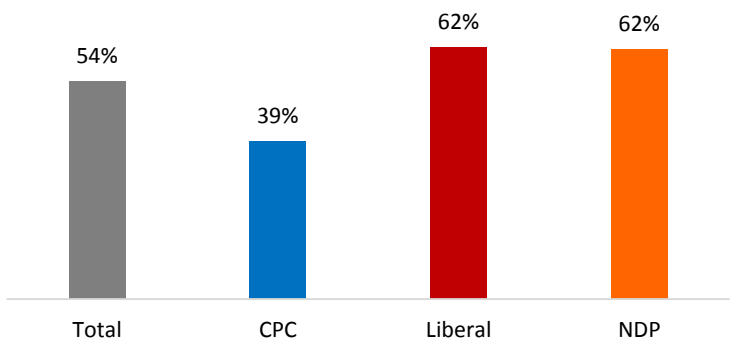
Canadians divided along political lines over whether to accept thousands of refugees in current crisis

Poll reveals schism between religious and non-religious Conservative Party supporters

September 4, 2015 – With the Harper government under fire on the campaign trail for its reaction to the European migrant crisis and refugee policy in general, new data from the Angus Reid Institute shows Canadians are themselves divided – notably along political lines – over what this country should do.

Reaction this week to images of three-year-old Alan Kurdi – a Syrian child with Canadian relatives – drowned on a Turkish beach, has led to discussion over whether Canada is "doing its part" in this situation. Results of the latest ARI public opinion poll reveal less consensus than public outcry might have anticipated.



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey on September 3, 2015 among a representative randomized sample of 1,447 Canadian adults who are members of the Angus Reid Forum. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

Canadians who support the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) in this campaign are less inclined than Liberal (LPC) or New Democrat (NDP) supporters to agree this country should be taking a welcoming stance and accepting more refugees. That said, the data also shows the CPC's Christian base finds itself at odds with Conservative supporters overall – the former, backing more intervention on behalf of refugees affected by the crisis.

Key findings:

- Overall, most Canadians (70%) say Canada has a role to play in the migrant crisis, but are divided on increasing the number of refugees the government sponsors and resettles here, and on seeing government spend more to make it happen. (54% and 51% support each, respectively)

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- A significant gender difference exists on whether the people fleeing to Europe from the Middle East are seen as "genuine": Canadian men are twice as likely as women to say the migrants are "bogus"

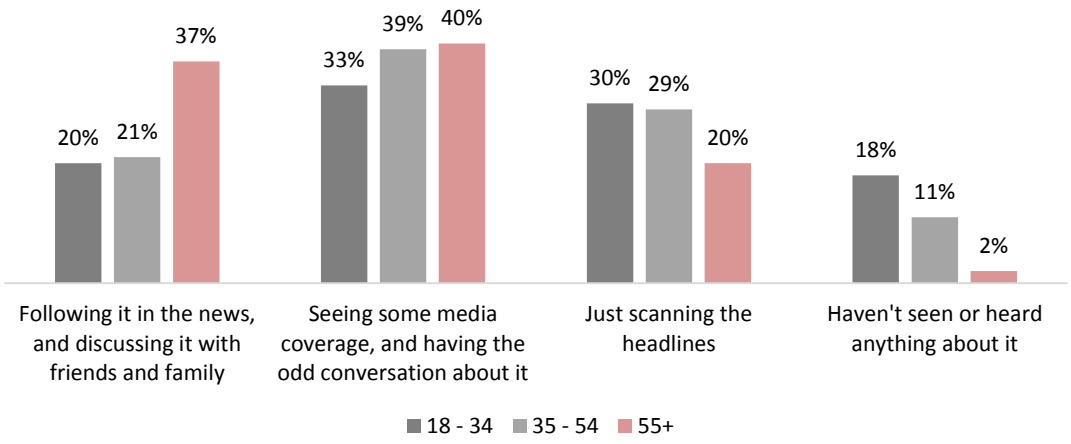
- As to what exactly this country should do, Canadians are most supportive of sending medical and armed forces professionals into the affected European countries areas to assist refugees, divided on taking more refugees and least supportive of "doing nothing"

Awareness of the Issue:

Alan Kurdi and his family represent a handful of the more than 350,000 migrants who have sought refuge in Europe so far this year. Like the little boy, his brother and mother, an estimated 2,500 people have died attempting to make the journey.

This survey finds that nearly all Canadians (90%) have at least some awareness of this crisis, with roughly two-thirds (64%) saying they're following these events actively. By a wide margin, Canadians over the age of 55 are more likely to be following the issue.

