

Canadians split on whether greater Western intervention would have helped in Aleppo

Most have seen some news coverage of the situation, but don't feel confident in their knowledge of it

January 13, 2017 – As the Syrian civil war rages on to different fronts, the global community has begun to assess the battle of Aleppo and the many civilian deaths that took place there.

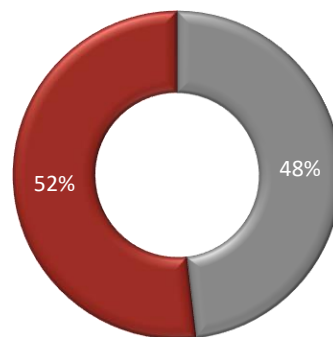
A new public opinion poll conducted by the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians feeling less-than-fully informed about the situation in Syria, and divided over whether Western countries like Canada should have done more to prevent or minimize the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo.

Those who feel more knowledgeable about the situation in Syria's once-largest city are more likely to say Western nations failed by not being more involved there, while those who feel less informed are more likely to say Western nations were right not to get more involved.

Key Findings:

- Fewer than one-in-ten Canadians (8%) say they know "a lot" about the battle of Aleppo. Most feel less confident in their knowledge of the situation in Syria
- Canadians are split between believing that Western nations should have done more to prevent death and destruction in Aleppo (48%) and believing that greater Western intervention was not necessary and would not have helped (52%).
- Knowledge of the situation drives opinions on the Western response to it. Those who profess the greatest understanding of the battle of Aleppo are also most likely to say the West failed by not doing more there (62% do).

Which of the following statements is closer to your own overall opinion on the role Western nations (the U.S., Canada, and our NATO allies) have played in this situation in Aleppo?



- Western nations failed here - they should have done more to try to prevent the death and destruction in Aleppo
- Western nations were right not to get more involved - it would not have helped in the end

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from January 9 – 12, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,501 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 +/- 2.5 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.

CONTACT:

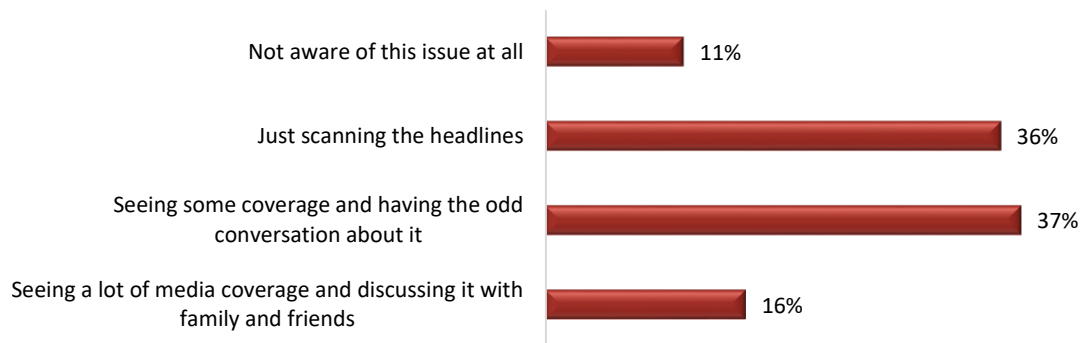
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

Many feel uninformed about the situation in Aleppo

The siege of Aleppo drew a steady stream of news coverage in November and December, as pro-government forces surrounded and advanced on rebel-held neighbourhoods in the city's east.

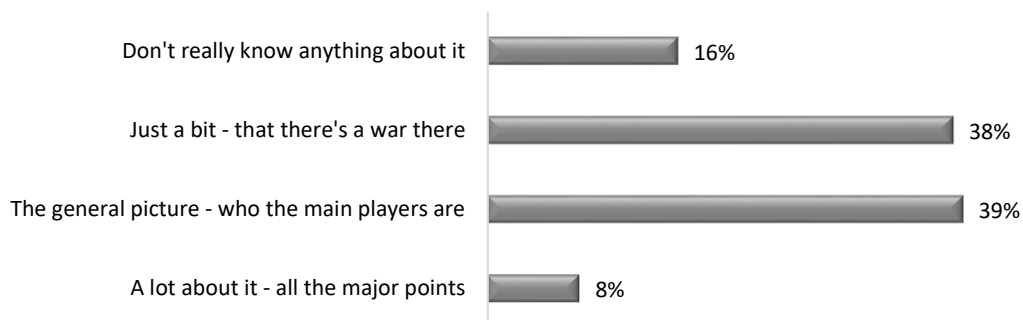
This media attention appears to have reached the vast majority of Canadians. Only one-in-ten (11%) say they haven't seen or heard anything about Aleppo. That said, the Canadian public hasn't necessarily been following the story closely in the news. As seen in the following graph, just one-in-six (16%) have been seen been highly engaged with this story:

We want to ask a few questions about the situation in Syria and specifically the recent battle and bombings in the Syrian city of Aleppo. How closely have you been following this issue? Would you say you are:



In fact, though most Canadians have at least been seeing some headlines about Aleppo, fewer than one-in-ten (8%) say they have a solid comprehension of what is going on in the region. A greater number, close to four-in-ten (39%) say they understand the general picture and who the main players are, but half admit they have little or no knowledge of the war or the drawn-out siege:

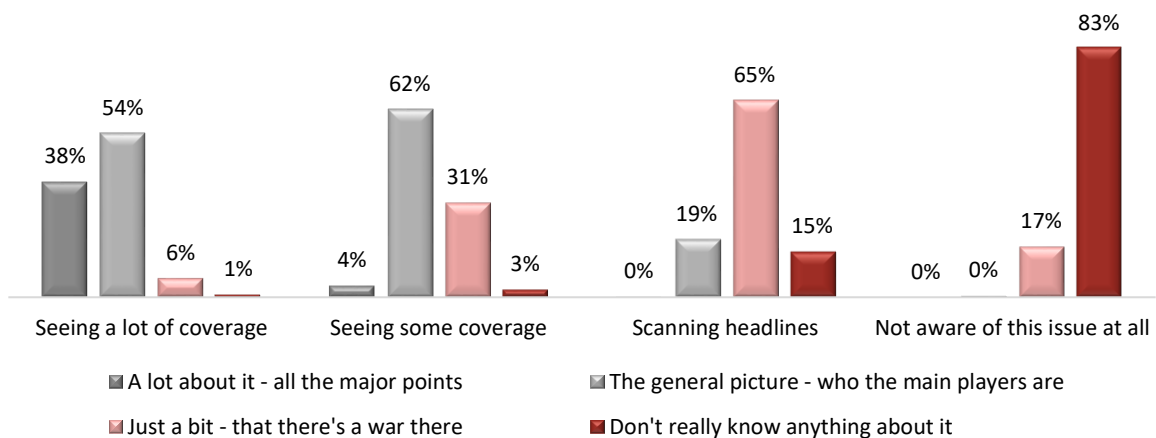
Thinking about the situation in Syria, and the battle of Aleppo specifically, how much would you say you know about this situation? Do you know...



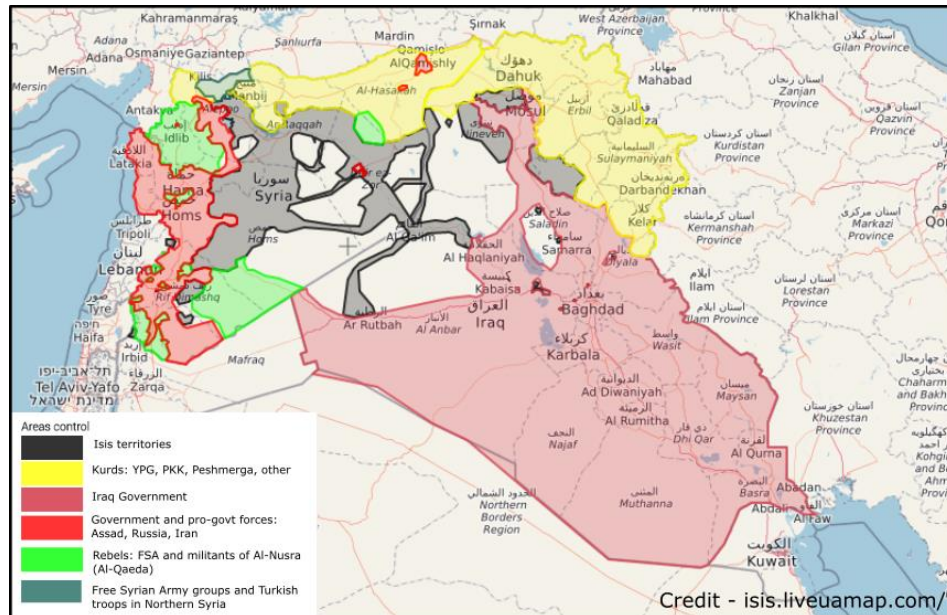
As might be expected, awareness of media coverage of Aleppo is correlated with confidence in one's understanding of the situation there. Those who are "seeing a lot of coverage" of the issue are also most likely to say they "know a lot about" it.

