

IV. EVALUATION OF FEDERAL MANAGEMENT OF THE TRADE TALKS

The starting point for any evaluation of federal management of the trade talks is overall perceptions of comparative advantages, if any, in negotiating skills brought to the bargaining table. Two questions were put to respondents to elicit views on this dimension. Are Americans perceived to be better bargainers? How well does the federal government advocate the Canadian position?

The majority of Canadians (57%) continue to be confident that Canadians can bargain effectively with Americans and get the best deal possible. However, the data suggest a slight (-4) erosion in this confidence in the period since April. Those respondents 65 years of age or older or those who have graduated from university appear more nervous about the negotiations. Positions on bilateral relations and cultural nationalism have a direct effect on expectations about comparative disadvantage in bargaining with the United States as one might expect. When it comes to provincial variations, confidence is more marked among supporters of free trade. In British Columbia, however, while overall support remains high, there is more insecurity about the negotiations (-8) compared to other supporters such as Alberta, as well as a decline in confidence since April.

The second dimension probed for assessments of whether the federal government generally "pushes its own point of view too strongly, not strongly enough, or has the right balance." The majority (58%) are of the view that it does not push strongly enough. Nor has there been much material change in this lack of confidence in the federal government's advocacy since April. There are no significant demographic variations to this view. Not surprisingly, perceptions of the capacity for bargaining are directly related to overall positions on free trade. Proponents tend more often to state that the government is achieving the right balance than opponents, but even a majority of this group expressed dissatisfaction in this regard.