How closely would you say you have been following this issue? (By Age)



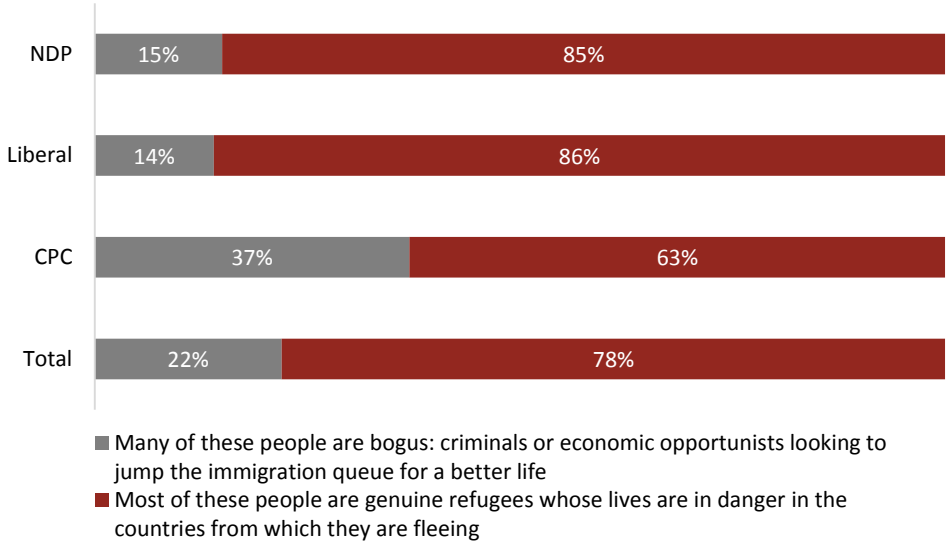
Election Implications:

It is unsurprising then, that the issue has made its way into the campaign narrative of the October 19th federal election. But while opposition party leaders Tom Mulcair and Justin Trudeau have accused the Conservative government and its leader Stephen Harper of not doing enough to address the plight of refugees, Harper's own message is that bringing them to Canada is not the only solution, pointing to Canada's military contribution to the fight against ISIS.

This line of messaging clearly resonates with a significant portion of the CPC base:

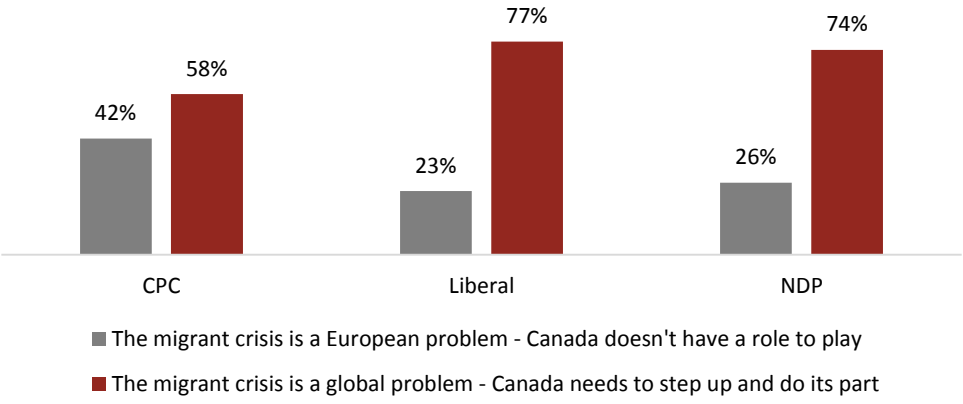
- Though majorities of all party supporters view those trying to get to Europe as “genuine refugees”, CPC supporters and leaners are twice as likely as other party supporters to characterize them as “criminals or economic opportunists”

Which statement is closest to your own point of view?



- While most of those backing or leaning towards the Conservatives see a role for Canada in this crisis – they are far more divided among their own ranks than those tilting to the NDP and LPC:

Which statement is closest to your own point of view?



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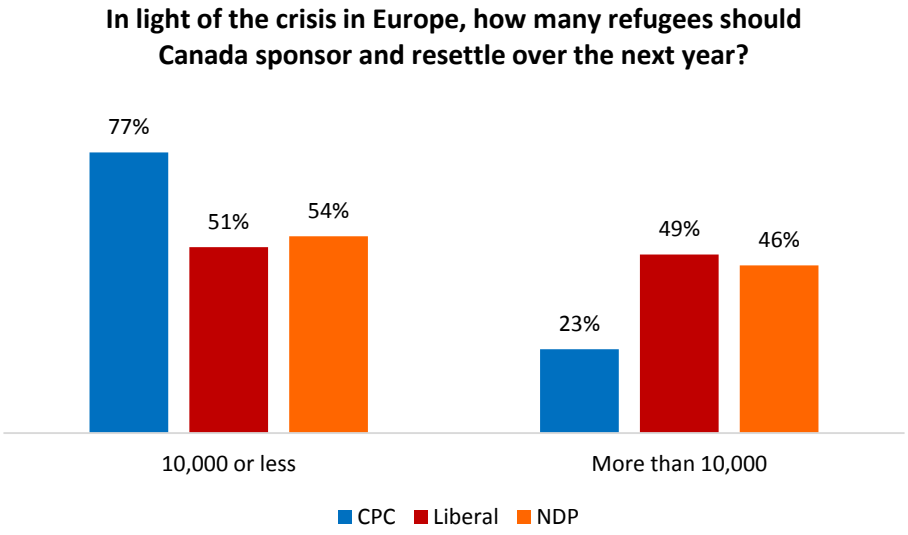
- Asked how many refugees the Canadian government should sponsor and resettle over the next year, CPC supporters are significantly more likely to say choose a maximum of 10,000. Conversely – Liberal and NDP supporters are more inclined to choose a number higher than 10,000:



- Asked whether they supported or opposed a $100 million dollar increase in federal spending to boost the number of government-sponsored refugees in a given year to 20,000, as proposed by immigrant and refugee settlement advocates, CPC supporters and leaners are far more likely to oppose such action (63%, 34% strongly) while near-inverse numbers of NDP and Liberal supporters and leaners support it (62% each, respectively)

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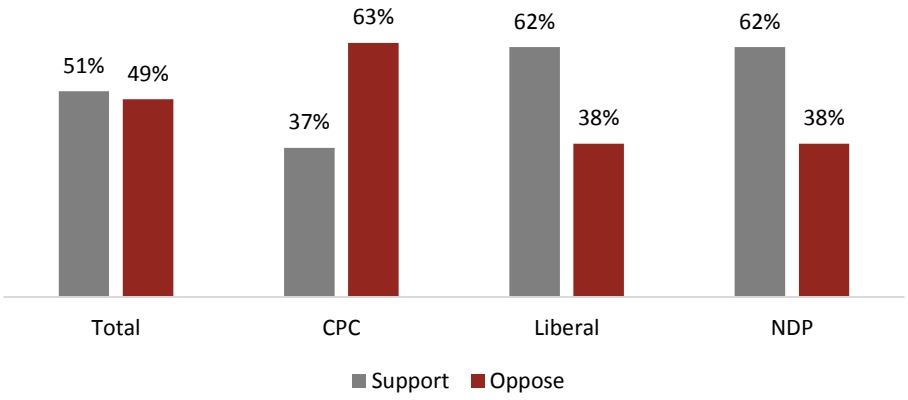
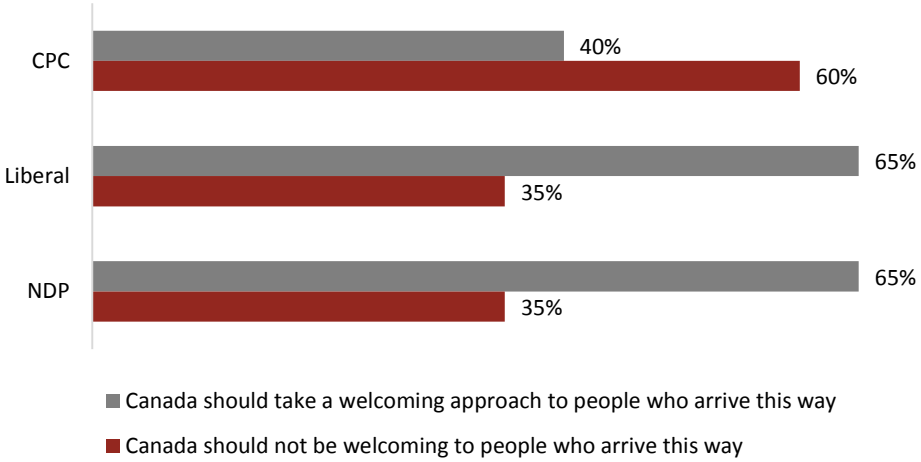
Support for increasing the number of government-sponsored refugees to 20,000 per year at a cost of $100 million annually:



Instances of refugees, trafficked individuals and economic migrants arriving by boat on Canadian shores are far less common than the European experience, but are still very much a part of this country's history. On the question of how we should react were it to start happening again, the opposition of CPC supporters to a "welcoming approach" in regards to migrant arrivals mirrors support for this by LPC and NDP backers (see the following graph)

Suppose this were happening in Canada, on the scale of the crisis in Europe. What should be the overall tone of Canada's response?



