

Half of Canadians say Trump right on increased NATO spending, but fewer actually want to meet that mark

Most say it was inappropriate of President to suggest not defending NATO allies under contribution target

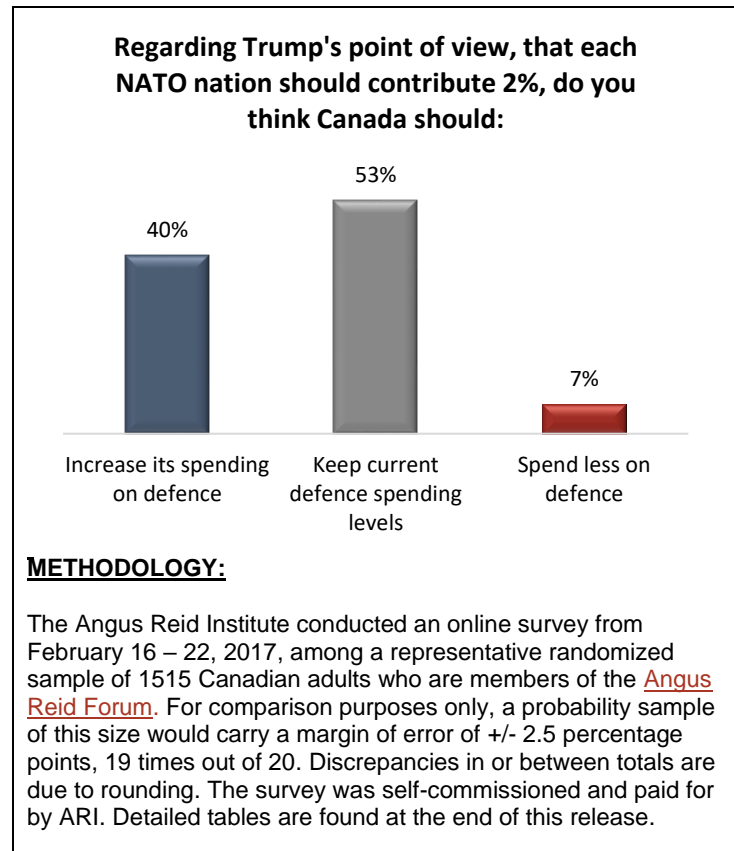
March 14, 2017 – As Finance Minister Bill Morneau gets set to table what is already being touted as a “[cautious budget](#),” he will find Canadians aligned with one of his government’s key foreign spending policies – even if it puts this country on a divergent path from the U.S.

A new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute – the final installment in a [three-part-series](#) on the Canada-U.S. relationship in the Trump era – finds Canadians mostly fine with their country continuing to maintain its own foreign policy course, notably on the question of defence spending.

While Canadians are almost evenly split on the question of whether members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – to which Canada belongs – should spend two per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on defence, fewer than half (40%) say Canada should be digging deeper into national coffers to pay the [extra \\$20 billion](#) required to meet that standard.

Key Findings:

- Just over half (52%) say U.S. President Donald Trump is right that NATO members should spend the recommended amount of two per cent of GDP, but the majority (60%) are disinclined to see an increase Canada’s defence spending
- By a rate of three-to-one Canadians are more likely to say Trump decision to re-instate the Mexico City policy on maternal health is bad one (62%) than a good one (20%)
- On Russia, having heard Donald Trump’s openness to leader Vladimir Putin, three-quarters of Canadians (77%) say that Canada should maintain its current approach, which has included sanctions and cold relations in the past several years



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Introduction:

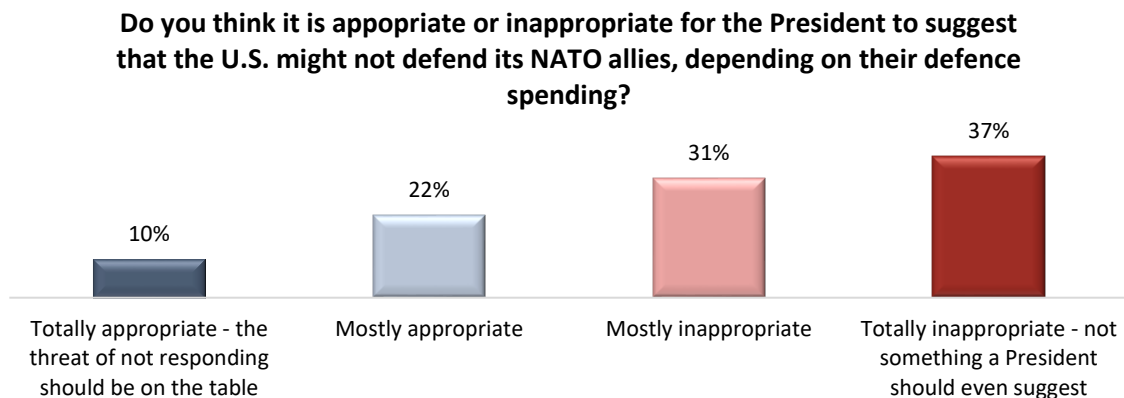
Speculation about the impact of the Trump era on Canada started [the day of](#) the president's stunning electoral victory. While Canada maintains its own distinct foreign policy interests, this nation has walked [in lockstep](#) with the United States for much of its history. From treaties, to trade deals, to war efforts, American policy is often suggestive of Canadian policy. In this new era of global realignment, some pressure has been applied to the Trudeau government to effectively respond to positions – some controversial – put forth by the Trump administration.

