

Open-door policy? Majority support government decision not to increase 2017 refugee targets

One-quarter say they would support a Trump-style ban on Syrian refugees coming to Canada

Feb 20, 2017 – As the American travel ban on refugees, visitors and immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries creates serious foreign policy differences between Canada and the U.S., border communities in Manitoba and Quebec are bearing witness to the fallout, watching asylum seekers trudging through the snow to cross the border.

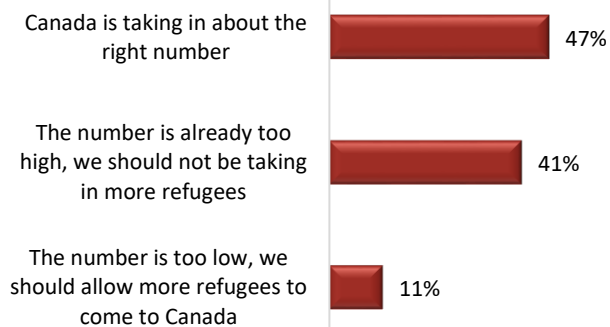
Against this backdrop, the latest survey from the Angus Reid Institute finds public opinion in this country is onside with its government's approach and response on domestic refugee policy, but is showing signs Ottawa may be testing the limits of how many migrants Canadians are willing to accept.

The majority of Canadians approve of how the Trudeau government has handled the refugee file. There is, however, a notable split in opinion regarding refugee targets for 2017. While a plurality of Canadians say the government has hit the mark with 40,000 total refugees expected to be entering the country this year, a significant segment say this number is too high.

Key Findings:

- One-in-four (25%) Canadians say this country should have responded to President Trump's executive order by adopting the same policy – a temporary ban on Syrian refugees. Most (57%) say the government made the right decision in standing pat.
- Six-in-ten (60%) Canadians say the government has done a good job overall in handling the resettlement of Syrian refugees since taking office in 2015
- Close to half of Canadians (47%) say the government is taking in the right number of refugees (Syrian and other nationalities) in 2017. A large group (41%), however, say that the total is too high, while one-in-ten (11%) say Canada should be granting access to more asylum seekers.

Overall, what is your opinion on the number of refugees coming to Canada?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Feb. 6 – 9, 2017 among a representative randomized sample of 1508 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.

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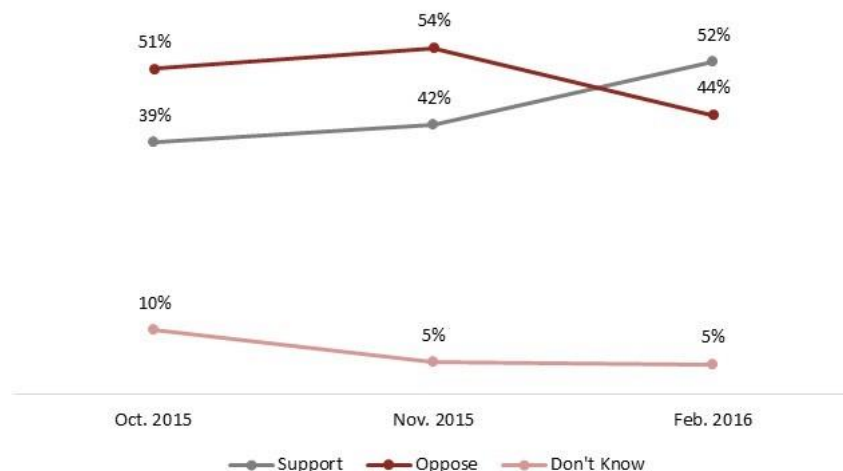
- Most approve of government handling of resettlement
- Support for Trudeau's response to Trump
- Four-in-ten say Canada accepting too many refugees
- Half say refugees won't make "enough effort" to fit in
- Positive but uncertain about Syrian refugee resettlement legacy

Most approve of government handling of resettlement

Most Canadians appear to believe the Trudeau government has struck the right balance on refugee resettlement. Support for the government's action on this file has ticked upward since the 2015 election. Initially, a majority voiced opposition to the plan to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of that year. Just over half of those who opposed it (53%) said that the tight timeline was the primary reason for their stance.

