

Bad Dogs or Bad Owners? Snarling issue finds majority oppose banning ‘dangerous’ breeds

58% say dog attacks are ‘isolated incidents,’ not product of breeding

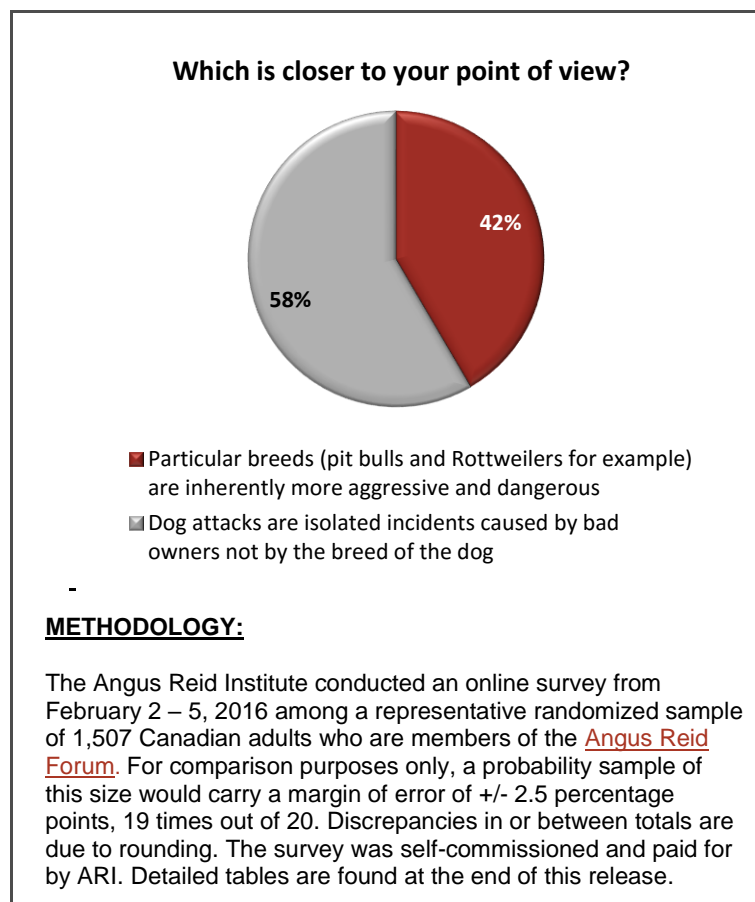
March 16, 2016 – It’s a question that has been around almost as long as man’s best friend: Are dog attacks the product of dangerous breeds or bad owners?

A new survey from the Angus Reid Institute finds most Canadians come down on the blame-the-owners side of this equation, but their opinions vary significantly depending on how old they are and whether they’ve ever owned a dog themselves.

And while most Canadians stop short of calling for bans on specific breeds – such as pit bulls or Rottweilers – they do support other measures aimed at reducing the risk of dog attacks such as those reported [last month in Windsor, Ont.](#), and [in Richmond, B.C., last December](#).

Key Findings:

- Most Canadians (58%) say “dog attacks are isolated incidents caused by bad owners, not by the breed of dog.” The rest (42%) say particular breeds “are inherently more aggressive and dangerous”
- Two-in-three Canadians (67%) support requiring muzzles for breeds of dogs deemed “dangerous,” but fewer than two-in-five (39%) support banning those breeds from their communities entirely
- Canadians are generationally divided on this issue, with older people more likely to blame breeds, and more supportive of various policies targeting both breeds and owners



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Dangerous dogs or bad owners? Opinions vary by age, dog ownership:

Statistics on dog bites vary wildly depending on what's being measured and how. On its web page about preventing dog bites, for example, the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control estimates](#) that 4.5 million bites occur in that country annually.

