

## Explaining the *Globe's* misleading anti-Harper poll



**COMPAS Inc.**  
**Public Opinion and Customer Research**

[www.compasresearch.com](http://www.compasresearch.com)

**Tel: 416-598-0310**

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*The Origin of the Project*

“On August 1, the *Globe and Mail* published an unusual poll on Canadians’ attitudes towards the federal government’s policies on the Hezbollah-Israel war. It was not up to the standards of the paper’s heritage nor that of its pollster.

I asked if the paper would consider carrying a short essay explaining the poll’s limitations. But an editor’s response was that it wasn’t ‘in the market’ for a second opinion. When the *Western Standard* asked if COMPAS would replicate the study to show how it was misleading, we were pleased to accept the invitation.”

Conrad Winn Ph.D.  
President

## **Background and Summary**

Stephen Harper’s Conservative party won Canada’s federal election on January 23, 2006. Just six months later, the *Globe and Mail* declared that Canadians were in uproar over the new federal government’s perceived pro-Israel, anti-Hizbollah stance. That’s what its polling showed, insisted the paper (20060801).

The Calgary-based *Western Standard* magazine wondered how this could possibly be. So it contracted with COMPAS for a second professional opinion, and our research firm promptly went into the field.

The COMPAS poll reveals an entirely different portrait of where Canadians stand, and we show why. The two polls ask similar questions. But the COMPAS/*Western Standard* poll allows respondents more response options and asks more questions.

If Toronto’s *Globe and Mail* had permitted respondents the same wide range of options, the *Globe*’s reporting would have had to be radically different. The headlines would have changed from



- ❑ “Only 32% Back PM on Mideast” to “Average 64% Backs PM on Mideast”
- ❑ “Survey good news for Bloc and Liberals” to “Some good news for Bloc but possible bad news for Liberals outside Quebec”
- ❑ “Harper’s stand on the Middle East leaves majority of Quebecers cold” to “Harper’s stand on the Middle East leaves majority of Quebecers luke-warm”.

The *Globe* reportage carried so much negative news for the Prime Minister and Israel and so much good news for Hizbollah that a foreign reader of the paper might be excused for concluding that Canadians have somehow come to embrace Hizbollah.

To find out how Canadians truly feel about Hizbollah, the COMPAS/*Western Standard* poll asked respondents if they favoured or opposed treating the organization as terrorist under Canadian law. Canadians favour treating Hizbollah as terrorist by a factor of 5:1 (2:1 in Quebec).

The 69% who favour continued treatment of Hizbollah as a terrorist organization were asked if they favour making it illegal to *support* the organization in Canada. Seventy-two percent said yes. Thus, about half of Canadians ( $0.69 \times 0.72 = 0.5$ ) favour making illegal mere support for Hizbollah (see tables at the bottom of the list of tables, below).

Asking people what they think of Hizbollah in Canada sheds light on how Canadians truly feel about the Harper government’s Mid-East stance. Half of Canadians would *criminalize* simple support for Hizbollah. This fact adds to the implausibility of the *Globe*’s portrait of a Canadian public hostile to Harper because of his verbal preference for Israel over Hizbollah.

The errors in the *Globe* poll are not limited to reporting how people feel about the government’s opposition to Hizbollah. In our view, the newspaper was also wrong in concluding that the public wants to send in Canadian peace-keepers. Respondents in the COMPAS poll were again offered a wider range of response options than in the *Globe* poll. A strong majority in the COMPAS poll oppose sending peace-keepers, at least until Hizbollah is disarmed.



## Canadian Opinion about Harper Policies

### What We Found—Harper Was Justified According to Large Majorities

Overwhelming majorities, unequivocal even in Quebec, believe that the federal government under Harper was justified in saying that Israel has a right to defend itself, Iran was wrong to arm Hizbollah and call for Israel's destruction, and Syria was wrong to arm Hizbollah (see tables, below).

Who started the war is the only issue on which Canadians are divided—38% agree with the government that Hizbollah started the war, 35% disagree.

### Where the *Globe* Erred—It Asked Only One Question, and Wording Was Poor

The *Globe* erred in providing only one policy position for respondents to evaluate instead of several. The paper erred in asking only about Israeli "actions" and doing so without providing a clear meaning. "Actions" is a slightly negative word that presupposes criticism. "Policy" is a neutral word.

"Actions" are also potentially vague. If "actions" are interpreted by respondents in the *Globe* survey as signifying airstrikes and bombing, the amazing finding is not that only 32% back government support for such actions but that as many as 32% do back the government.

In democracies, publics rarely see any justification in killing. The vast majority of Canadians who would disapprove of Israeli military action would simultaneously approve of the Israeli right of self-defence, a fact that could not come out in the *Globe* poll because the question was not asked.

## Explaining Why the Federal Government Holds the Policies It Does

### What We Found—Admiration for George Bush Dwarfed by Concern about Arab terrorism, Desire to Protect U.S. Market Access, and Belief in Israel's Right of Self-Defence

The *Western Standard* poll shows that Canadians believe that the federal government's position on the conflict is motivated above all by



- concern about Arab extremism and terrorism—28% (Arab extremism 12%, Hizbollah is terrorist, 12%, Syria as a problem 4%);
- protecting access to U.S. markets for our exports—21%;
- a belief in Israel's right to defend itself—19%;
- respect for Bush as a role model—12%.

The *Western Standard* and *Globe* polls could not be more different. If the *Globe's* poll is right and if the *Globe's* interpretation is well founded, most Canadians think that Ottawa's policies were driven only by a desire to emulate Bush. Our poll shows that only 12% of Canadians believe that the Canadian government's policy is motivated Harper's admiration for Bush.