Previous installments of this study have focused on perceptions of the Trudeau government's capacity to deal with the new U.S. leadership, and areas of agreement and disagreement on [climate change and pipelines](#). This final report deals with a several other foreign policy concerns, outlined in the index above.

Half say Trump right on NATO, fewer want to meet two per cent of GDP target

As a candidate, Trump [suggested](#) that the United States would only defend fellow NATO members against an attack if he believed those countries had “fulfilled their obligations to us.” Later, as President-elect, he [called NATO “obsolete,”](#) and said other countries not spending the recommended 2 per cent of GDP on defence was “very unfair to the United States.”

Asked to consider these comments from the new leader of the alliance's largest member nation, almost seven-in-ten Canadians (68%) find them inappropriate, and largest group (37%) say they are “not something a President should even suggest”:



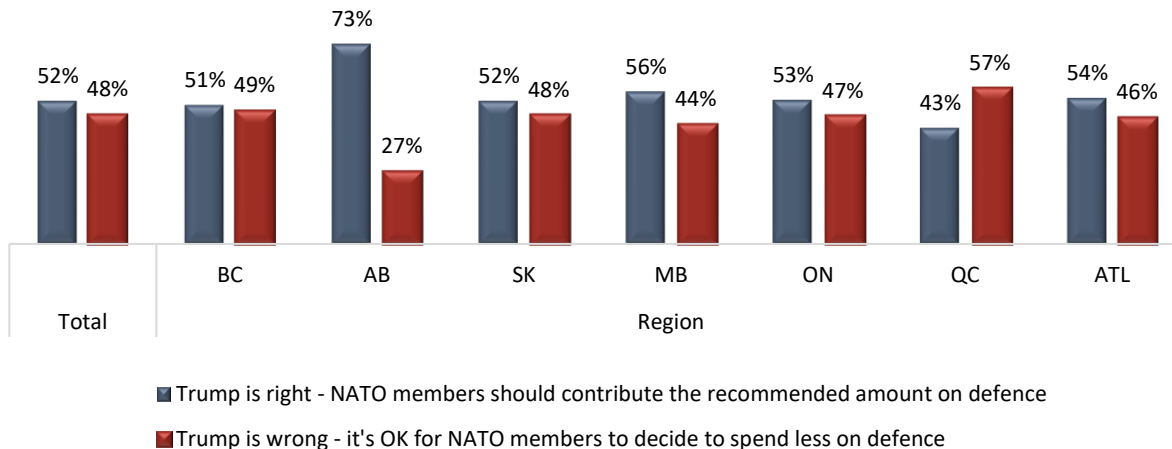
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But on Trump's larger point – that NATO countries aren't spending enough on defence – Canadians are more evenly divided. Slightly more than half (52%) say Trump is right in his assertion that member states should contribute the recommended amount, while the rest (48%) say it's OK for NATO members to decide to spend less.

This near-even split is reflected across most regions of the country, though Alberta – and to a lesser extent, Quebec – are notable outliers:

Leaving aside whether it was appropriate for Trump to suggest that the U.S. might not defend its NATO allies, how do you feel about his call for NATO members to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence? Would you say:



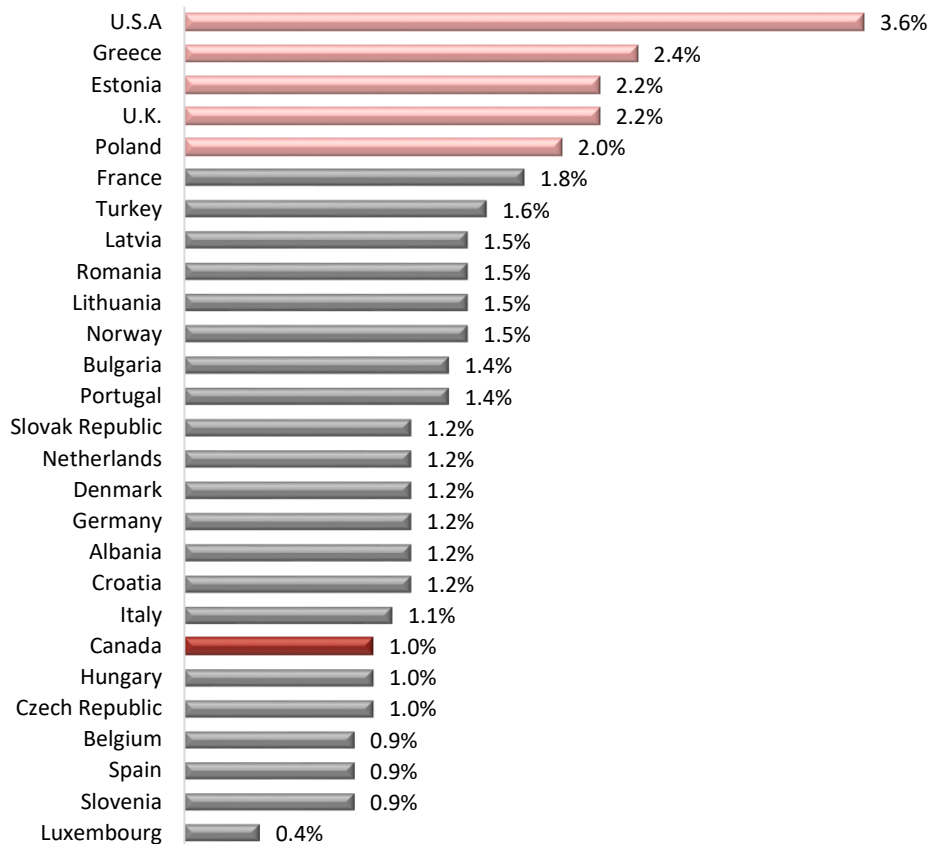
When this question narrows from the abstract – what other countries should do – to the tangible – what *this* country should do - Canadians aren't as inclined to loosen the purse strings.

Canada currently spends approximately 1 per cent of its GDP on defence, about \$20 billion, and just over half of Canadians (53%) are content to keep it that way.

A sizeable minority – 40 per cent – say that Canada should increase its spending on defence in light of Trump's position, while a much smaller group (7%) says Canada should spend less on defence in the Trump era. This proposed one per cent increase in spending would equate to another \$20 billion being added to the defence budget.

Defense Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan admitted recently that there "needs to be more investment" in defense, but that the government would not be committing to such a jump to meet the request of the new U.S. President. Canada sits 23rd out of 28 NATO countries in terms of its relative contribution.

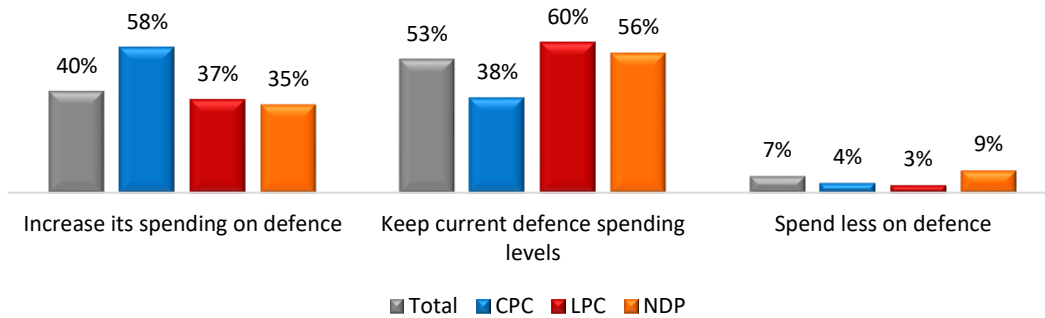
NATO Spending as percentage of GDP (2016) NATO Target = 2.0%



The government has argued that Canada contributes in other ways, with boots on the ground, rather than in strict funding terms.