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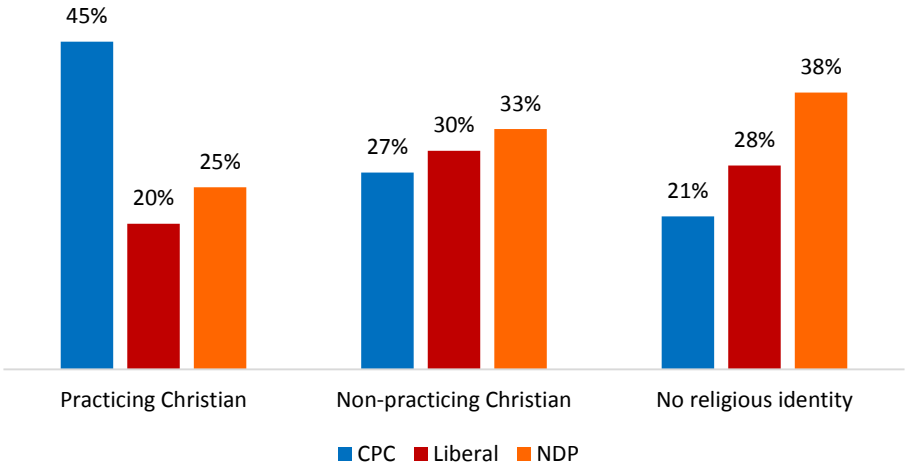
Cleavages within the Conservative base:

While these findings reveal less national consensus on an issue that has dominated week five of this election campaign, conventional wisdom might also conclude they indicate the Conservative Party is successfully engaging its own base. This view however, comes with a hefty caveat.

In fact, Conservatives are divided by religious participation on how to react to and what to do about the migrant crisis. This division is particularly significant for the CPC – more than the Liberal or New Democratic parties – because practicing Christians form a large and influential part of the Conservative base, as evidenced in the graph below:

2015 voting intention by religious affiliation:



And it is with this influential segment of CPC support that Conservative messaging is nearly as resonant. Compare the responses of all those who say they'll vote Conservative on October 19, regardless of religious participation – with Christian CPC voters who regularly attend services in the graph below on key questions of refugee policy:

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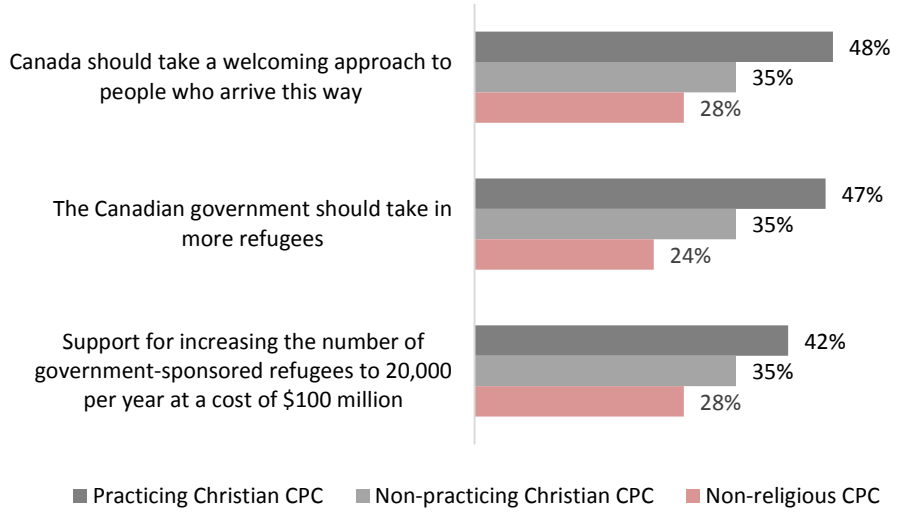
Practicing Christians more supportive of refugees than other CPC voters:



So What Should Canada Do (if Anything)?

Regardless of political preferences, the vast majority of Canadians view the refugees as "genuine" (78%) and agree that the migrant crisis is a global problem, and Canada must do its part (70%).

Notwithstanding the acceptance of more government-sponsored refugees, there are a variety of ways in which any country could be – and in many cases are – responding to the current crisis. The Angus Reid Institute asked respondents about a handful of hypothetical options:

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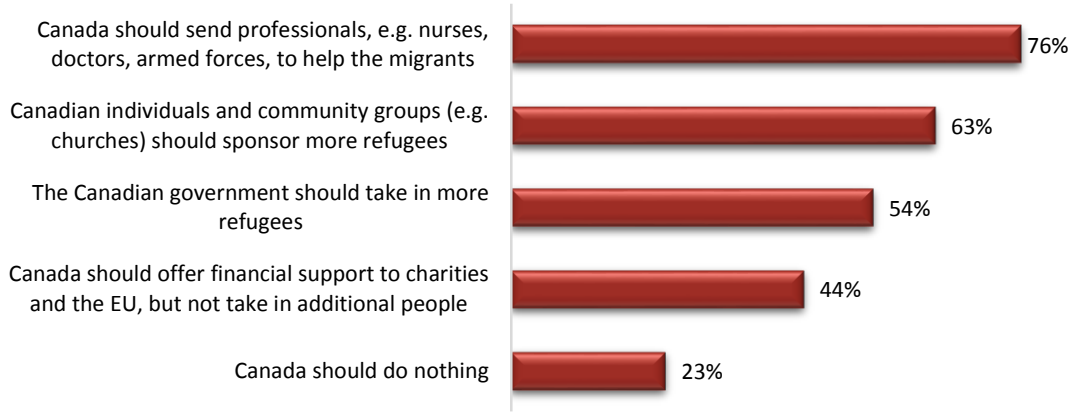
Please tell us whether you support or oppose the following measures: (Summary of Support)

