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By Natalie Stechyson



The vast majority of Canadians and Americans think that the world can't accept a nuclear-armed Iran, according to a new poll.

Nine out of ten people polled in both countries said they agreed with the statement "the world cannot tolerate an Iran with nuclear weapons capability," according to an Ipsos Reid survey conducted on behalf of The Munk Debates. Just over 2,000 Canadians and Americans were polled.

The results, 92 per cent of people in agreement with the statement, were the same for respondents both north and south of the border.

The degree to which Canada's views on Iran mirrored those polled in the United States surprised Rudyard Griffiths, co-organizer and moderator for The Munk Debates - a semi-annual contest of debates on issues facing the world and Canada.

Canada's role in past governments has always been to try to be a broker between conflicting sides in the Middle East, Griffiths said.

"Since Harper was elected as Prime Minister, foreign policy has shifted to be very much supportive of Israel's position, and I think it brought public opinion with them," said Griffiths.

"Many people I think were assuming that this government was somehow out of step with public opinion when it comes to its very hawkish, hard-line stance on Iran. When in fact, I think they're both shifting public opinion but they're also being led by public opinion."

Just 8 per cent of Americans and 9 per cent of Canadians said they disagreed with the statement posed to them.

In Canada, while the results were pretty even across the provinces, British Columbians and Albertans were most strongly opposed to tolerating a nuclear-capable Iran, with 94 per cent of respondents in those provinces saying they agreed with the statement. Quebecers were the next most strongly opposed at 93 per cent, followed by Atlantic Canadians at 91 per cent, and Ontarians at 90 per cent.

Support for the statement "the world cannot tolerate an Iran with nuclear weapons capability" was weakest in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, with 87 per cent saying they agreed.

One argument is that logic would follow that if people can't tolerate a nuclear-capable Iran, then

they would also support a pre-emptive strike - or a series of them over a number of years - to permanently degrade Iran's enrichment capacity, Griffiths said.

"You could then ask 'What's that going to do to the Arab Spring? What's that going to do to the price of oil? What's that going to do to any kind of hope of a rapprochement between the West and the Islamic world?'" Griffiths said.

"I think those are pretty compelling arguments for people to maybe take a second look at this."

The level of agreement with the statement in the United States, split geographically into four regions, was almost uniform between the northeast (93 per cent), the Midwest (93 per cent) the South (92 per cent) and the West (90 per cent).

The poll was released in advance of Monday evening's Munk Debate on Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The online poll of 1,007 Canadians and 1,007 Americans was conducted between Nov. 12 and 18 and is considered accurate to within plus or minus 3.5 percentage points of the total Canadian and American populations.