

British and Canadians Criticize Leaders for Following U.S. Lead

August 9, 2006

Polls Show Weak Support for Missions in Iraq and Afghanistan



Two of President Bush's closest allies—Great Britain's Tony Blair and Canada's Stephen Harper—have alienated voters by seeming to follow the United States' lead on policy toward the Middle East. Majorities in both nations now oppose their governments' indefinite commitment to U.S.-led operations in Iraq and the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush at the White House in May 2006 (White House photo/Shealah Craighead)

In contrast, French President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, whose government has been battered by scandals, have seen their sagging approval ratings rise since distancing themselves from the United States and Israel by calling for an immediate cease-fire in Lebanon.

British on Blair's Relationship with US

Some people say that the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has made Britain too close to the United States while others think he has got the relationship about right. Do you think that Britain is...

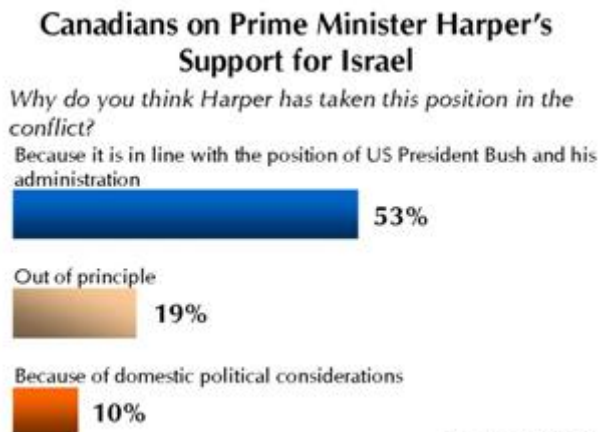


Guardian 7/06 A large majority of British voters—

including most Labor party supporters—want Prime Minister Tony Blair to pursue policies that are more independent of the Bush Administration. An [ICM poll](#) taken for the Guardian newspaper found that 63 percent agreed with the statement that Tony Blair had made Britain “too close to the U.S.A.” Only a third thought that relations between the two countries were “about right.” A mere 3 percent thought Britain should be closer to the United States.

The desire for greater distance between Bush and Blair included most Labor party supporters (54%) and strong majorities of Conservatives (68%) and Liberal Democrats (83%).

A majority of Canadians think Stephen Harper, Canada's Conservative Prime Minister, is following Washington's lead by backing Israel in its battle with Hezbollah. Most Canadians want their government to remain neutral in the conflict.



Globe and Mail/CTV 7/06 A poll for the Toronto Globe and Mail by

the [Strategic Counsel](#), conducted July 27-30, found that 53 per cent thought Harper backed Israel "because it is in line with the position of U.S. President Bush and his administration." Only one in five (19 percent) thought their prime minister based his support for Israel on principle.

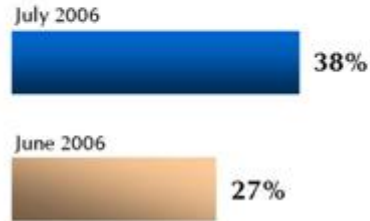
More than three out of four Canadians (77%) believe Canada should remain neutral in the conflict. Sixteen percent thought Canada should back Israel and only one percent favored supporting Hezbollah. The perception that the Canadian Prime Minister is too eager to back U.S. policies overseas may have contributed to the declining support for conservatives over the last few months. Since mid-April, Conservative support has slipped from 41 percent to 32 percent, according to polls by [Decima Research](#).

Chirac Gets a Much-Needed Lift

French Opinion of President Chirac

Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with Jacques Chirac as President of the Republic?

Percentage saying "satisfied"



Journal du Dimanche 7/06 Jacques Chirac's popularity hit record lows last month, not only for his presidency but for all French presidents since Charles de Gaulle founded the Fifth Republic in 1958. A poll by the [Ifop institute](#) for the Journal du Dimanche newspaper taken June 8-16 found that only 27 percent were satisfied with Chirac's performance while 70 percent disapproved. Villepin fared even worse: only 23 percent approved of the prime minister. The two right-wing leaders, who abandoned labor reforms last spring in the face of massive student protests, have also been weakened by scandals over the management of partly state-owned companies and allegations of political dirty tricks.

But Chirac's outspoken insistence on the need for an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon appears to have given him a boost among the French public. The most recent Ifop survey, taken July 20-21, shows an 11-point jump in Chirac's approval ratings over the past month: Thirty-eight percent said they were satisfied with the French president. Villepin's approval rose five points to 28 percent.

British, Canadian Support for Troops in Iraq, Afghanistan Softens

The British polls also indicate weak popular support for participation in joint military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, while Canadians are becoming increasingly disillusioned with their mission in Afghanistan.

Few Britons believe that the presence of British forces is "helping to improve the situation" in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the [Guardian/ICM](#) poll. Less than a fifth (19%) believed British forces were helping Iraq; more than seven in ten said the mission made either "no difference" (35%) or "things worse" (36%). Results were similar on Afghanistan. Less than a quarter (23%) thought British forces were helping the country; nearly two-thirds thought their presence either made no difference (34%) or made things worse (29%).

Seven out of ten Britons believe that by stationing troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, the government is "overstretching our military resources."

Support for the mission in Afghanistan is also sliding among Canadians. A majority of Canadians (52%) now believe that "Canadian troops should not be deployed in

Afghanistan and that they should be brought home as soon as possible,” an [Ipsos-Reid](#) poll taken July 25-27 found. The proportion of Canadians believing their troops should not be in Afghanistan has risen six points since March, according to the pollster.

Canada has about 2,200 troops in Afghanistan, most of whom are stationed in the southern province of Kandahar. Islamic insurgents from the revived Taliban militia have stepped up attacks on the NATO forces there, which took command of military operations in southern Afghanistan from the United States. Canada first deployed troops to the Central Asian nation four years ago, shortly after the U.S. invasion, but 15 of its 23 combat fatalities have occurred over the last six months, including four deaths in one day on Aug. 4, after this survey was completed.

A poll by the [Strategic Counsel](#) taken July 13-16 found that four out of ten Canadians (41%) wanted to bring Canadian troops “home now” from Afghanistan. Thirty-four percent favored allowing them to stay for a “limited period of time—two or more years” and 21 percent thought they should “stay as long as it takes to stabilize the country.”

A robust majority of Canadians (66%) supported joining the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan when their troops first deployed there in January 2002, according to Ipsos-Reid. That support had declined to 57 percent by May 2006.