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Harper popular outside Canada At home? Not so much

14 countries polled. Among world leaders, Merkel most liked, our PM is second, Bush comes dead last

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Maybe Prime Minister Stephen Harper should be running in another country.

Harper is seen much more favourably outside Canada than he is at home, according to a survey of voters in 14 countries that is to be made public today.

But Canadians are more likely than people elsewhere to think their government is handling the economy well.

That will help Harper in the Oct. 14 election, said Jean-Marc Léger, president of Léger Marketing, which conducted the Canadian part of the poll.

In Canada, 45 per cent of those surveyed had a "bad opinion" of Harper, while 42 per cent had a "good opinion." That gave him an overall score of minus-3 per cent.

"When you're prime minister you make decisions, sometimes they're unpopular," Léger said. "It's the same almost everywhere, leaders are given the hardest time at home."

Harper fared better elsewhere. In the 14 countries surveyed, his average score was plus-17 per cent; 25 per cent had a good opinion of him and eight per cent a bad one.

That made Harper the second-highest ranked leader, behind German Chancellor Angela Merkel (plus-38 per cent). George Bush was at the bottom, with minus-52 per cent.

Though most of those polled outside Canada didn't have an opinion of Harper, Léger said his second-place ranking is impressive, especially since Harper did well in the United States and France, where people are more likely to know him.

The survey also showed that Canadians:

Gave Ottawa a 5.4 when asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (very bad) to 10 (excellent), its "handling of the present economic situation."

That put Canada in fifth place, after China, Russia, Switzerland and Holland. The average score among the 14 countries was 4.6.

"It's a good grade for Harper and the economy is going to be a key election issue," Léger said. "The more you talk about the economy, the better it is for Conservatives."

Are among the most likely to have a bad opinion of U.S. president George Bush (minus-73 per cent). Only France, Switzerland and Iceland dislike Bush more.

Would support Barack Obama (70 per cent) over John McCain (16 per cent) if they could vote in the U.S. election.

The surveys were conducted by polling firms that belong to the Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research. The other countries polled were the U.S., France, Britain, Italy, Japan, Holland, China, Russia, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, South Korea, and Iceland.

In Canada, Léger surveyed 1,511 people, between Sept. 3 and 7. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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