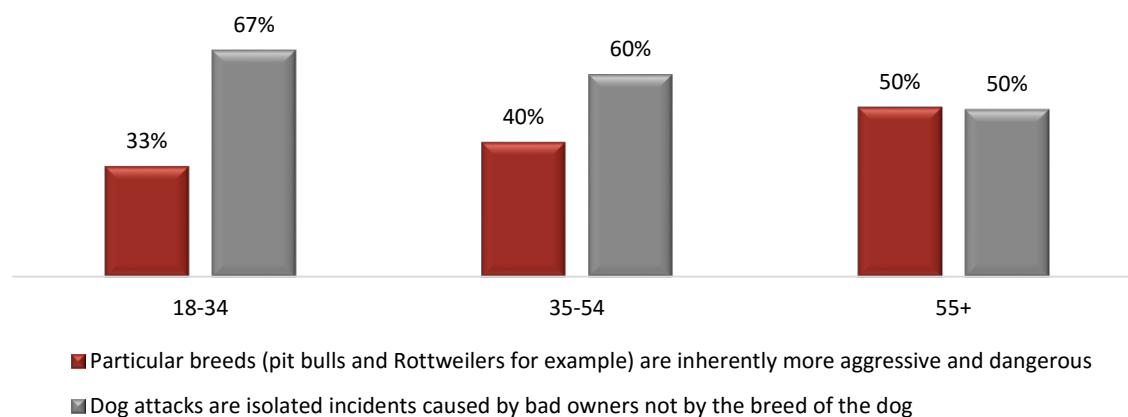
However, only a fraction of these bites – fewer than 350,000 in the most recent year for which data is available (2013) – result in injuries significant enough to be reported in the CDC's own [statistical database](#).

Canadian data is less readily available, but the [Canada Safety Council estimates](#) that 460,000 Canadians are bitten by dogs each year. That said, relatively few of these incidents are as serious as the December attack in Richmond, in which [three people were injured](#), one critically.

Much of the disparity between these numbers can be attributed to the fact that not all dogs that bite people are large enough or strong enough to actually do any serious damage. When it comes to the dogs that *are* powerful enough to hurt people, there is an ongoing debate over whether the breed or the dog-owner is more responsible for attacks – one that is driven by a notable age-divide.

Most Canadians (58%) blame owners more than breeds, but this feeling is stronger among those ages 18 – 34 and weaker among those ages 55 and older, as seen in the following graph:

**Some people say particular breeds of dogs are inherently aggressive.
Others say dog attacks are isolated incidents caused by human influence.
Which is closer to your point of view?**

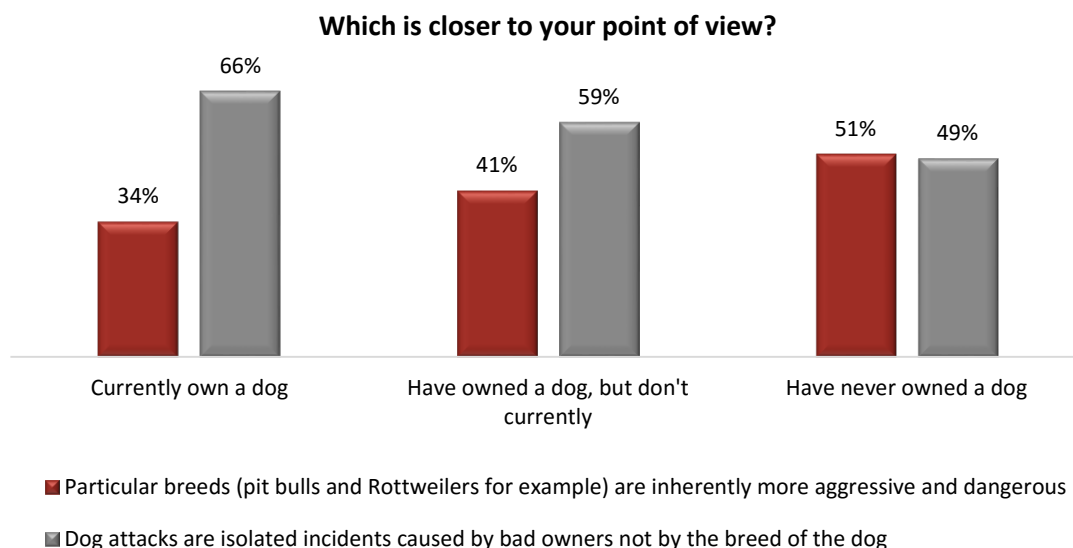


Men are more likely than women to say certain breeds are inherently dangerous (46% of men do so, compared to 37% of women), and British Columbians are marginally more likely than residents of other regions to say the same ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

It might be expected that people who have been bitten by dogs in the past would have a different perspective on this issue than those who haven't, but this poll does not find that to be the case (see summary tables at the end of this release).