Regionally, Alberta is again an outlier. It's the only province where a majority (54%) say Canada should increase defence spending ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)). This finding is likely correlated with the large number of Conservative voters in Alberta. As seen in the following graph, those who voted for the CPC in 2015 are considerably more supportive of increased military spending than past voters of other major parties:

Regarding Trump's point of view, that each NATO nation should contribute 2%, do you think Canada should:



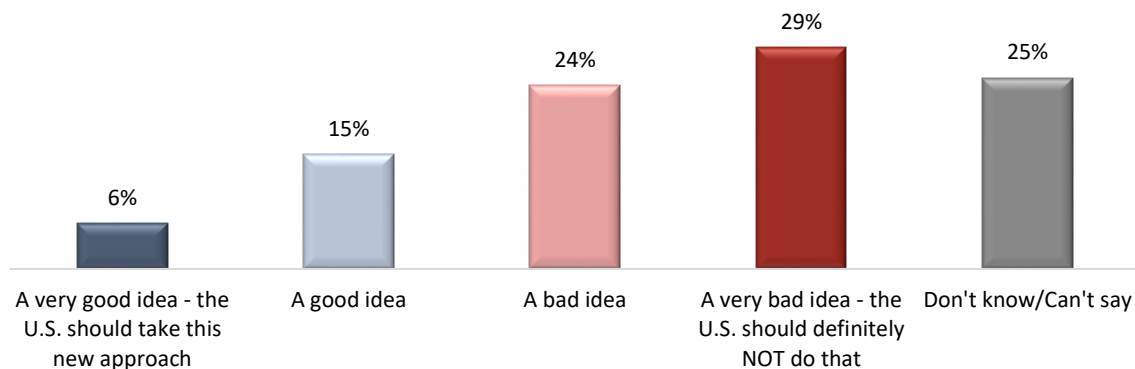
There is also a significant gender divide on this issue of defence spending, with men more likely than women to say countries – including Canada – should spend more, and that Trump’s suggestion that the U.S. might not defend NATO allies was appropriate ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Little desire for close relations with Russia

Donald Trump has consistently praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and said he hopes to forge a closer relationship between the United States and Russia. From Attorney General Jeff Sessions to Michael Flynn, who stepped down as National Security Advisor just weeks into his tenure, the new administration has certainly faced its share of accusations that these ties are [closer than previously disclosed](#).

Recent ARI polling in the United States [suggests](#) that Americans aren’t especially on board with this agenda and [external polling](#) appears to confirm that. Similarly, this Canadian poll finds more than twice as many north of the border say closer ties with Russia are “a bad idea” for the U.S. than a good one:

**What are your views on the new U.S. administration's approach to Russia?
Would you say it is:**



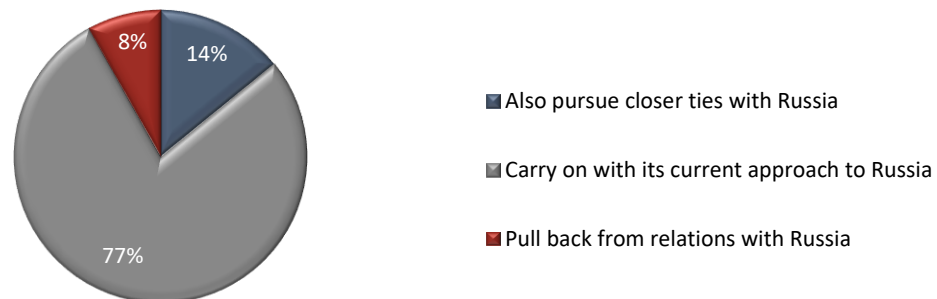
Perhaps relatedly, Canadians are mostly disinterested in their own country pursuing closer ties with the nation their government condemned and [imposed sanctions on](#) after its annexation of Crimea. Stephen Harper's government took a harsh tone in its dealings with Russia. Harper said at a 2015 G7 summit that Russia had "[no place](#)" being in Crimea, and did not share Western values.

The Trudeau government has arguably doubled down on its predecessor's position in naming Chrystia Freeland as Foreign Affairs Minister. Freeland was one of 13 Canadians [banned from entering Russia](#) in response to the Harper-era sanctions.

Given this context, it follows that the Canadian appetite for a closer relationship with Russia is a slight one.

Fewer than one-in-six Canadians (14%) say their country should join the U.S. in pursuing closer ties with Russia, and even fewer (8%) say Canada should further pull back from the relationship. The vast majority favour a continuation of the current approach, which includes the Harper government's hard-line stance.

