

Is Canada responsible when defence exports are used abroad against civilians? Half of Canadians say yes

Most uncomfortable selling arms to Saudi Arabia, but would leave current deal in place

September 14, 2017 – When a country that buys weapons and other military technology from Canadian companies is alleged to have used those items against its own people, does Canada bear responsibility?

While Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland and officials investigating the alleged use of Canadian-made equipment against civilians in Saudi Arabia grapple with this question, Canadians are weighing in with their own answers.

A new report from the Angus Reid Institute finds slightly more than half (53%) say this country is not responsible for what happens to defence technology once it leaves Canada, while the rest believe the opposite.

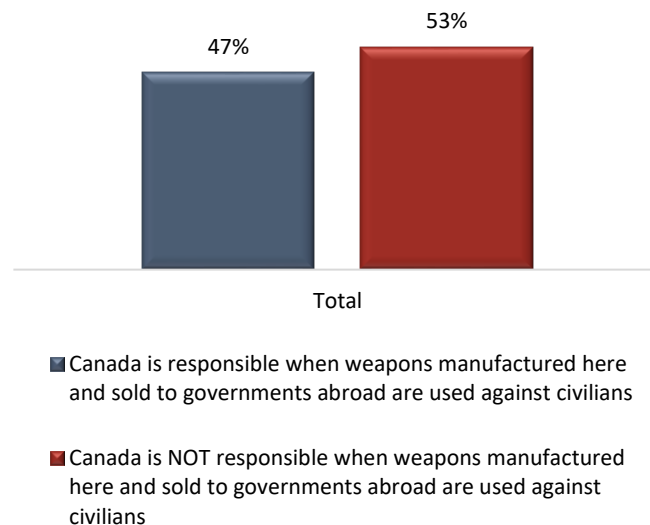
That said, Canadians – who also vastly underestimate this country's defence exports – are more united in the belief that their country should not have been selling arms to Saudi Arabia in the first place.

Six-in-ten (62%) say Canada should not be selling arms to that Middle Eastern nation, while fewer than one-in-six say this of any of the other seven top destinations for Canadian military technology, including the United States (15%) and Germany (9%).

Key Findings:

- Just one-in-ten Canadians (10%) correctly identify their country as one of the top 10 exporters of military and defence technology in the world. Most think Canada is either in the top 11 – 20 (48%) or outside the top 20 entirely (42%)

Share who say each of the following views are closer to their own:



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from August 22 – 25, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,505 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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- While most don't think Canada should be selling military technology to Saudi Arabia, fewer than half (40%) would cancel the 15-year, \$15-billion deal to sell armoured vehicles to that country that the federal government approved last year
- Most (60%) would let the deal stand, but they have differing views about future trade. Overall 44 per cent would honour the agreement, but do so while prohibiting any future weapons sales to Saudi Arabia. Just one-in-six (16%) would keep the current deal and allow future sales to the kingdom

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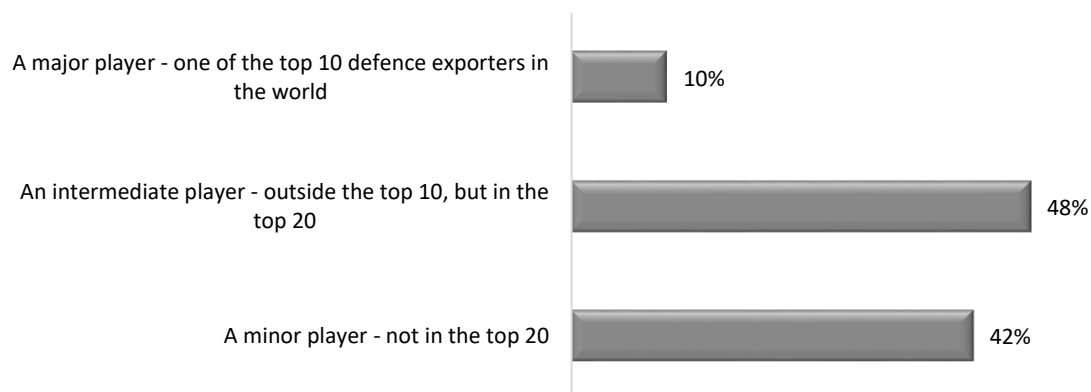
- **Canadians underestimate extent of military technology industry**
- **What's Canada's responsibility?**
- **Canadians are uncomfortable with selling to Saudi Arabia**
- **What should government do going forward?**

Canadians underestimate extent of military technology industry

Canada's defence sector employs more than 70,000 people – about 4 per cent of the country's manufacturing industry overall. This country exported more than \$4.3 billion worth of weapons and military equipment in 2016. As a result, Canada ranked sixth in the world for exports of military and defence technology last year, [according to IHS Jane's](#), an industry analyst.