In late November, 2015, the government put forth an extended timeline, adjusting the date from January 1st to March 1st of 2016. With this change in place, the majority supported the plan when the Angus Reid Institute next asked again in February.

Support for the government's refugee resettlement plan over time:

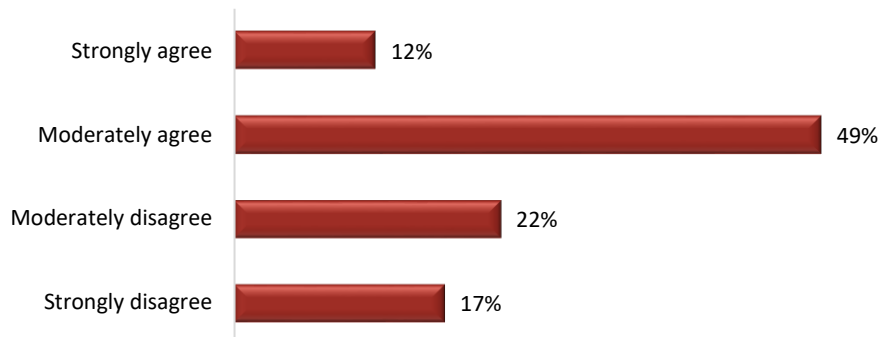


Canvassed about this issue two months into 2017, support for the government's overall handling of the resettlement plan sits at six-in-ten (60%). The largest proportion of Canadians (49%) moderately agree that the government has done a good job, while four-in-ten (40%) generally disagree. Note, the previous graph represents support of the plan, while the following graph represents whether the government has done a good job handling the issue overall.

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Overall, the federal government has done a good job handling the resettlement of refugees

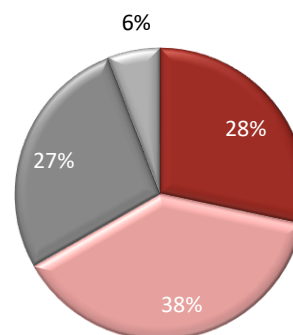


This issue, never far from the minds of many Canadians for the past 18 months, has been further amplified since United States President Donald Trump signed an executive order barring Syrian refugees – among others – from entering that country indefinitely. The impact of this currently suspended order has been felt in the courts, on the streets, and in border communities in Manitoba and Quebec, where would-be refugees have been crossing the border by foot, leading to calls for federal assistance from town officials.

Awareness of the issue appears to have spiked after recent the controversy. Just six per cent of Canadians say they haven't seen any coverage of the refugee crisis, while three-in-ten (28%) say they have been following closely and actively discussing the topic.

How closely have you been following the ongoing refugee crisis caused by the Syrian civil war? Would you say you are:

- ☒ Following it in the news and having discussions with friends and family
- ☒ Seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation
- ☒ Just scanning the headlines
- ☐ Haven't seen or heard anything about it



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This stands in contrast to the Canadian public's awareness of one of the major causes of the crisis itself - the Syrian civil war and the [battle for Aleppo](#) in late 2016. On this, twice as many Canadians had seen nothing (11%), and close to half as many were following that situation closely (16%).

Support for Trudeau's response to Trump

In response to Trump's executive order, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau – whose Liberal Party ran on a platform of accepting more refugees than the previous Conservative government – tweeted this:



From a policy perspective, some observers wondered whether this tweet signalled an increase in the number of refugees the Canadian government had currently planned to admit during 2017.