There are, however, divides on this question based on whether they have – either now or in the past – shared their home with a 'Fifi' or 'Fido'. Two-in-three people who currently own dogs (66%) blame bad owners, while those who have never owned a dog are almost evenly split between blaming the breed and the owner.

Those who have owned dogs in the past, but don't currently, are in the middle:



Most oppose breed bans, support other measures

Canadian municipal and provincial governments have taken a variety of different approaches to limiting aggressive dog behavior. Some jurisdictions – including the cities of [Edmonton](#) and [Burnaby, B.C.](#) – have laws requiring higher licensing fees for individual dogs that have histories of biting, chasing, or causing injury.

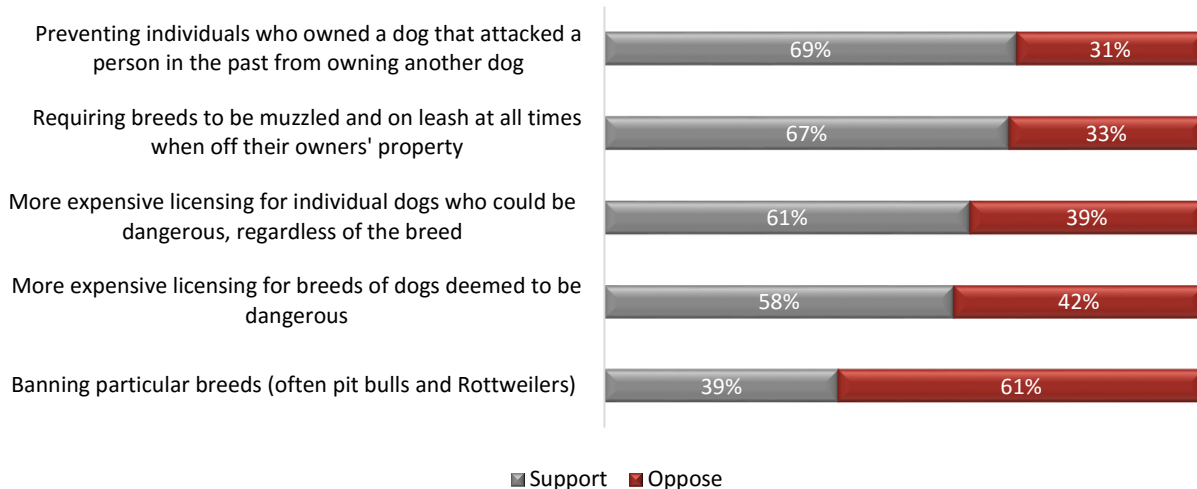
Other governments – notably [Winnipeg's in 1990](#) and [Ontario's in 2005](#) – have enacted bans on specific breeds.

This latter strategy is more controversial. Indeed, it's the only policy canvassed in this survey that receives less than majority support from Canadians, as seen in the following graph:

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Do you support or oppose each of the following policies being implemented in your community?

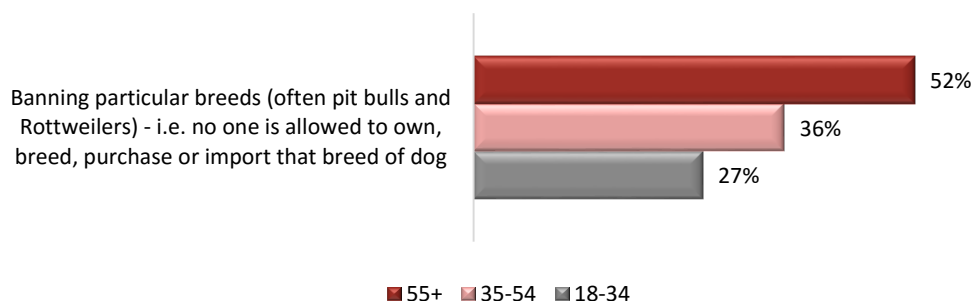


Interestingly, though Ontario has had a pit bull ban for more than a decade, residents of that province are no more supportive of such legislation than those who live in other regions.