However, Canadians are largely unaware of the major role their country plays in the international market for defence technology. Asked where Canada ranks globally, only one-in-ten Canadians (10%) correctly identify their country as one of the top 10 defence exporters in the world:

Where do you think Canada ranks compared to other countries in terms of the amount of weapons and military technology it produces and sells to other nations?



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Although Canadians of all ages underestimate the size of the arms-exporting industry, younger respondents (those ages 18-34) are more than twice as likely as the older ones (those ages 55-plus) to correctly identify their country as a major player in the international market (14% to 6%). Almost half of the oldest cohort (47%) think Canada is a minor player ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

What's Canada's responsibility?

The agreement to sell armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia was negotiated during the previous Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, which [hailed it as a historic "win"](#) for the country's advanced manufacturing industry.

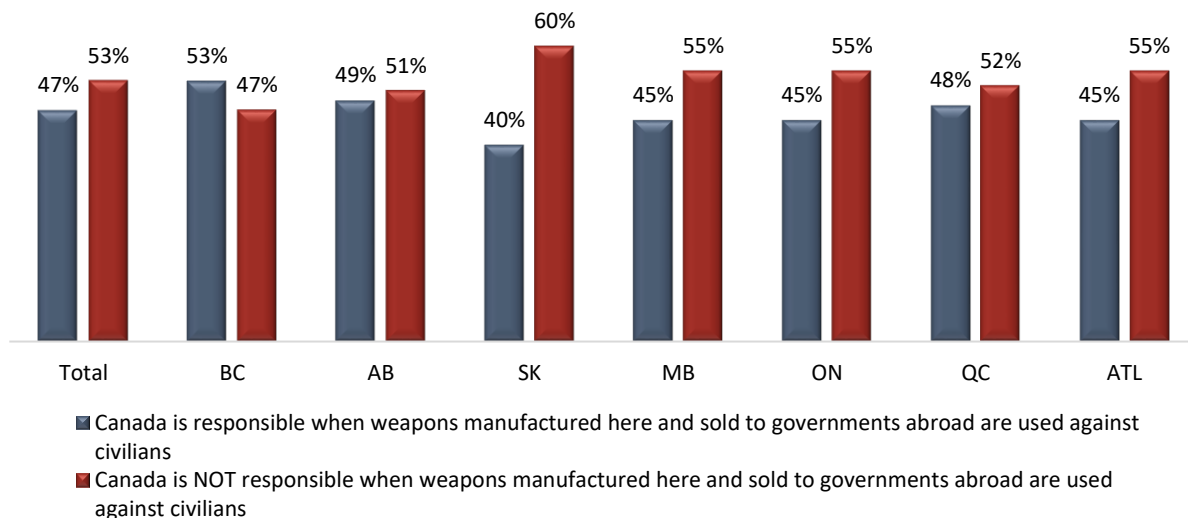
When the federal Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau approved the export permits last year, it argued that it didn't want to interfere with a ["done deal."](#) Doing so, the government argued, would both hurt Canada's economy and damage the country's reputation for keeping its word.

The move was not without controversy. A [February 2016 Angus Reid Institute poll](#) found that nearly half of Canadians (48%) felt the decision to stick by the inherited deal was a bad one.

More recently, videos have surfaced that allegedly show Canadian-made vehicles being used in crackdowns against civilians in an eastern Saudi Arabian city. The videos prompted Freeland to begin an investigation, saying she was ["deeply concerned"](#) by the allegations.

If Canadian-made technology was, in fact, used against civilians, does Canada have blood on its hands? Canadians are divided as to whether their country is responsible for how exported weapons and military technology are used by their buyers:

Share who say each of the following views are closer to their own:



The government's position is further complicated by [legislation Freeland introduced](#) in April that would see Canada join the UN Arms Trade Treaty. Doing so would – among other things – create a legal obligation for Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs to assess the risk that an exported good could be used

