER THE WAR

There are three themes we are going to talk about. First, there is no reason for this ambivalence. There is no sense in the United States that U.S. consumers are in any kind of boycotting mood right now. No reason for concern. Second, the border between Canada and the U.S. after the war in Iraq is finished is a border that unites us in support of trade and globalization against the interests of preferences and nationalism. The border issues facing us right now as the war ends shows how Canadian and U.S. interests both support free trade. Third, the security issue facing us in this post war world is an issue of economic security. How do these two countries succeed together? All of this is a long-winded way of delivering one reassuring note that I wanted to deliver. All Canadians appear to be in a real tizzy about Chretien's decision not to join the coalition and believe that we going to pay a price. One message I want to deliver: we are not boycotting the Dixie Chicks. We are not boycotting.

Who is Being Punished?

We asked people in a poll last week in the U.S. if they were more likely or less likely to buy goods and services from these countries than you were six months ago. Yes, there has been an impact from all of the diplomacy, all of the fights, and everything that has happened since. The majority of Americans say, "I am less likely to buy French goods than I was six months ago." Forty percent say they are less likely to buy German goods. The majority of people in the U.S. are seeking a way to punish the French for their dissent.

When it comes to the Germans, we are not quite sure where they stand. A slightly smaller number want to punish the Germans. Thirty-eight percent are trying to find a way to reward Great Britain for its support. Then there is Canada. Who let Canada off the hook? Only 26 percent say they are less

likely to buy Canadian goods. What is that about? We know who our friends are. We know who our enemies are in this recent adventure. Eighty-six percent know that the United Kingdom supported the United States in the war against Iraq and 72 percent are aware Australia was on our side. Sixty percent are aware Spain was on our side. That is because there was this very well-publicized summit meeting out in the ocean with the Spanish Prime Minister. We definitely know France was not on our side. Eighty-three percent of Americans said France was opposed to us on this war.

But when it comes to Canada, 47 percent say Canadians were with us and 44 percent say Canadians were against us. Who believes the Canadians were with us? An uninformed 47 percent say the Canadians were with us. The kinds of people who said that Canadians were with us included 58 percent of people who were unemployed. Those who you would think were watching television all the time. The television coverage obviously did not go into who is on our side and who is not. Those people whose income is under \$25,000. Most people who live in the Midwest or out west believe Canada was on our side. Who believed Canada was opposed to us? The majority of people who have a college education, incomes above \$50,000, and who are middle-aged. The people age 35 to 64 recognized that Canada took another position. The youngest and the very oldest believed Canada must be with us.

The Reality of Boycotting

I will bet you are wondering in the aftermath, as scores are settled, are Americans going to be informed that Canada was not with us. And then what happens to us? Here is the good news. The fact is that Americans are not in any kind of boycotting mood. I asked them last week to tell me how they personally feel about boycotting the goods and the services of countries that did not support us in the war. On a scale of zero to ten, where ten means you are definitely going to boycott products from those countries, and zero means you are definitely not going to boycott products from those countries. Twenty-nine percent said they were not going to boycott. They scored a zero, a one, or a two. Thirty-six percent said I am going to boycott. They fell in at eight, nine, or ten. At the extremes where people really have opinions to express, the numbers were exactly equal and extremely polarized. On one end they were saying, "I am a zero and I am absolutely not going to boycott." On the other side they were saying, "I am a ten and I am absolutely going to boycott." We are totally split on the issue. Nothing is going to happen, believe me. Do not expect U.S. consumers to suddenly change their actions or their tunes.

What is interesting is who falls into each camp and who is saying I am going to boycott and who is saying I am not. People who say I am not going

to boycott over this issue tend to be college educated, and they tend to be Democrats and Independents, not Republicans. They tend to live in the west, and they tend to live in urban areas.

There is also a group of Americans who say there is nothing about a decision a country makes that is going to change my consuming patterns. These are the groups that feel that way: the best educated, those most alienated from the current Administration, Democrats and Independents, people who live out west who are furthest from the intensity of feeling about the war on terrorism or the war on Iraq, and live in urbanized areas.

Who are the boycotters? The committed boycotters in the U.S. are those who say, "I am a ten and I am really going to make them pay." The committed boycotters are the strangest group of boycotters you have ever seen. They are Republicans. They are people with incomes above \$50,000. They are also people who live in rural areas in the south. I do not see this boycott movement really gelling and coming to much of anything.

When we probed a little bit and asked people in our survey if they remember the coalition of the willing and if Canada was part of that coalition, a lot of people say they are not sure they signed up. We have the same 48 percent who say they know Canada was not with us, a lot of people who do not know, and only a third who say Canada was definitely with us. Finally, our interviewers spilled the beans. They said, Canada was not with us in this coalition and they opposed the war in Iraq. What you see is that when we asked this group that is now informed that the Canadians were not with us, "Are you more likely or less likely to buy their products?" Forty percent say less likely and eight percent say more likely.

The boycotting issue is a lot of lip service. Not much is going to happen, but this is going to have an impact on feelings about Canada. In fact, you see that same familiar 47 percent who say that Canada's not doing enough in securing the U.S.-Canadian border. This question has bizarrely partisan answers. Democrats say Canada is doing plenty. Forty-five percent of Democrats say Canadians are doing all they need on support of border security. The majority, Republicans and Independents, say they are not doing enough. Among Republicans, 28 percent say they are doing enough, 54 percent say not enough is being done. This is not an answer about border security. This is an answer about whether they are supporting the President's policies. Independents go along with Republicans on this. Forty percent say they are not doing enough. That is not the worst score on the scoreboard.