Indeed, it is in neighbouring Quebec – which doesn't ban any dog breeds province-wide – that support for breed-specific bans is the highest (45% support banning particular breeds there, compared to 37% in Ontario, [see comprehensive tables](#)).

Older respondents are also more likely to favour banning certain breeds, with those in the 55-plus age group almost twice as likely to say they support such measures as those under 35:

Do you support or oppose each of the following policies being implemented in your community? (those saying 'support' shown)



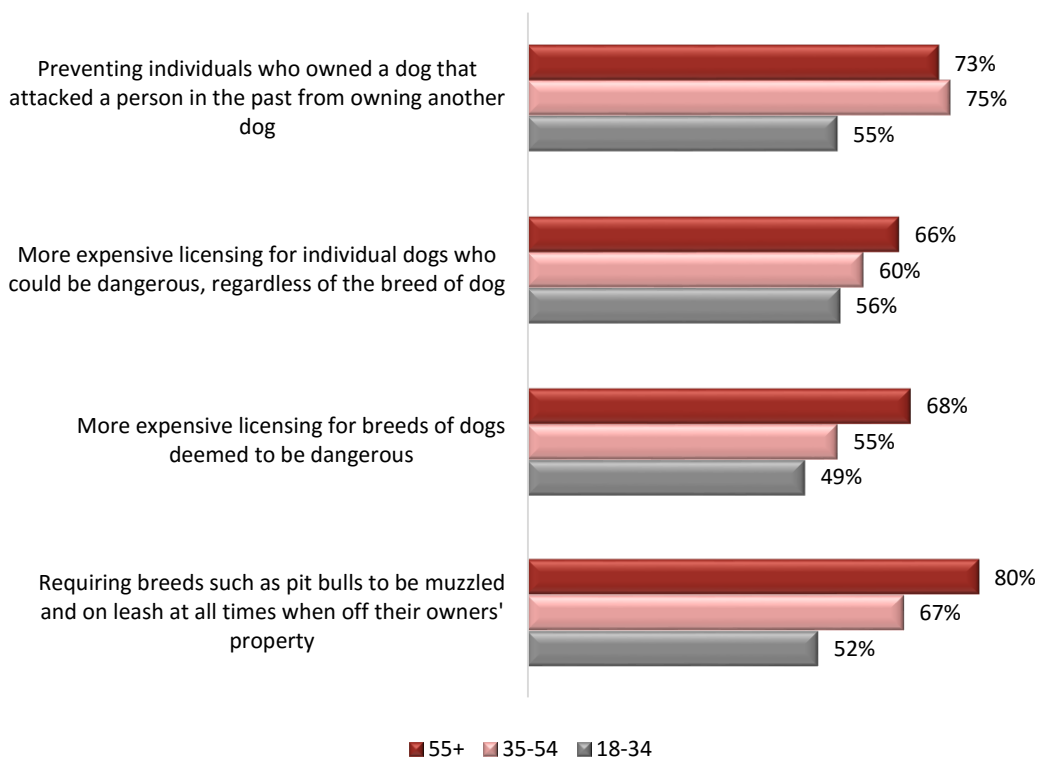
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Canadians aren't opposed to breed-specific legislation that stops short of an outright ban, however. Fully two-thirds of respondents (67%) support requiring muzzles for breeds such as pit bulls when they are off their owners' properties. Another three-in-five (58%) support more expensive licensing for "dangerous" breeds.