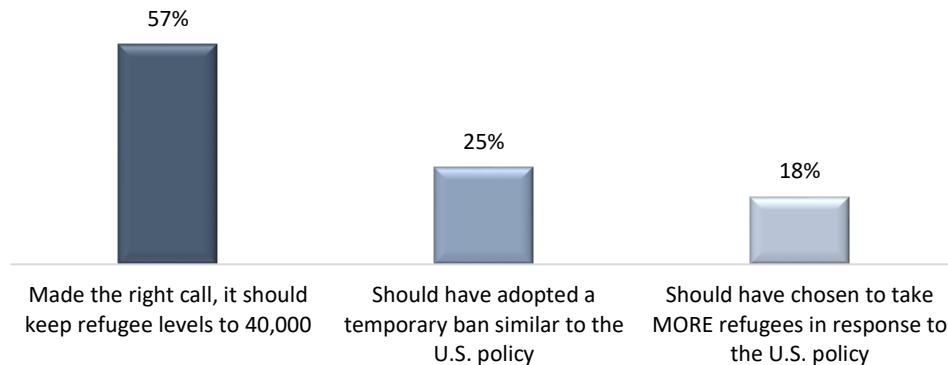
Despite pressure from some members of the New Democratic Party in Parliament, the government decided to maintain the [target of 40,000](#) refugees announced in October – down from more than 55,000 in 2016. [“We don't develop policy on the fly”](#), said Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen.

For six-in-ten Canadians (57%), the government made the right call in standing pat. However, fully one-in-four (25%), would have supported Canada implementing its own ban, while slightly fewer say that Canada should have opened its doors to more refugees:

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After U.S. President Donald Trump's executive order, Canada considered changing its own refugee policies but decided against, would you say the government:

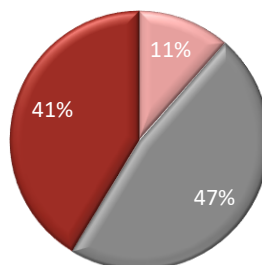





Four-in-ten say Canada accepting too many refugees

While most say the correct response to policy in the United States is to stay the course, and not adjust this nation's refugee acceptance targets, that does not necessarily mean that all Canadians are on board with the government plan itself.

Asked to consider the total number of refugees entering Canada, a slim plurality of Canadians (47%) say that the government has chosen the right amount. A similar portion (41%), however, are less keen, saying the goal is too ambitious and fewer should be allowed to enter the country. The remaining one-in-ten (11%) do not think the target is high enough, saying the government should allow more refugees to come to Canada.

Overall, what is your opinion on the number of refugees coming to Canada? Would you say:



-  The number is too low, we should allow more refugees to come to Canada
-  Canada is taking in about the right number
-  The number is already too high, we should not be taking in more refugees

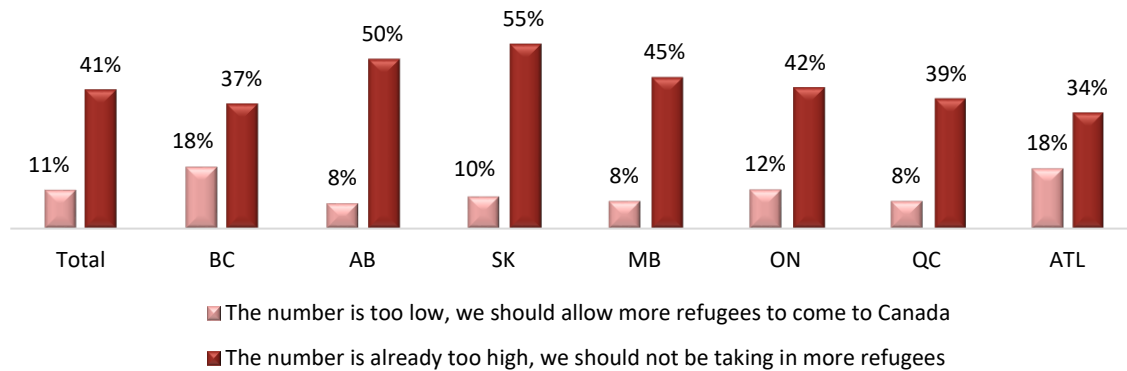
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British Columbians and Atlantic Canadians are most likely to say more refugees should be allowed into Canada, while half of Albertans (50%) and most of those in Saskatchewan (55%) say the number is too high. These are the only two provinces where this is the case:

Overall, what is your opinion on the number of refugees coming to Canada?