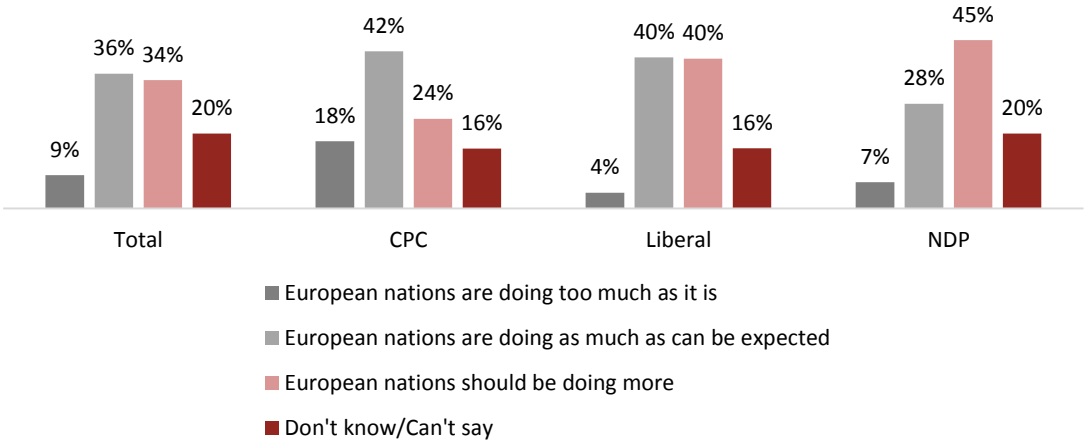


And how do we view Europe's response?

Canadians are divided on Europe's response to the current crisis – but only as far as whether it has been sufficient or not. Very few (9%) think the continent has done "too much" to deal with the crisis.

The rest of the country is divided between the opinion that "European nations are doing as much as can be expected" (36%) and "European nations should be doing more" (34%). Another one-fifth (20%) are unsure.

Based on what you've seen, heard, or read, what do you think about Europe's response to the migrant crisis?



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Opinion on this question varies by region and by age. Canadians between the ages of 35 and 54 are less likely than other age groups to say European nations should be doing more (29% say so, compared to 38% of younger Canadians and 36% of those over 55). The opposite is true of residents of the Atlantic provinces, 50 per cent of whom say Europe should be doing more.

Respondents in Western Canada are more likely to say Europeans are doing as much as can be expected. Not quite half of British Columbia (46%) and Alberta (43%) residents choose this option.

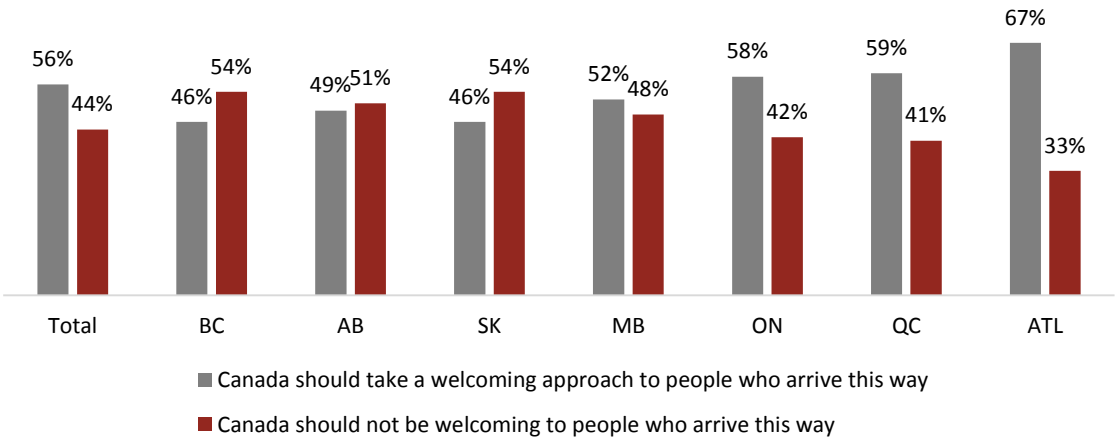
What if it happened here?

Migrants have arrived in Canada by boat in the past, but never on the scale currently seen in Europe. In the somewhat unlikely event that the current crisis was taking place here, Canadians are divided on how they would like the country to handle such a situation.