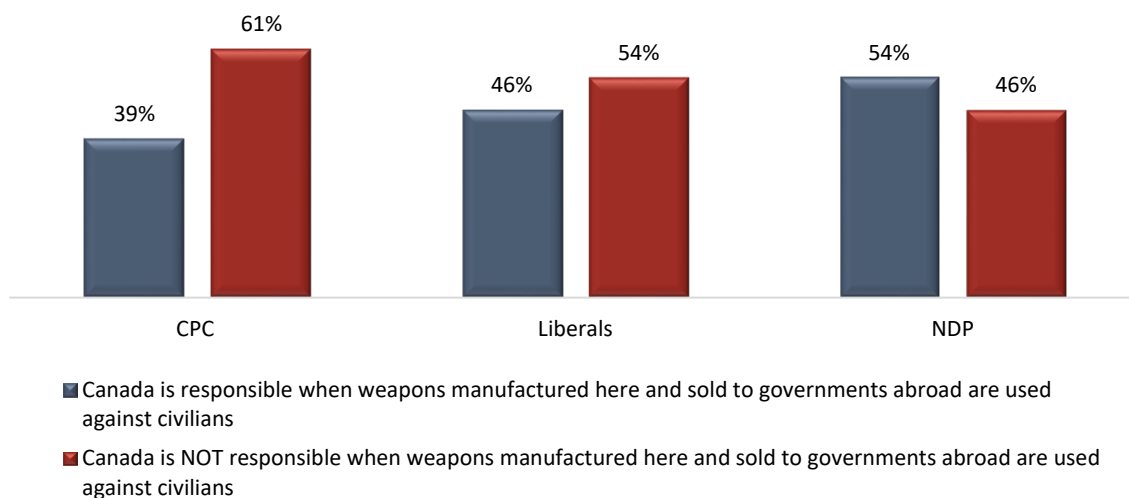
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to commit “a serious violation of international humanitarian law or international human rights law” before authorizing export permits.

Notably, a majority of those who voted for the Liberal Party in 2015 take a position arguably at odds with joining the treaty. They are joined in this opinion by past Conservatives, and even a substantial percentage of past NDP voters:

Share who say each of the following views are closer to their own:



A gender divide also emerges on this question, with men more likely than women to say Canada is not responsible in situations like this (58% versus 49%; [see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Canadians are uncomfortable with selling to Saudi Arabia

In its [February 2016 poll](#) on Canadian relations with the Middle East, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians about their country’s relationship with Saudi Arabia. At that time, fewer than one-in-ten respondents (8%) felt Canada should pursue military cooperation – including arms deals – with the Saudi regime. More than half (54%) of Canadians were inclined to condemn Saudi Arabia’s government, while just one-in-ten (10%) respondents respected it.

This study finds Canadians remain largely uncomfortable with the idea of military trade with the kingdom.

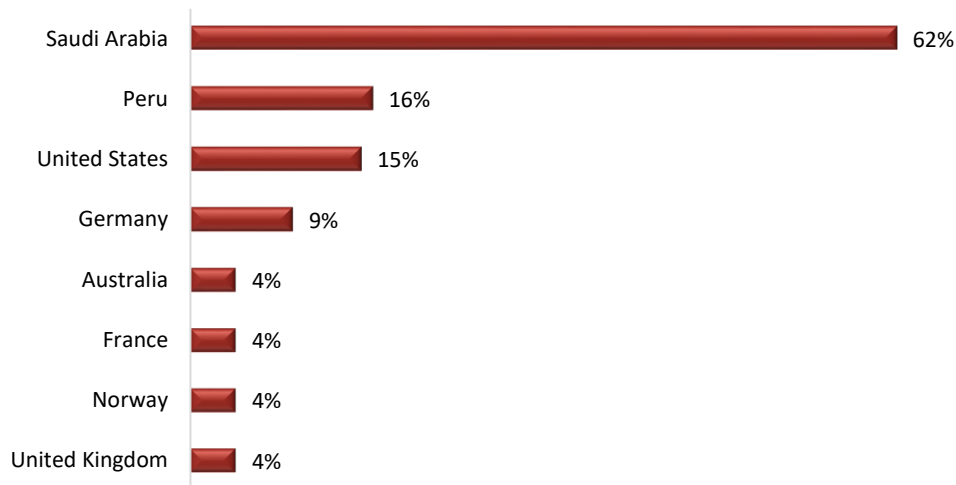
Respondents were presented with a list of eight destinations for Canadian military exports – the top eight destinations in 2016, though respondents were not provided with this information – and asked to select any countries on the list to which they believe Canada shouldn’t sell.

Six-in-ten (62%) identify Saudi Arabia as a country with which Canadian companies should not be making arms deals. No other country on the list is rejected by more than one-in-six respondents.

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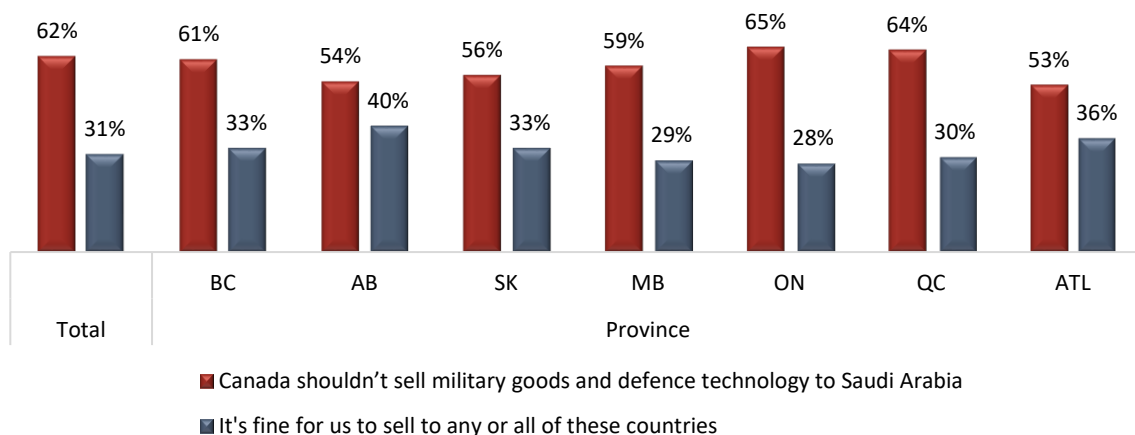
Of the following countries, are there any you think we shouldn't sell military goods and defence technology to?