**Suppose the Trump administration does pursue a closer relationship with Russia.
If that were the case, how would you like to see Canada respond? Should Canada:**



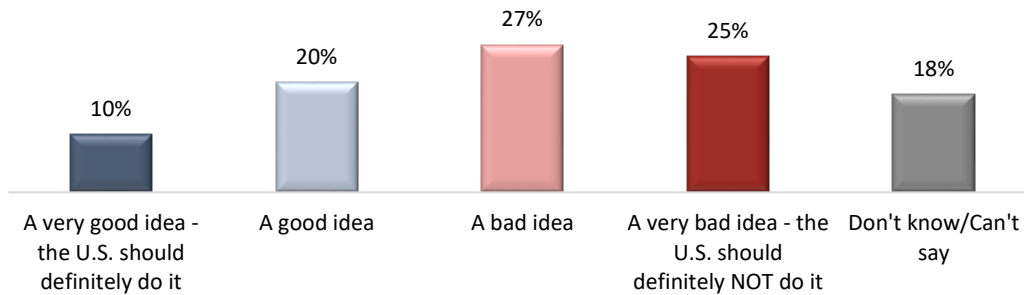
Just one-in-ten want more Canadian isolationism

Many of Trump's signature policy proposals focus on immigration and international trade, with an underlying message that these things undermine American security and hurt the U.S. economy. Trump and his advisors have summed up this approach as putting "America First."

For many, this slogan, and the policies that accompany it, signal a return to the more isolationist American foreign policy seen before World War II.

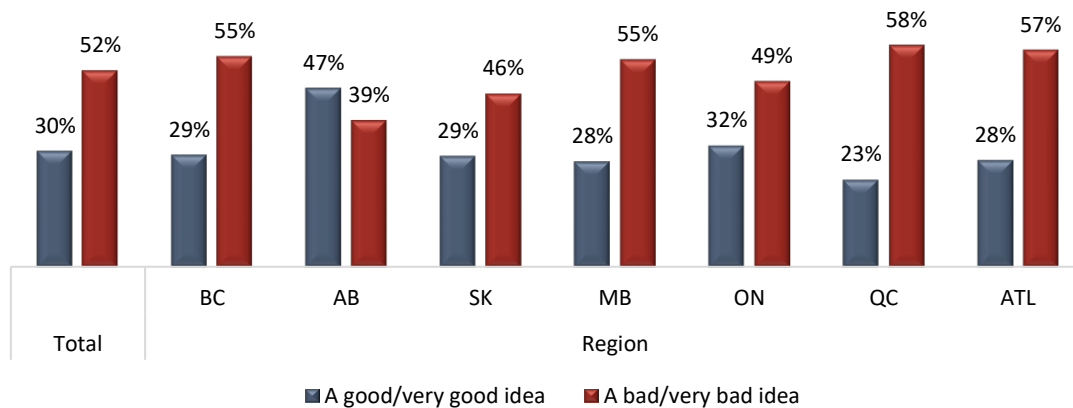
Canadians tend to view an American withdrawal from the global stage as a bad idea, rather than a good one, as seen in the following graph:

**What are your views on the U.S. becoming more isolated and reducing its involvement in global organizations and world affairs?
Overall, would you say this is:**



As was the case in their views on NATO, Albertans are again an outlier. Almost half of respondents in Wild Rose Country (47%) say an increasingly isolationist U.S. is a good idea. No other province rises above 32 per cent:

What are your view on the U.S. becoming more isolated and reducing its involvement in global organizations and world affairs?



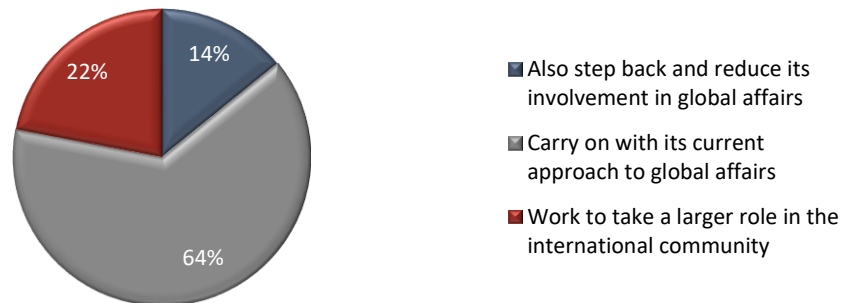
The difference between Alberta and the rest of Canada is again correlated with the difference between past Conservative voters and those who cast ballots for other parties. More than six-in-ten supporters of both the Liberal and New Democratic parties see American isolationism as a bad idea, while those who voted for Harper's CPC in 2015 are divided (44% say it's a good idea, 42% say it's a bad one; [see comprehensive tables](#)).

This view is all the more surprising because it has long been [associated with people on the left](#) – not the right – of the political spectrum, who have railed against America's global hegemony and called for the U.S. to take a less active role in world affairs.