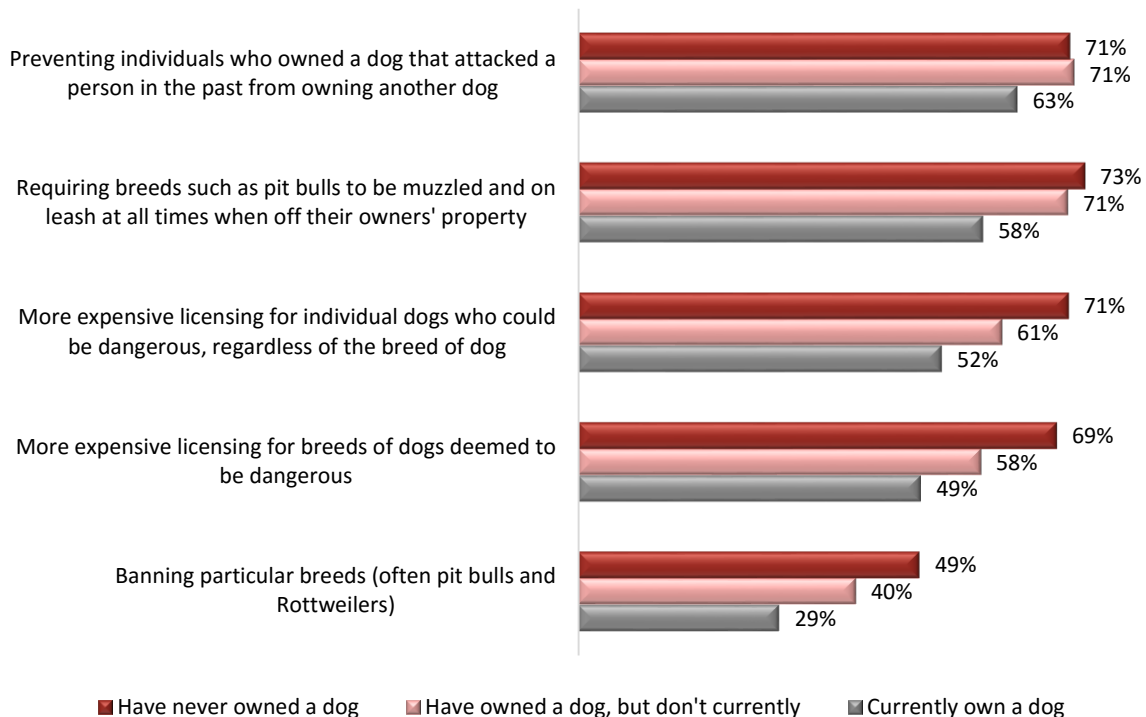
Again, there are significant age divides on each of these measures, with older Canadians more supportive across the board – and also more likely to say they "strongly support" each one ([see comprehensive tables](#)):

Do you support or oppose each of the following policies being implemented in your community? (those saying 'support' shown)



Current dog owners are also less likely to support policies that would put either owners or animals themselves in the proverbial dog house:

Do you support or oppose each of the following policies being implemented in your community? (those saying 'support' shown)



*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.*

Summary tables follow. For comprehensive results by region, age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Some people say particular breeds of dogs (pit bulls and Rottweilers, for example) are inherently aggressive and dangerous. Others say dog attacks are isolated incidents caused by human influence. Which is closer to your point of view?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1507)	Dog ownership		
		Yes, currently (459)	Have owned in the past, but don't currently (639)	Have never owned a dog (409)
Particular breeds (pit bulls and Rottweilers for example) are inherently more aggressive and dangerous	42%	34%	41%	51%
Dog attacks are isolated incidents caused by bad owners not by the breed of the dog	58%	66%	59%	49%

Some people say particular breeds of dogs (pit bulls and Rottweilers, for example) are inherently aggressive and dangerous. Others say dog attacks are isolated incidents caused by human influence. Which is closer to your point of view?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1507)	Dog bite experience		
		Yes, I have been bitten (398)	Yes, someone in my household has (266)	Have never been bitten by a dog (882)
Particular breeds (pit bulls and Rottweilers for example) are inherently more aggressive and dangerous	42%	39%	44%	42%
Dog attacks are isolated incidents caused by bad owners not by the breed of the dog	58%	61%	56%	58%

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Do you support or oppose each of the following policies being implemented in your community? (summary of support)

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1507)	Dog ownership		
		Yes, currently (459)	Have owned in the past, but don't currently (639)	Have never owned a dog (409)
Banning particular breeds (often pit bulls and Rottweilers) - i.e. no one is allowed to own, breed, purchase or import that breed of dog	39%	29%	40%	49%
Requiring breeds such as pit bulls to be muzzled and on leash at all times when off their owners' property	67%	58%	71%	73%
More expensive licensing for breeds of dogs deemed to be dangerous	58%	49%	58%	69%
More expensive licensing for individual dogs who could be dangerous, regardless of the breed of dog	61%	52%	61%	71%
Preventing individuals who owned a dog that attacked a person in the past from owning another dog	69%	63%	71%	71%

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