Would you say:

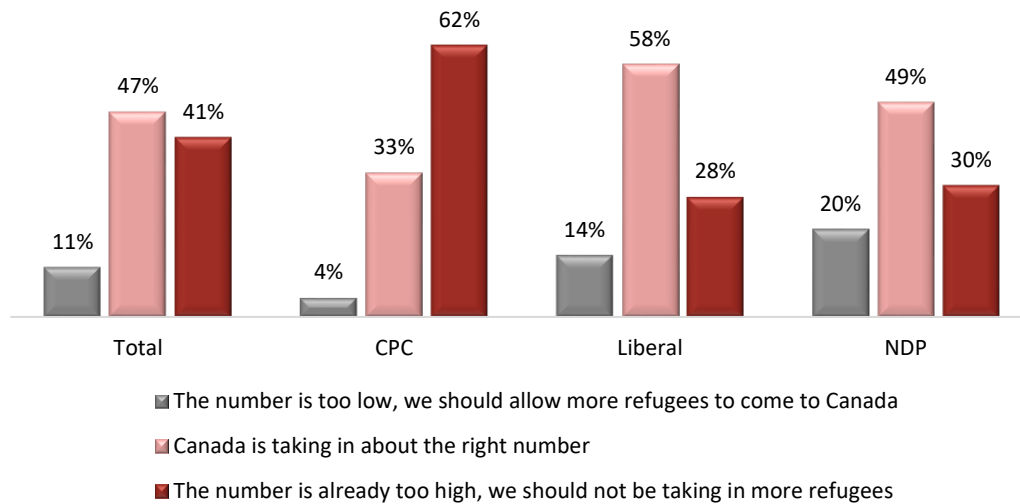


Views on this issue vary considerably across the political spectrum. Those who say they supported the Conservative Party in the 2015 election are substantially more likely to say that the number of refugees is too high – six-in-ten (62%) do so. Liberal Party supporters are most likely to say that the number is optimal (58%), while NDP supporters voice the most support for increasing targets (20%). It is notable that no more than one-quarter of supporters of any party say the number is too high – a signal that this sense of unease cuts across party lines:

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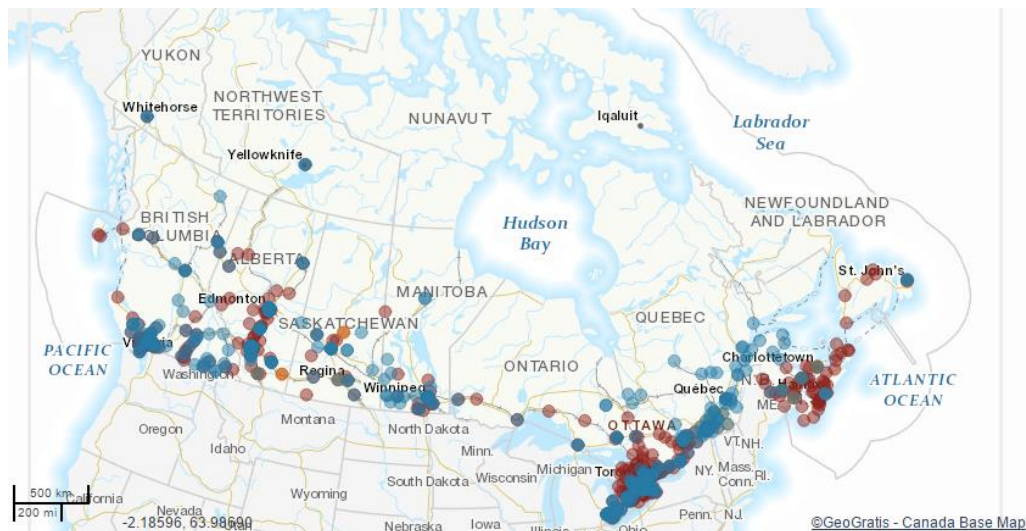
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Overall, what is your opinion on the number of refugees coming to Canada? Would you say:



Half say refugees won't make "enough effort" to fit in

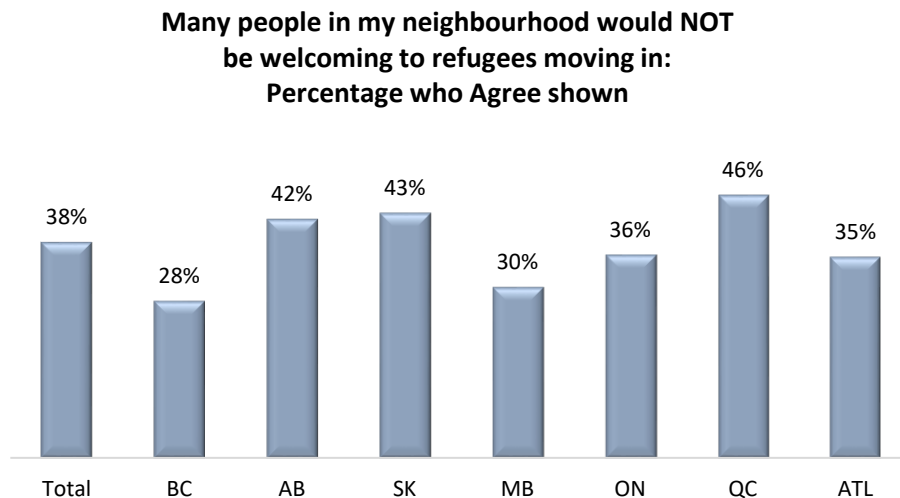
Stories of Syrian refugees integrating into neighbourhoods across the country have ranged from the [inspiring](#), to the [frustrating](#). Some 350 different communities have accepted families from the war-torn region to this point, as seen by the map below, which was produced by the Government of Canada. More than 40 per cent of the refugees accepted through this program have [settled in Ontario](#).



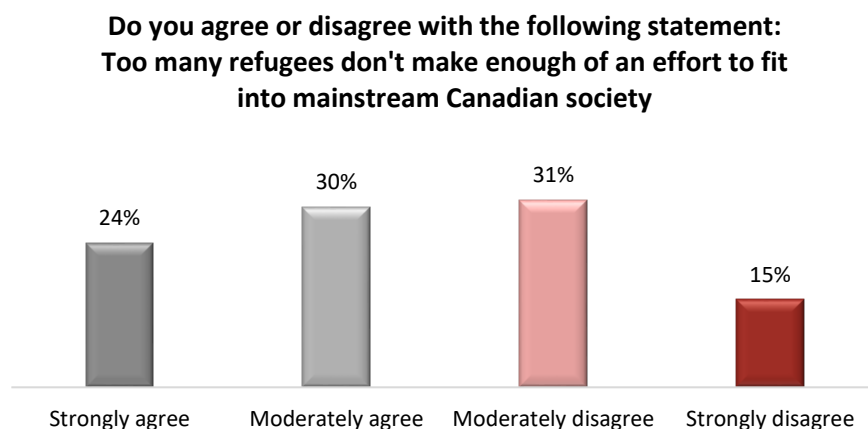
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And, while there are countless anecdotal examples of the ways communities have been gracious and helpful to these newcomers, concerns still linger among a significant portion of the public regarding acceptance. Close to four-in-ten Canadians (38%) say that many people in their community would not be welcoming to a refugee family. This number is highest in Quebec (46%) and drops ten points below average in British Columbia (28%):



Chief among the concerns of many Canadians is the assimilation of refugees coming from vastly different cultural backgrounds. Roughly half of respondents (54%) voice doubt over whether refugee families make what they consider “enough effort” to fit into Canada’s society:

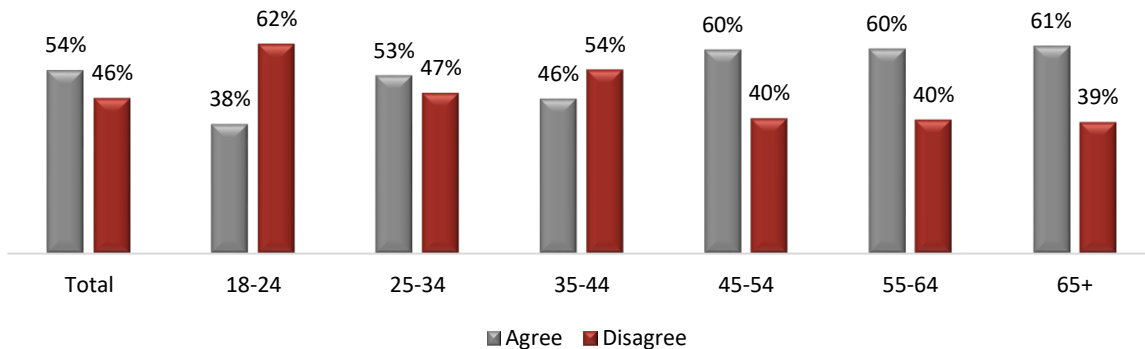


This majority opinion, that refugees won’t assimilate into mainstream society, holds across nearly all age cohorts. The youngest voting age Canadians, those 18-24, are much more likely to disagree – six-in-ten (62%) do so:

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**Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
'Too many refugees don't make enough of an effort to fit into mainstream
Canadian society'**

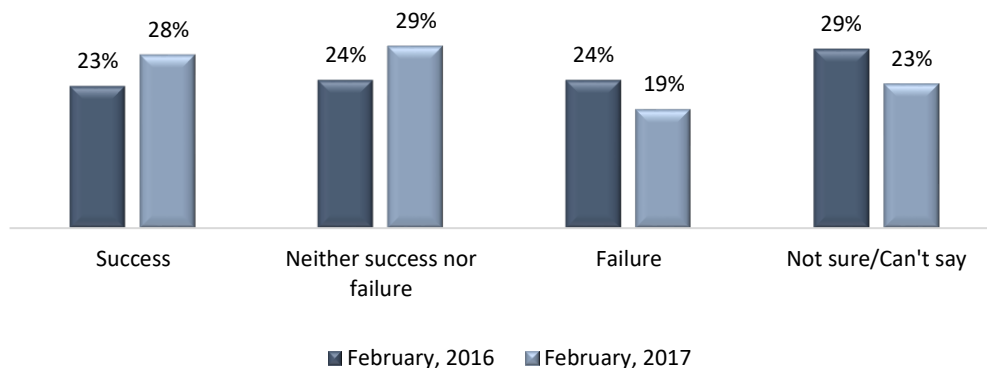


Uncertain about Syrian refugee resettlement legacy

Asked to take the long view, Canadians are divided over what they expect the legacy of the program to be. Roughly three-in-ten (28%) say the program will be looked upon as a success 15 years from now, while one-in-five (19%) expect it to be seen as a failure.

While opinion on this question remains split, it has moved toward the notion that the program will be seen as a success over the last year. This year's survey sees a five-point increase in those saying the legacy will be one of success, and a five-point decrease in those saying it will be one of failure:

**Thinking about the future - say 15 years from now - do you think
Canadians at that time will look back at the resettlement of Syrian
refugees and say it was a success or failure?**



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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.*

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

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Overall, would you say you support or oppose the government's Syrian refugee resettlement plan?		
(weighted sample sizes)	October 2015 (1504)	Feb 2016 (1507)
Strongly support	14%	21%
Moderately support	25%	31%
Moderately oppose	17%	21%
Strongly oppose	34%	23%
Not sure / Don't know	10%	5%

Thinking about the future - say 15 years from now - do you think Canadians at that time will look back at the resettlement of Syrian refugees and say it was a success or failure?		
(weighted sample sizes)	February 2016 (1507)	Feb 2017 (1508)
Success	23%	28%
Neither success nor failure	24%	29%
Failure	24%	19%
Not sure/Can't say	29%	23%

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