### **Where the *Globe* Erred—Too Few Response Options and Poor Wording**

The *Globe* erred in providing too few response options, two of which were unlikely to be chosen. In an era of cynicism about politicians, it is unreasonable to expect many respondents to say that politicians, even those they respect, are motivated "out of principle." "Out of principle" is one of the three response options provided to respondents in the *Globe* poll for explaining the federal government's policy on the MidEast.

Respondents are also unlikely to select a second response option, "domestic political considerations." The language of the question is too hifalutin for many respondents to understand. Even for respondents with a Ph.D. in political science, its meaning is unclear. The response option could mean accommodating U.S. foreign policy for countless possible reasons, including

- in order to satisfy Canadians' desire to sell goods into the U.S. market,
- because Canadian voters see the worlds through the same prism as American voters,
- because Conservative voters insist on this approach, or
- in order to win over potential new Conservative voters.

The phrase is unclear.

The third option is easy to understand, and is widely embraced. Half of the *Globe* respondents opted for the "in line with U.S. President George W. Bush" option. This is more than four times the number of *Western Standard*



respondents saying that Ottawa's policy is explained by a desire to follow Bush as a "role model." In the *Globe* survey, 53% explained Canada's policy in terms of the Conservative government's wanting to be "in line with U.S. President W. Bush." By contrast, in the *Western Standard* survey only 11% explained Canada's policy in terms of the Conservative government's seeing the Bush administration as a "role model." One may wonder if the immense number of *Globe* respondents opting for the "in line" option is because they didn't understand or didn't like the only other two answers offered in the *Globe* study.

## Where Do Canadians Stand on Peace-Keeping

### **What We Found—Most Oppose Sending Peace-Keepers, Certainly Until Hizbollah is Disarmed**

We found that a near-two-thirds majority of Canadians do not want to send peace-keepers, at the very least not before Hizbollah is disarmed, as shown in a table at the bottom of this report.

### **Where the *Globe* Erred—Too Few Response Options**

According to the *Globe*'s poll, most Canadians want to send in peace-keepers—the opposite of our own finding. The paper's mistake was in not reminding respondents that peacekeepers had been driven out of Lebanon before.

Survey interviews are conducted without advance warning with respondents having virtually no time to think about the subject of the interview. Reminding respondents of a fact that might be outside their readily accessed memory when phoned without warning is essential for producing a quality estimate of where Canadians truly stand.

## Methodology

A national sample of n=500 is deemed accurate to within 4.5 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal investigator on this study was Dr. Conrad Winn, reachable at 416-598-0310.



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Globe/CTV

Do you agree with Mr. Harper's support for Israeli actions?

	Canada	Quebec
Agree	32	17
Disagree	45	61
Neither	18	15
Don't know	5	7

\*Unprompted

Western Standard/COMPAS

Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each of the following policies of the Government of Canada under Stephen Harper on the Middle East war

	Agree	Disagree	DNK*
Israel has a right of self-defense			
Canada	82	13	5
Quebec	70	23	7
Rest of Canada	85	10	5
Iran was wrong to arm Hezbollah and call for the destruction of Israel			
Canada	69	20	12
Quebec	53	38	10
Rest of Canada	74	14	12
Syria was wrong to arm Hezbollah and disobey the United Nations resolution requiring Syria to keep guns out of Lebanon			
Canada	68	18	14
Quebec	56	31	13
Rest of Canada	72	14	14
Hezbollah in Lebanon started the war			
Canada	38	35	27
Quebec	25	43	32
Rest of Canada	42	32	26
Average of the four policies equally weighted			
Canada	64	22	15
Quebec	51	34	16
Rest of Canada	68	18	14



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**Globe/CTV**

*Why do you think Mr. Harper has taken this position? (supports Israeli actions)*

	Canada	Quebec
Because it is in line with U.S. President George W. Bush and his administration	53	72
Out of principle	19	11
Domestic political considerations	10	7
Other/don't know	18	10

**Western Standard/COMPAS**

*Do you think that the opinions of the Government of Canada on the Middle East are mainly because it believes... [RANDOMIZE]  
[choose one]*

	Canada	Quebec	RoC
Earning U.S. goodwill protects Canada's economic interests	21	21	22
Israel has a right of self-defense	19	14	20
Arab extremism is a problem	12	13	12
Hizbollah is terrorist	12	11	13
President Bush is a role model	12	11	13
Syria and Iran are problems	4	5	4
<i>Sum of Arab extremism+ Hizbollah terrorist + Syria-Iran are problems</i>	28	29	28
Don't know or no opinion*	19	26	17

\*Unprompted



**Globe/CTV**

*What do Canadians think about sending an international force of peacekeepers to the area?*

	Canada	Quebec
International peacekeepers should be sent to ensure a ceasefire	53	67
International community should not be involved	34	26
Other/don't know	13	7

**Western Standard/COMPAS**

*As you may know, peacekeepers in Lebanon in 1983 were forced out when attacked by Hezbollah fighters. Should Canada... [RANDOMIZE]*

	Canada	Quebec	RoC
Send in peace-keepers only if Hezbollah is disarmed	34	30	36
Definitely not send in peace-keepers	31	28	31
Definitely send in peace-keepers	27	28	26
Don't know or no opinion*	9	13	7

\*Unprompted



**Western Standard/COMPAS**

*As you may know, the Government of Canada under Jean Chretien declared Hezbollah a terrorist organization and banned its operation in Canada. Do you agree that this policy should continue?*

	Canada	Quebec	RoC
Agree	69	56	74
Disagree	14	23	12
Don't know or no opinion*	17	22	15

**Western Standard/COMPAS**

*IF YES: In your opinion, should it be illegal to support Hezbollah in Canada?*

	Canada	Quebec	RoC
Yes	72	58	75
No	22	34	19
Don't know or no opinion*	6	8	6

\*Unprompted