Interestingly, the desire to pull back from the international spotlight doesn't seem to extend to Canada, even for those groups most likely to favour the U.S. doing so. The Trudeau government has voiced support for the notion that globalization has not worked for middle-class workers globally, but has defended Canada's commitment to working with the international community on issues of climate change, human rights, and free trade deals, such as the one [recently ratified](#) by the European Parliament.

Asked how Canada should respond if the U.S. steps back from the world stage, two-in-three Canadians (64%) say their country should carry on with its current approach, rather than standing up or stepping back:

How should Canada respond if the U.S. does pull back from global affairs? In that case, should Canada:



Albertans and CPC voters are more likely than other demographic groups to favour a more isolationist Canada, but relatively few of them feel this way (28% of Albertans and 25% of CPC voters, respectively; [see comprehensive tables](#)).

Canadians support reproductive health programs, less keen on spending increase

Justin Trudeau and Donald Trump marked International Women's Day in different ways. While the President tweeted messages that some [suspect he did not write himself](#), the Prime Minister pledged [\\$650 million over three years](#) in funding for reproductive health organizations around the world – funding that will, in part, make up for Trump's reinstatement of the [Mexico City policy](#), which blocks U.S. federal funding for international non-profit organizations involved in abortion services.

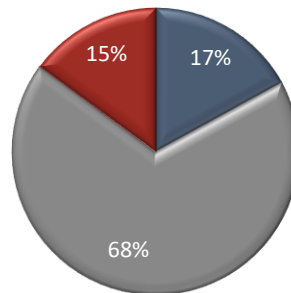
When Trump has spoken about Canada during his first months in office, he has generally been positive – even giving Trudeau [a shout-out](#) in his first address to a joint session of Congress. And while the two leaders found common ground on the need to spearhead entrepreneurship opportunities for women in business, they differ on their governments' roles on another women's rights issue: reproductive health.

Continuing the tradition of previous Republican Presidents, Trump re-instated the Mexico City policy, which refuses U.S. government funding to international non-profit organizations that provide abortion counselling or referral. The policy was enacted under Ronald Reagan and has been rescinded by each Democrat and reinstated by each Republican to take the presidency since.

The government of the Netherlands [responded to this move](#) by creating a global fund for abortion, birth control and women's education, which Canada said it would support. Trudeau outlined this support on International Women's Day, announcing that the Canadian government would double its funding for reproductive health and rights programs over the next three years.

Two-in-three Canadians (68%) say that the government is right to maintain its funding of these types of programs, regardless of what the administration in the U.S. does. However, the government's increase in funding falls in line with the views of just 15 per cent of Canadians, as seen in the graph that follows:

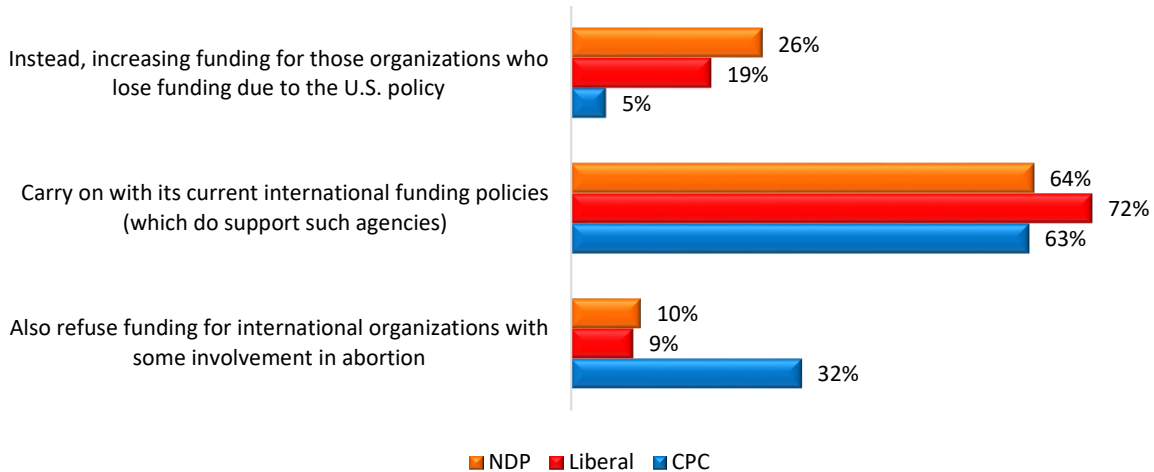
What do you think Canada's policy on this issue should be? Should Canada:



- Also refuse funding for international organizations with some involvement in abortion
- Carry on with its current international funding policies (which do support such agencies)
- Instead, increasing funding for those organizations who lose funding due to the U.S. policy

Views on this issue break down largely by political affiliation. Those who supported the Conservative Party in the last federal election are three times as likely to support a ban on funding for organizations supporting abortion-related activities, while New Democratic Party supporters say Canada should increase funding at a rate of one-in-four (26%).