Is the United Nations doing enough to free the world of weapons of mass destruction? Seventy percent of Americans say no. Is France doing enough in fighting the war on terrorism? Sixty-eight percent said no. So, do not feel your 47 percent is a failing grade. When it comes to the war, the public is very aware of the role of the U.K. and France. They may try to reward the

U.K., but the feelings are not very intense and it is not likely much will come of it.

There is an intense desire among elites, among the highest income, the highest educated, the kinds of Americans who are usually the most pro-free trade, to punish the French. As I said, that is not a group of people who I expect to really carry out those boycott threats. Additionally, Canada is really not a significant part of this global score settling. This thing with France may go on a while. I found this news story and I thought I would share it just as a way of saying I do not think we are going to settle this with France tomorrow. There was a shopkeeper in France who said he was going to take part in a boycott against U.S. products by not accepting U.S. credit cards.¹ He added, I do not think that will affect my business much.² This makes me think it might go on for a while.

Beyond Terrorism

There are issues in the U.S. as a result of terrorism in the war that I like to talk about that. We are over our fear of terrorism and what happened after September 11th. We are focused on the role of France, the United Kingdom, and to some extent the rest of the world. For the conflict ahead, as the war ends, what we see in U.S. attitudes is a focus on the old issues that were there before September 11th; globalism versus protectionism. You know, Dago man versus Seattle woman. An anglophone world where the economy's healthy and happy, versus a France and a Germany that are really suffering crippling unemployment. In that conflict, the United States and the current U.S. Administration really needs Canada. Canada cannot be irrelevant.

We asked what are the most important issues facing the United States today. We ask it in the context of today compared to one year ago. Foreign affairs remains a high score on this scoreboard, but the content has changed. Instead of it all being about terrorism, last week it was about the war in Iraq. The economy is zooming up in terms of concerns. In Canada, there is a real bullish feeling. The United States is very concerned about the economy. Other domestic issues remain big in the United States, as is true in Canada.

Issues about healthcare and education are rising on the American political agenda. The fear about terrorism is gone. All the old issues are back. We can tell that over a long period of time. We did a three trend series from our U.S. polling. The top is our cash index, measuring consumer attitudes in the U.S. Consumer attitudes fell off the table in June of last year and they have never really recovered. Presidential approval declined at the same time. The

¹ *Europeans thumbing their noses at U.S. products*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, April 1, 2003 available at 2003 WL 3182015.

² *Id.*

sense the country was going in the right direction also collapsed last June. The only recovery was a small blip in November of 2002, which was enough to allow the Republicans to take control of Congress. Then the decline continued. Once the war started, everything changed. I would suggest we are heading into a period of real concern about the economy with Republicans in control of both the White House and Congress. They will have to answer for concerns about education, healthcare, and the economy.

FUTURE OF CANADA-U.S. RELATIONSHIP

Looking ahead, what is the relationship between the United States and Canada and what are the issues in the world? There are four issues weighing on the United States dependence on Canada in the year ahead. We conducted a poll in late February and early March in nine countries simultaneously. I am just going to tell you about a few countries. We asked people in these nine countries, should your foreign policy bring you closer to the United States or distance yourself more. Remember, these were questions asked before the shooting started. It was done at a time when the debate was focused on if the United States is going to bring us into a war or not. In Canada and the U.K., the majority said we should distance ourselves. In France, a strong majority said our country's foreign policy is correct and we should be in opposition to Bush's adventurism in Iraq. Look at Germany. Remember, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder had no chance to win his re-election until he took an extreme anti-American position. There is a real sense in Germany that stance may have gone too far. The German public wonders if they should try to get closer to the United States. That sense of ambivalence was already there before the war.

A second issue, globalization, has champions and it has foes in the world. We asked people if expanded trade and globalization is a good or bad thing. The United States and Canada share the sense that trading is good for the world. The census is most strongly felt in Canada and the U.S. among men, especially younger men. It is a sense that you can see world-wide among younger people that there is a real benefit to expanding the North American economy or offering it to the rest of the world. In both the U.K. and Germany there is also support for free trade, but also a little ambivalence on the issue. A very different picture emerges in France. The only people who are very supportive of world trade are a very different group than you find in the United States or Canada. Trade in France is supported only among the very young, very leftist, and women.

There is a very different picture when you compare how the United States and Canada look at protectionism issues and how Europe does; in particular how France does. That is going to be an issue where the United States needs the support of Canada. Canadians share American tastes. The United States

counts on the Canadian economy. We asked people what they thought of L'Oreal, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's. In Canada and the U.S., Coke and McDonald's are better, more attractive than L'Oreal. Of course, in France L'Oreal is more attractive. What should strike you is that fewer than half of the adults in France, the U.K., or Germany have positive feelings about McDonald's. There is no way to run a retail company when fewer than half the people have any affection at all for you. I would say all of Europe threatens to become a no fry zone.

Finally, is the rest of the world as a result of the war in Iraq going to boycott U.S. products? This is where I want to bring it back together. You remember at the beginning of my presentation that I said 26 percent of Americans say they are going to boycott Canadian goods before we informed them Canada was on the wrong side. In the rest of the world, are they going to avoid U.S. products and services? In Canada 26 percent say they are going to avoid U.S. products. That is the high mark. Only 24 percent in France, 15 percent in Great Britain, and 19 percent in Germany say they are going to avoid U.S. products. There is no boycott war getting under way, but there clearly is a war developing between those in North America who favor free trade and those in France who favor protectionism. Somewhere in between is the United Kingdom, who is trying to figure out which side they are going to be on.