That said, even this high-information group of Canadians is not especially confident in their knowledge. They're more likely to say they know "the general picture" than to say they know "all the major points," as seen on the left side of the following graph:

Thinking about the situation in Syria, and the battle of Aleppo specifically, how much would you say you know about this situation? Do you know...



Much of the difficulty Canadians have in accurately understanding the conflict owes to the sheer complexity of the issue. While the civil war sprouted out of Arab Spring protests and the Syrian government's violent suppression of burgeoning dissent, a number of other national and subnational groups now occupy physical space in the conflict, while outside actors interact by proxy, funding groups that side with their interests. The image below shows an assessment of who occupies which areas in the region at the outset of 2017, though borders change daily.



[Click to view full-size image](#)

A failure of the West?

As the battle of Aleppo approached its end, Turkey and Russia negotiated a ceasefire that was intended to allow the evacuation of the many civilians still living in the surrounded neighbourhoods. The fighting did cease for a little while, but [reports suggested](#) that many of the scheduled evacuations didn't actually happen.

The United Nations says [hundreds of civilians died](#) during the siege of Aleppo, and – though Russia and the Assad regime have denied targeting non-combatants – some commentators have said the actions of the pro-government forces [constitute war-crimes](#).

In a speech, American ambassador to the UN Samantha Power [likened the situation in Aleppo to past atrocities](#) the international community had been seen as failing to stop, including the genocide in Rwanda in the 1990s. If Aleppo comes to be remembered in a similar light, will it be because nations like Canada, the United States, and their NATO allies didn't do enough to stop the death and destruction there?

Canadians are divided on this line of thinking. Asked to choose between two opposing statements about the West's involvement in Aleppo, roughly half (48%) say "Western nations failed here – they should have done more to try to prevent the death and destruction in Aleppo," while the rest (52%) say "Western nations were right not to get more involved – it would not have helped in the end."

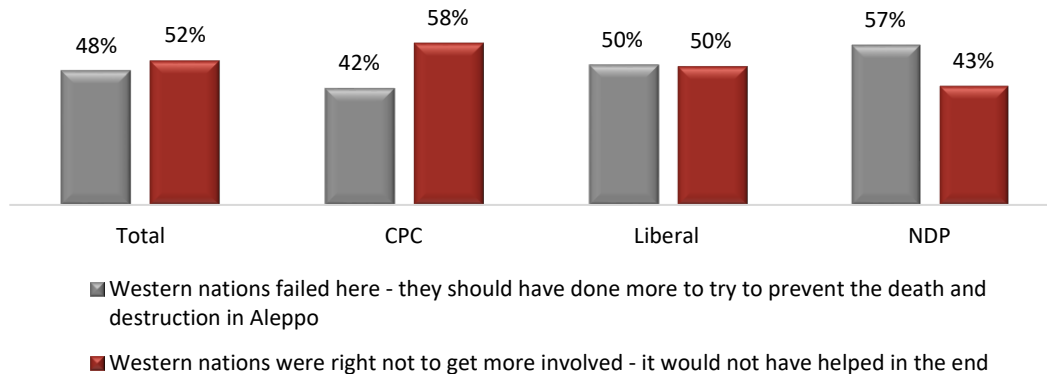
This split is remarkably consistent across demographic groups. Canadians of all ages, genders, and education levels are divided roughly equally in their opinion on this question. There are some notable regional differences, however, with Quebecers more likely to say Western nations failed in Aleppo (56% there do), and every other province more likely to say the West was right not to get involved ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

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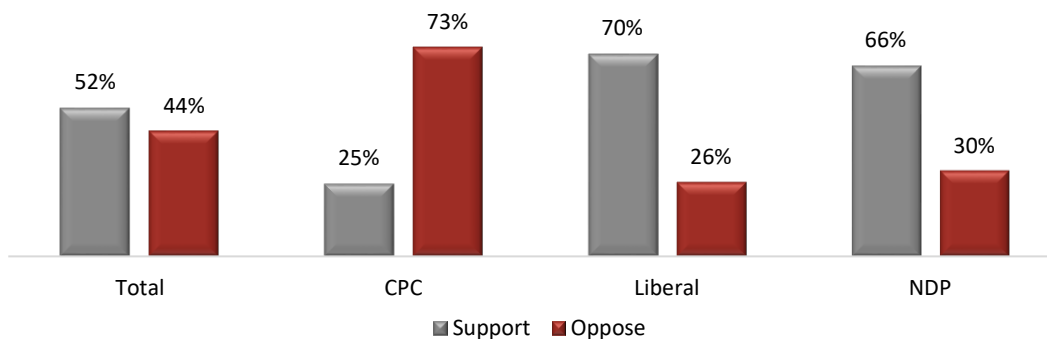
Also driving differences on this question? Political affiliation. Those who voted for the Conservative Party of Canada in the 2015 election take a more cautious approach to intervention, with 58 per cent saying the West was right not to get involved in Aleppo. Most 2015 New Democratic Party voters, on the other hand, say Western nations failed (57% do). Supporters of the governing Liberal Party are evenly split:

**Which of the following statements is closer to your own overall opinion
on the role Western nations (the U.S., Canada, and our NATO allies)
have played in this situation in Aleppo?**

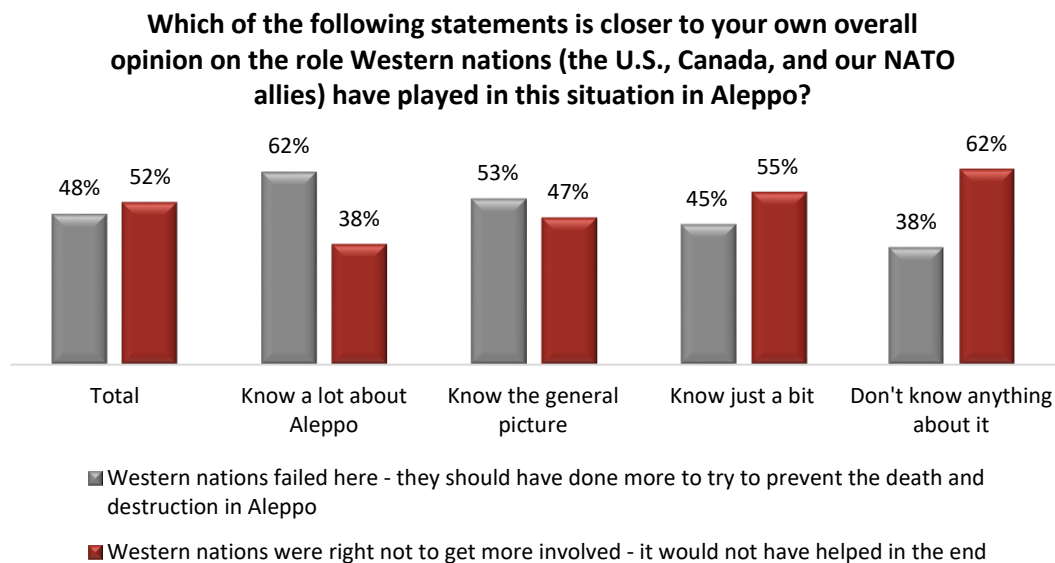


Interestingly, while the differences between partisans on this question are statistically significant, they're smaller than the gulf between parties often recorded on other issues. Consider, for example, views on another Syria-related topic: the federal government's refugee resettlement plan. When the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians about the plan [last year](#), there was a massive partisan gap, as seen in the graph that follows.

**Overall, would you say you support or oppose the government's Syrian
refugee resettlement plan?
(From February 2016 survey)**



Notably, it is those who profess the greatest degree of knowledge about the situation who are most likely to say their country and its allies should have done more in Aleppo. More than six-in-ten (62%) do so. Conversely, those who say they don't know anything about it are most likely to say intervention wouldn't have helped:



Reflecting the approach taken by most Western governments – and perhaps the ambivalence of his party's supporters – Canada's Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan has said that while the situation in Aleppo was tragic, Canada has [no plans to engage](#) in Syria militarily, either by fighting or by contributing to training moderate Syrian forces.

*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 detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Thinking about the situation in Syria, and the battle of Aleppo, specifically, how much would you say you know about this situation? Do you know ...

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1501)	Awareness of media coverage of Aleppo			
		Seeing a lot of coverage (236)	Seeing some coverage (563)	Just scanning the headlines (529)	Not aware of this issue at all (163)
A lot about it - all the major points	8%	38%	4%	0%	0%
The general picture - who the main players are	39%	54%	62%	19%	0%
Just a bit - that there's a war there	38%	6%	31%	65%	17%
Don't really know anything about it	16%	1%	3%	15%	83%

Which of the following two statements is closer to your own overall opinion on the role Western nations (the U.S., Canada, and our NATO allies) have played in this situation in Aleppo?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1501)	Knowledge of the situation in Aleppo			
		Know a lot about it (113)	Know the general picture (583)	Just know a bit (571)	Don't know anything about it (233)
Western nations failed here - they should have done more to try to prevent the death and destruction in Aleppo	48%	62%	53%	45%	38%
Western nations were right not to get more involved - it would not have helped in the end	52%	38%	47%	55%	62%