

AFGHAN DETAINEES

Canadians Support Public Inquiry into Afghan Detainee Controversy

Respondents are five times more likely to find the testimony of diplomat Richard Colvin credible than to side with federal government ministers.

[TORONTO – Nov. 26, 2009] – Many Canadians believe the recent controversy over Afghan detainees should become the focus of a public inquiry, a new Angus Reid Public Opinion poll conducted in partnership with the *Toronto Star* has found.

In the online survey of a representative national sample of 1,010 Canadian adults, a majority of respondents (53%) support launching a public inquiry on what the government and the Canadian Forces knew about reports of prisoner torture in Afghanistan, while 36 per cent are opposed.

People in Quebec (63%) and British Columbia (57%) clearly call for a public inquiry, while Albertans (41%) are less likely to back this course of action.

Credibility

Canadian intelligence officer and diplomat Richard Colvin testified to a parliamentary committee about a series of memos he wrote between May 2006 and October 2007 warning that Afghan detainees captured by Canadians and turned over to Afghan authorities were being tortured in Afghani prisons. Colvin testified that those memos were ignored until newspaper reports brought the matter into the public eye. Canadian government ministers have dismissed Colvin's claims as "not credible" and "entirely suspect."

KEY FINDINGS

- **53% call for a public inquiry on what the government and the Canadian Forces knew about reports of prisoner torture in Afghanistan**
- **49% find Richard Colvin's testimony credible; 10% side with federal government ministers**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

From November 24 to November 25, 2009, Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among 1,010 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.1%. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure samples representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

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Canadians are five times more likely to believe in Colvin's testimony (49%) than to take the side of the ministers (10%). The government's rationale gets its highest level of support in Alberta (24%).

Still, Canadians are not ready to point fingers. While one-in-five (21%) blame politicians in Ottawa for the alleged mistreatment of Afghan prisoners, 16 per cent think the Canadian troops in Afghanistan are responsible. A More than a third of respondents believe neither is to blame (36%) and one-in-four (27%) are undecided.

Respondents are almost evenly divided on whether the people in Afghanistan currently have a good opinion of Canada's role as a peacekeeping nation. While 33 per cent of Canadians believe Afghans have a mostly positive view of Canada, 29 per cent believe it is mostly negative.

Analysis

The federal government's strategy of dismissing Colvin's claims has not struck a chord with the population, as a remarkably low proportion of Canadians believe the former diplomat's testimony is "not credible." At this stage, a public inquiry appears to be the only option that would clear the air after this public disagreement.

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Afghan Detainees

Overall, do you believe the people of Afghanistan have a positive or negative impression of Canada's role as a peacekeeping nation?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Mostly positive	33%	24%	48%	34%	39%	20%	46%
Mostly negative	29%	26%	15%	24%	28%	42%	20%
Not sure	38%	50%	37%	42%	34%	38%	34%

Afghan Detainees

As you may know, Canadian intelligence officer and diplomat Richard Colvin has testified to a parliamentary committee about a series of memos he wrote between May 2006 and October 2007 warning that Afghan detainees captured by Canadians and turned over to Afghan authorities were being tortured in Afghani prisons. Colvin testified that those memos were ignored until newspaper reports brought the matter into the public eye. Canadian government ministers have dismissed Colvin's claims as "not credible" and "entirely suspect." From what you have seen, read or heard about this issue, who do you believe most?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Diplomat Richard Colvin	49%	53%	33%	29%	52%	54%	48%
Canadian government ministers	10%	5%	24%	8%	10%	6%	20%
Not sure	41%	42%	43%	63%	38%	40%	32%

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Afghan Detainees

Overall, who do you think is to blame for the alleged mistreatment of Afghan prisoners?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Canadian troops in Afghanistan	16%	9%	10%	14%	16%	24%	15%
Politicians in Ottawa	21%	25%	20%	8%	19%	28%	15%
Neither is to blame	36%	39%	50%	39%	40%	21%	45%
Not sure	27%	27%	20%	40%	26%	27%	25%

Afghan Detainees

Do you support or oppose launching a public inquiry on what the government and the Canadian Forces knew about reports of prisoner torture in Afghanistan?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Strongly support	26%	26%	15%	22%	20%	40%	29%
Moderately support	27%	31%	26%	25%	29%	24%	24%
Moderately oppose	13%	10%	14%	11%	15%	10%	16%
Strongly oppose	23%	18%	33%	25%	27%	17%	23%
Not sure	11%	15%	11%	17%	9%	10%	8%

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Angus Reid Public Opinion is a practice of Vision Critical—a global research and technology company specializing in custom online panels, private communities, and innovative online methods. Vision Critical 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

Vision Critical is now one of the largest market research enterprises in the world. 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 Public Opinion polls are conducted using the Angus Reid Forum (www.angusreidforum.com), Springboard America (www.springboardamerica.com) and Springboard UK (www.springboarduk.com) online panels, which are carefully recruited to ensure representation across all demographic and psychographic segments of these populations. Panel members pass through rigorous screening and a double opt-in process ensuring highly motivated and responsive members. These premier online survey platforms present respondents with highly visual, interactive, and engaging surveys, ensuring that panel members provide thoughtful and reliable responses. Each survey is actively sampled and weighted to model that characteristics of the universe required and employs the latest in quality control techniques to ensure data validity.

Angus Reid, 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://bit.ly/4zxf1S>

Since 2006, Angus Reid has covered eight 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.

More information on the way Angus Reid conducts public opinion research can be found at

<http://bit.ly/3z0u1l>

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

Copies of this poll are available on our website:

<http://www.visioncritical.com/category/global-opinions-and-trends>

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