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Western launches Canada/U.S. think tank

Devoted to studying relations with our neighbour to the south

By HANK DANISZEWSKI, The London Free Press
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Canadians have more clout than they think on US government policies, at least in the eyes of many Americans.

That was one of the more surprising findings in the first study by the new Canada-US Institute at the University of Western Ontario.

The study done by Cameron Anderson and Laura Stephenson, two Western political science professors, found that 41%-59% of Americans thought the Canadian government had "somewhat or a lot of influence" over US policies on key issues such as the economy, free trade, the environment, energy and border security.

While that may not reflect political realities, Anderson said it could be used as leverage when it comes to key issues such as trade.

"We often think of ourselves as a small insignificant country to the north with little leverage. But in the minds of some Americans there is a perception of influence," said Anderson.

The study entitled *Moving Closer or Drifting Apart?* was based on a survey of 1,000 citizens in each country and was done in February.

Cameron said the survey showed relationships are generally improving.

"There's obvious differences on some issues but there is a sense, going forward, that we are close and getting closer" said Anderson.

The survey found 64 per cent of Canadians describe the Canada-U.S. relationship as "friends, but not close," compared to 61 per cent of Americans. About 28% of Americans say we are the "best of friends" compared to 15% of Canadian.

Donald Abelson, director of the Canada-US Institute, said the election of U.S President Barack Obama is having an impact reversing a chill in relations during the George W. Bush presidency.

"President Obama has set a very different tone for more cordial relations," said Abelson.

Anderson said the both Canadians and Americans want their governments to be more active in fixing the economy.

Despite record deficit and debt levels currently experienced by the American government, both American (80 per cent) and Canadian (83 per cent) respondents think that more should be done for the American economy.



Both Canadians and Americans respondents gave the Canadian government higher marks than the American government in handling key issues such as the economy, the environment and energy

But there was some divergence on the issue of border security. About 60% of Americans said the government should do more to beef up more boarder security while 27% of Canadians thought the Americans were doing too much.

The Canada U.S. Institute at the University of Western Ontario brings together scholars from the business, law and social-science faculties to study Canada US relations in politics, economics, legal, cultural and historical issues.

Director Donald Abelson said it will be the only “think tank” in Canada devoted exclusively to studying relationships with the United States.