

Executive Summary

Potential communications approach	• The “information vacuum” has only served to reinforce their existing fears and concerns. • Their views can be shifted slightly more positively with information about: • Concrete examples of progress (focusing on women and children) • UN and NATO involvement • Clarity around the need for security and stability in order to provide aid and undertake diplomacy (they do generally buy into this premise)
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In general, younger Canadians (aged 18 to 35), with some exceptions (e.g. Saskatoon), tend to be less supportive of the mission compared to older Canadians, aged 36 and up. This appears to be linked to a less informed perspective on world events in general and Afghanistan in particular, as well as a stronger anti-American stance, compared to those in the older age cohort.

Generally speaking, with the exception as noted above, younger focus group participants tended to be more strongly opposed to Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. This generational effect is a result of a number of factors, including:

Stronger opposition to U.S. international policies and a sense that Canada is simply following suit – Many young people were strongly opposed to Canada's involvement in Afghanistan because it suggests an alignment with U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, there is a belief expressed by some young people that the Afghanistan mission is an American-led initiative. As such, they are concerned that Canadians are not in control. This sense that Canadians are blindly following U.S. leadership in the region is a worry to the extent that Canada is seen to become more vulnerable as a terrorist target. They are concerned that terrorist groups will make little distinction between Canada and the United States.

A concern that Canadian Forces don't really know what they're doing or what enemy they are fighting in Afghanistan – This attitude is based on three distinct but mutually reinforcing perceptions about the Canadian mission and about Afghanistan in general. This first is a lack of confidence in the political leadership in general. On many issues, young people express doubts about the wisdom and judgement of government officials. This is reflective of the broader issue of a lack of confidence in traditional institutions and authoritarian bodies which plays out in their perceptions regarding Canada's role in Afghanistan. The second is a general tendency to view the military as an increasingly outdated institution. In many respects this attitude is simply reflective of the idealism of youth and the desire for a world in which military intervention becomes unnecessary. Finally, it is clear from comments made by many young people in focus groups that they lack a full understanding of the geography, history, culture and politics of Afghanistan. Their views are shaped by limited information and understanding which leads them to a very simplistic (and generally negative) view of the situation.