A slim majority (56%) say "Canada should take a welcoming approach to people who arrive this way," while the rest (44%) say "Canada should not be welcoming to people who arrive this way."

Interestingly, responses in every province west of Manitoba are reversed – with slim majorities favouring an unwelcoming approach. Manitoba and every region to the east favours a welcoming approach.

Suppose this were happening in Canada, on the scale of the crisis in Europe. What should be the overall tone of Canada's response?



This question also yields gender and age divides: Men and those between the ages of 35 and 55 are more likely to say Canada should not welcome migrants arriving by boat, while women and those in the youngest (18 to 34) and oldest (over 55) age groups are more likely to prefer the welcoming option (see detailed tables at the end of this release).

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*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Overall, how closely would you say you have been following this issue? Would you say you are:

(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL* (88)
Following it in the news, and discussing it with friends and family	27%	26%	18%	19%	14%	30%	28%	29%
Seeing some coverage, and having the odd conversation about it	38%	52%	45%	32%	47%	36%	30%	30%
Just scanning the headlines	26%	17%	23%	30%	25%	25%	32%	28%
Haven't seen or heard anything about it	10%	5%	14%	19%	13%	8%	10%	13%

Overall, how closely would you say you have been following this issue? Would you say you are:

(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Gender		Age			Fed Vote Intention 2015		
		Men (707)	Women (740)	18 – 34 (419)	35 – 54 (505)	55+ (523)	CPC (363)	Liberal (349)	NDP (399)
Following it in the news, and discussing it with friends and family	27%	30%	24%	20%	21%	37%	31%	30%	23%
Seeing some coverage, and having the odd conversation about it	38%	38%	37%	33%	39%	40%	41%	38%	38%
Just scanning the headlines	26%	25%	27%	30%	29%	20%	21%	25%	28%
Haven't seen or heard anything about it	10%	8%	12%	18%	11%	2%	7%	7%	11%

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Based on what you've seen, heard, or read, what do you think about Europe's response to the migrant crisis?								
(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL (88)
European nations are doing too much as it is	9%	10%	7%	9%	11%	9%	12%	3%
European nations are doing as much as can be expected	36%	46%	43%	31%	40%	37%	30%	28%
European nations should be doing more	34%	28%	29%	23%	26%	33%	39%	50%
Don't know/Can't say	20%	15%	21%	37%	23%	21%	19%	19%

Based on what you've seen, heard, or read, what do you think about Europe's response to the migrant crisis?									
(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Gender		Age			Fed Vote Intention 2015		
		Men (707)	Women (740)	18 – 34 (419)	35 – 54 (505)	55+ (523)	CPC (363)	Liberal (349)	NDP (399)
European nations are doing too much as it is	9%	13%	6%	9%	11%	9%	18%	4%	7%
European nations are doing as much as can be expected	36%	38%	35%	29%	39%	40%	42%	40%	28%
European nations should be doing more	34%	34%	35%	38%	29%	36%	24%	40%	45%
Don't know/Can't say	20%	15%	25%	24%	22%	15%	16%	16%	20%

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People have different points of view about the migrants making their way to Europe. Which of the statements below comes closest to your own point of view								
(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL (88)
Many of these people are bogus: criminals or economic opportunists looking to jump the immigration queue for a better life in the western world	22%	28%	22%	22%	16%	20%	25%	15%
Most of these people are genuine refugees whose lives are in danger in the countries from which they are fleeing	78%	72%	78%	78%	84%	80%	75%	85%

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		Men (707)	Women (740)	18 – 34 (419)	35 – 54 (505)	55+ (523)	CPC (363)	Liberal (349)	NDP (399)
Many of these people are bogus: criminals or economic opportunists looking to jump the immigration queue for a better life in the western world	22%	29%	15%	22%	25%	19%	37%	14%	15%
Most of these people are genuine refugees whose lives are in danger in the countries from which they are fleeing	78%	71%	85%	78%	75%	81%	63%	86%	85%

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Some people say the migrant crisis is only a European problem and that EU nations should deal with it. Others say this is a global problem and other countries – including Canada – have a role to play. Which statement is closest to your view								
(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL (88)
The migrant crisis is a European problem - Canada doesn't have a role to play	30%	32%	35%	26%	33%	31%	30%	23%
The migrant crisis is a global problem - Canada needs to step up and do its part	70%	68%	65%	74%	67%	69%	70%	77%

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The migrant crisis is a European problem - Canada doesn't have a role to play	30%	37%	24%	32%	37%	23%	42%	23%	26%
The migrant crisis is a global problem - Canada needs to step up and do its part	70%	63%	76%	68%	63%	77%	58%	77%	74%

