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## **In relations with U.S., Canadians want the best of both worlds**

New study finds we like to keep our neighbours close, but not too close

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Canadians are smug about many things – our boundless wilderness, our livable cities and our prowess in hockey.

No. 4 on the conceit list might well be the conviction that we know more about the United States than Americans know about us. And to some extent this is true.

A study being released Tuesday in Washington by University of Western Ontario's Canada-U.S. Institute confirms that our southern roots run deep. Compared to Americans, Canadians cross the border more often, are more likely to have friends and family in the U.S., and more of us say our incomes are dependent on what happens there.

But the study, based on a Harris Interactive survey of roughly 1,000 Canadians and 1,000 Americans, also suggests there's much about this critical relationship that we don't fully understand. (The survey was conducted online in January and February.)

"Canadians think they know everything they need to know about Americans," Donald Abelson, director of the Canada-U.S. Institute, said. "This study shows there's a whole lot we don't know."

Considering how much we think we know, Canadians aren't particularly consistent about what they want from the relationship.

The survey shows we're not fans of integration – economic or otherwise. Just 18 per cent of the Canadians surveyed think it's a good thing. Forty-one per cent say integration is bad.

It's a virtual mirror image of how Americans feel.

And yet Canadians have a visceral reaction when Americans try to revoke historic benefits of our proximity. We howl when Americans erect new protectionist barriers or threaten to scrap free trade. We grumble about needing a passport, getting fingerprinted or forced to wait in line to cross the border. We get downright mad at tariffs or other restrictions on our exports.

We pride ourselves on how different we are, and at times, we can be downright anti-American. Yet we want Americans to treat us better than they treat all other foreigners.

Prof. Abelson acknowledged Canadians can sometimes be quixotic about their U.S. neighbours. He said we cherish the benefits of proximity, even as we struggle to retain our own unique identity. "We want the relationship to be close, but not too close," he explained.

"We're happy to get the best of both worlds. We want closeness, without sacrificing our social and political identity."

That probably explains why Canadians are hopelessly conflicted by the notion of greater integration with the U.S. We're leery of embracing a common market, single currency or joint security perimeter.

"We're prepared to push [integration] so far and then we pull away," Prof. Abelson said.

None of this is particularly new ground. Even in 2010, Canada struggles with its identity.

But it confirms that after everything that has happened in the past decade, our views haven't changed much. And, thankfully, nor have those of Americans. Americans aren't nearly as tuned in to the ups and downs of the relationship. But they share similar priorities and concerns. Like us, they rank critical issues in virtually the same order, including the economy, free trade, energy, border security, the environment and Afghanistan.

At the end of the day, most Americans think relations are pretty good, and they're eager to keep it that way. They think the Canadian government is doing a better job than their own on numerous fronts.

And they believe Canada can and should try to influence U.S. policy.

That's a pretty healthy foundation for future relations.

Now if we could just get them to like Sidney Crosby.