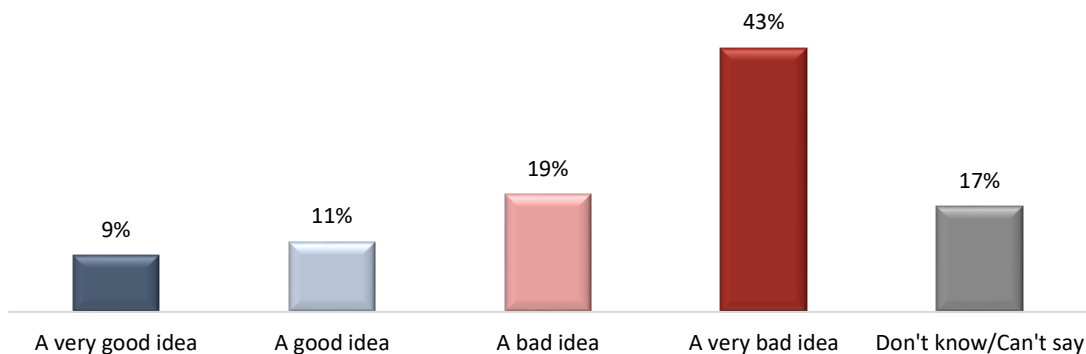
What do you think Canada's policy on this issue should be? Should Canada:



Younger Canadians, age 18-34 are most likely to support an increase in investment – one-in-five (22%) say this is the right path to pursue, compared to half that number for respondents in older age cohorts.

As for the decision of the U.S. President to continue the Republican Party tradition of re-instating the Mexico City policy – a move that will reportedly leave a \$600 million gap in funding for affected organizations – fully six-in-ten (62%) Canadians say this was a bad idea. Indeed, respondents are more than twice as likely to choose “very bad” than they are to choose any other option, as seen in the following graph:

Do you think this executive order to reinstate the Mexico City policy was:

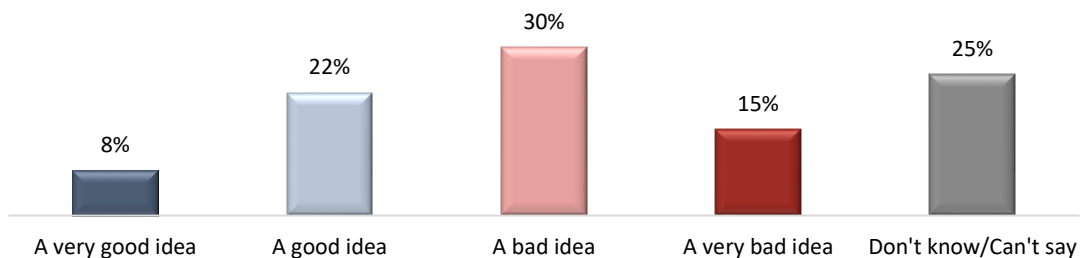


Most don't trust Trump to 'tweak' NAFTA

When Trudeau and Trump met last month, one of the top issues on the minds of most Canadians was the anticipated renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The President has been highly critical of the deal, and hopes to rework terms to favour U.S. interests.

The good news for Canadians coming out of the two leaders' first meeting was an apparent vow from Trump to only tweak provisions with respect to Canada, while focusing more on American terms with Mexico. Regardless, Canadians lean toward the opinion that a renegotiation would be a bad idea. Just under half say this (45%) while three-in-ten (30%) favour the idea and one-quarter (25%) remain unsure at this point.

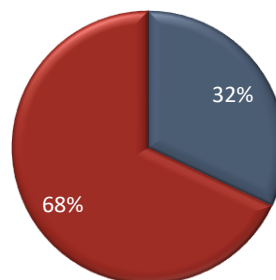
**The new U.S. administration has signaled it wants to renegotiate NAFTA.
Do you think the US government's intention to renegotiate NAFTA is:**



One partial explanation for a plurality of Canadians saying that this renegotiation would be a bad idea is the fact that most don't necessarily believe what Trump has said on the matter.

Asked to weigh in on the statement that NAFTA would be simply "tweaked" where Canada is concerned, two-thirds of Canadians (68%) say they can't count on this because Trump could easily change his mind. The rest say the President means this and Canada won't be affected greatly in negotiations.