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Here are some ways Canada might respond. Please tell us whether you support or oppose the following measures. Summary of Support:								
(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL (88)
The Canadian government should take in more refugees	54%	52%	46%	50%	54%	57%	52%	65%
Canadian individuals and community groups (e.g. churches) should sponsor more refugees	63%	64%	62%	68%	58%	65%	59%	63%
Canada should offer financial support to charities and the EU, but not take in additional people	44%	44%	35%	45%	52%	45%	48%	33%
Canada should send professionals, e.g. nurses, doctors, armed forces, to help the migrants	76%	79%	76%	80%	74%	79%	75%	64%
Canada should do nothing	23%	22%	28%	16%	23%	23%	23%	18%

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		Men (707)	Women (740)	18 – 34 (419)	35 – 54 (505)	55+ (523)	CPC (363)	Liberal (349)	NDP (399)
The Canadian government should take in more refugees	54%	50%	58%	53%	45%	63%	39%	62%	62%
Canadian individuals and community groups (e.g. churches) should sponsor more refugees	63%	60%	65%	64%	54%	70%	55%	69%	69%
Canada should offer financial support to charities and the EU, but not take in additional people	44%	45%	43%	49%	46%	38%	45%	41%	43%
Canada should send professionals, e.g. nurses, doctors, armed forces, to help the migrants	76%	72%	81%	76%	74%	79%	71%	80%	82%
Canada should do nothing	23%	27%	18%	24%	30%	15%	30%	16%	19%

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Here are some ways Canada might respond. Please tell us whether you support or oppose the following measures. Summary of Support:				
(weighted sample size)	All CPC (363)	Religion (among CPC voters)		
		Practicing Christian (142)	Non-practicing Christian (110)	No religious identity (89)
The Canadian government should take in more refugees	39%	47%	35%	24%
Canadian individuals and community groups (e.g. churches) should sponsor more refugees	55%	67%	52%	40%
Canada should offer financial support to charities and the EU, but not take in additional people	45%	48%	45%	41%
Canada should send professionals, e.g. nurses, doctors, armed forces, to help the migrants	71%	74%	70%	63%
Canada should do nothing	30%	25%	30%	37%

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Similar things have happened in Canada in the past, but on a much smaller scale. Now, suppose it were happening again, on the scale of the crisis in Europe, and boatloads of migrants began arriving on Canada's coasts. If that were the case, what would you say should be the overall tone of Canada's response?								
(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL (88)
Canada should take a welcoming approach to people who arrive this way	56%	46%	49%	46%	52%	58%	59%	67%
Canada should not be welcoming to people who arrive this way	44%	54%	51%	54%	48%	42%	41%	33%

Suppose boatloads of migrants began arriving on Canada's coasts If that were the case, what would you say should be the overall tone of Canada's response?									
(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Gender		Age			Fed Vote Intention 2015		
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Canada should take a welcoming approach to people who arrive this way	56%	50%	62%	60%	49%	60%	40%	65%	65%
Canada should not be welcoming to people who arrive this way	44%	50%	38%	40%	51%	40%	60%	35%	35%

Suppose boatloads of migrants began arriving on Canada's coasts. If that were the case, what would you say should be the overall tone of Canada's response?				
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Canada should take a welcoming approach to people who arrive this way	40%	48%	35%	28%
Canada should not be welcoming to people who arrive this way	60%	52%	65%	72%

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In light of the current crisis in Europe, how many refugees should Canada sponsor and resettle over the next year?								
(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL (88)
None	16%	14%	18%	15%	12%	15%	19%	12%
1-5,000	21%	22%	25%	24%	27%	19%	22%	21%
5,000-10,000	25%	28%	26%	26%	31%	26%	23%	15%
10,000-15,000	12%	12%	7%	16%	15%	13%	11%	15%
15,000-20,000	8%	7%	6%	5%	6%	9%	10%	6%
20,000-25,000	7%	10%	7%	4%	2%	8%	5%	10%
More than 25,000	11%	8%	11%	9%	7%	10%	10%	22%

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None	16%	19%	13%	14%	21%	13%	20%	9%	14%
1-5,000	21%	21%	21%	20%	24%	19%	26%	19%	16%
5,000-10,000	25%	23%	27%	30%	22%	23%	30%	23%	24%
10,000-15,000	12%	10%	14%	14%	11%	11%	12%	16%	11%
15,000-20,000	8%	7%	9%	6%	8%	10%	5%	9%	11%
20,000-25,000	7%	7%	7%	6%	4%	11%	1%	10%	10%
More than 25,000	11%	13%	9%	10%	9%	13%	5%	14%	13%

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Some people are calling on the Canadian government to increase the number of government-sponsored refugees accepted in this country to 20,000 a year. They say this increase will cost roughly $100 million annually, or slightly less than $3 per Canadian per year.

Would you support or oppose this?

(unweighted sample)	Total (1447)	Region						
		BC (203)	AB (142)	SK (103)	MB (91)	ON (475)	QC (345)	ATL (88)
Strongly Support	22%	23%	24%	13%	20%	23%	21%	28%
Moderately Support	29%	29%	21%	32%	29%	29%	31%	32%
Moderately Oppose	24%	26%	25%	34%	28%	24%	20%	28%
Strongly Oppose	25%	22%	31%	21%	24%	24%	29%	12%

Some people are calling on the Canadian government to increase the number of government-sponsored refugees accepted in this country to 20,000 a year. They say this increase will cost roughly $100 million annually, or slightly less than $3 per Canadian per year.

Would you support or oppose this?

(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Gender		Age			Fed Vote Intention 2015		
		Men (707)	Women (740)	18 – 34 (419)	35 – 54 (505)	55+ (523)	CPC (363)	Liberal (349)	NDP (399)
Strongly Support	22%	22%	23%	20%	17%	29%	9%	29%	34%
Moderately Support	29%	28%	30%	34%	26%	28%	28%	32%	29%
Moderately Oppose	24%	22%	26%	24%	26%	21%	29%	21%	16%
Strongly Oppose	25%	29%	21%	22%	31%	22%	34%	17%	22%

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Would you support or oppose this?

(weighted sample size)	All CPC (363)	Religion (among CPC voters)		
		Practicing Christian (142)	Non-practicing Christian (110)	No religious identity* (89)
Strongly Support	9%	8%	9%	11%
Moderately Support	28%	35%	26%	16%
Moderately Oppose	29%	29%	30%	32%
Strongly Oppose	34%	29%	35%	41%

Overall, how closely would you say you have been following this issue? Would you say you are:

(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
Following it in the news, and discussing it with friends and family	27%	39%	33%	23%	20%
Seeing some media coverage, and having the odd conversation about it	38%	33%	37%	44%	33%
Just scanning the headlines	26%	23%	23%	26%	30%
Haven't seen or heard anything about it	10%	5%	7%	7%	17%

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Based on what you've seen, heard, or read, what do you think about Europe's response to the migrant crisis?					
(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
European nations are doing too much as it is	9%	11%	11%	7%	9%
European nations are doing as much as can be expected	36%	41%	41%	36%	32%
European nations should be doing more	34%	35%	32%	38%	32%
Don't know/Can't say	20%	13%	16%	19%	27%

People have different points of view about the migrants making their way to Europe. Which of the statements below comes closest to your own point of view?					
(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
Many of these people are bogus: criminals or economic opportunists looking to jump the immigration queue for a better life	22%	25%	23%	20%	22%
Most of these people are genuine refugees whose lives are in danger in the countries from which they are fleeing	78%	75%	77%	80%	78%

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Some people say the migrant crisis is only a European problem and that EU nations should deal with it. Others say this is a global problem and other countries - including Canada - have a role to play. Which statement is closest to your view?

(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
The migrant crisis is a European problem - Canada doesn't have a role to play	30%	29%	28%	30%	34%
The migrant crisis is a global problem - Canada needs to step up and do its part	70%	71%	72%	70%	66%

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Here are some ways Canada might respond. Please tell us whether you support or oppose the following measures. Summary of Support:					
(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
The Canadian government should take in more refugees	54%	60%	54%	54%	52%
Canadian individuals and community groups (e.g. churches) should sponsor more refugees	63%	65%	64%	63%	60%
Canada should offer financial support to charities and the EU, but not take in additional people	44%	46%	42%	44%	44%
Canada should send professionals, e.g. nurses, doctors, armed forces, to help the migrants	76%	82%	79%	75%	74%
Canada should do nothing	23%	16%	23%	18%	30%

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Suppose boatloads of migrants began arriving on Canada's coasts. If that were the case, what would you say should be the overall tone of Canada's response?					
(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
Canada should take a welcoming approach to people who arrive this way	56%	57%	56%	57%	54%
Canada should not be welcoming to people who arrive this way	44%	43%	44%	43%	46%

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In light of the current crisis in Europe, how many refugees should Canada sponsor and resettle over the next year?					
(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
None	16%	12%	13%	14%	22%
1-5,000	21%	19%	20%	21%	24%
5,000-10,000	25%	28%	27%	25%	21%
10,000-15,000	12%	13%	12%	12%	12%
15,000-20,000	8%	7%	10%	8%	7%
20,000-25,000	7%	9%	6%	10%	5%
More than 25,000	11%	12%	11%	10%	10%

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Would you support or oppose this?

(weighted sample size)	Total (1447)	Personal Experience			
		Am a Refugee/ Immigrant (182)	Close friends/family immigrant/refugee (349)	Acquaintance of immigrant/ refugee (477)	Don't know any immigrants/ refugees (439)
Strongly Support	22%	28%	22%	24%	18%
Moderately Support	29%	34%	26%	28%	30%
Moderately Oppose	24%	20%	26%	23%	25%
Strongly Oppose	25%	18%	25%	25%	27%

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