President Trump said the US will be "tweaking" NAFTA where Canada is concerned, and instead be much more focused on Mexico. In light of these more recent statements, do you think:



- Trump means this and Canada won't be much affected by new NAFTA negotiations
- We can't count on better treatment for Canada - he can so easily change his mind

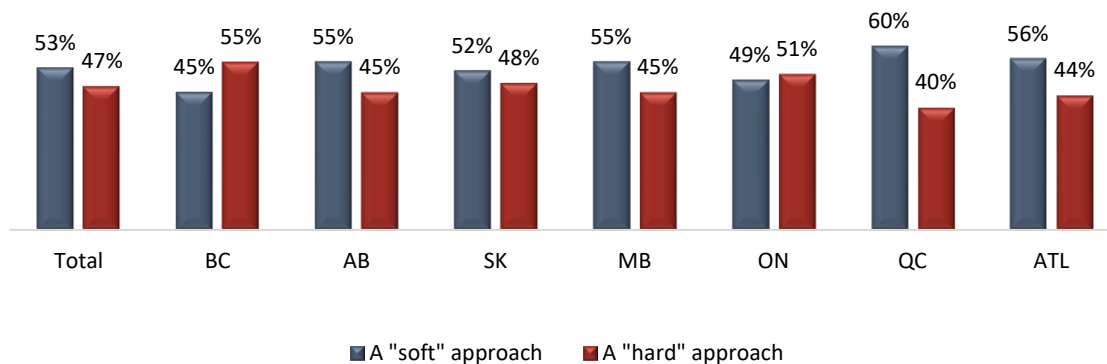
With more than \$650 billion in total trade between the two nations, any changes – even 'tweaks' – are likely to reverberate throughout the Canadian economy. So, what should Canada do if the U.S. formally

presents a proposal to renegotiate NAFTA? Canadians are split over the tactics they would like to see their government employ.

Roughly half (53%) say that Trudeau and his team should take a *soft approach*, where difficult concessions might be made with the hopes of maintaining a positive overall relationship with this country's largest trade partner. A similar number (47%) take the opposite position, saying that the government should employ a *hard approach*, which would entail refusing concessions, even at the risk of damaging the relationship between the two countries.

British Columbia and Ontario are the two provinces most inclined to favour a hard stance. In B.C., some of this may owe to the [long-running](#) softwood lumber dispute, or simply to British Columbians' [propensity](#) to oppose all things Trump. In Ontario, meanwhile, the impact of Trump's trade policy and any potential NAFTA renegotiation on the manufacturing sector is [a source of concern](#) for producers hoping to attract investment.

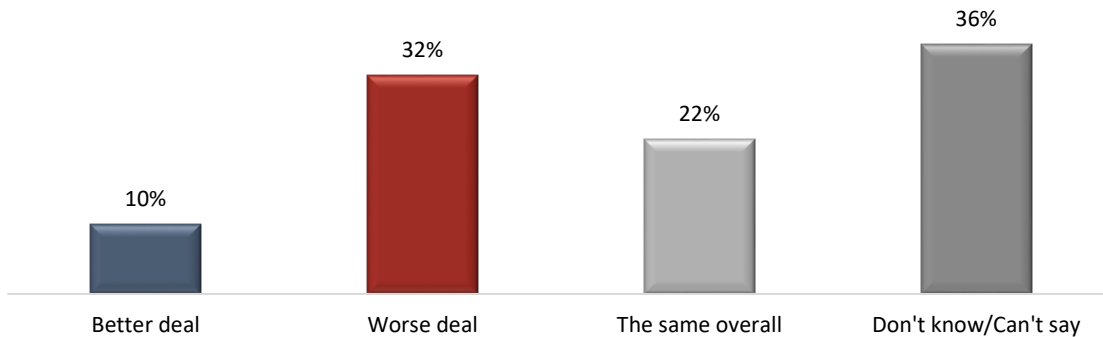
Assuming the US does give official notice that it wants to renegotiate NAFTA, which of these overall approaches should Canada take?



If NAFTA is ultimately renegotiated, Canadians believe – by a three-to-one margin – that their country will come out on the short end of stick. Only one-in-ten (10%) say Canada will benefit from new terms, while one-in-three (32%) say the deal will be worse.

That said, the most common response to this question is uncertainty (36%), while one-in-five say the deal will be the same overall.

Regardless of which approach Canada actually takes, if NAFTA is renegotiated, will the end result be a better or worse deal for this country?



*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.*

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