Although Canadians of all political stripes are against selling military goods to Saudi Arabia, past NDP voters are the most likely to voice their opposition. Nearly seven-in-ten (68%) do so, compared to six-in-ten past Liberal and past Conservative voters.

Notably, nearly one-third of Canadians (31%) say it's fine to sell military goods and technology to any or all of the listed countries. This feeling is strongest in Alberta where four-in-ten respondents (40%) voice the position. Along with Atlantic Canadians, Albertans are also the least likely to say Canada shouldn't sell military goods to Saudi Arabia, as seen in the following graph:

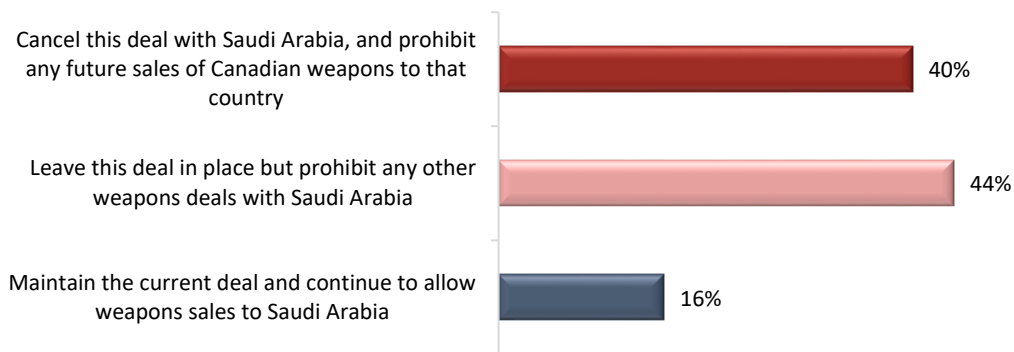
Of the following countries, are there any you think we shouldn't sell military goods and defence technology to?



What should the government do going forward?

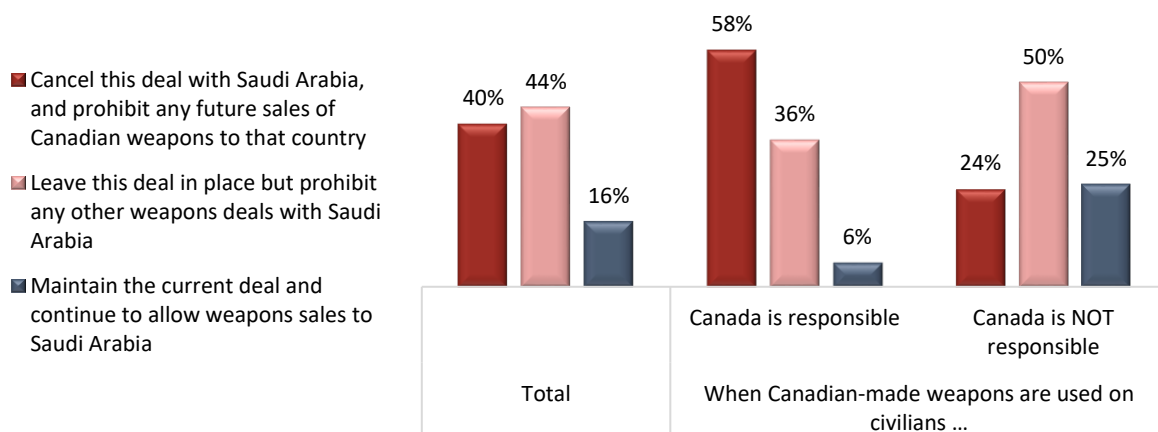
Despite their opposition to selling weapons military goods and technology to Saudi Arabia in general, Canadians are divided on what the government should do about the ongoing deal for armored vehicles, as seen in the following graph:

In terms of the current deal for armoured vehicles with Saudi Arabia, what would you advise the government to do?



Perhaps unsurprisingly, views on this question vary significantly depending on how one feels about Canada's responsibility in cases where defence technology manufactured here is used on civilians abroad, as seen in the graph that follows:

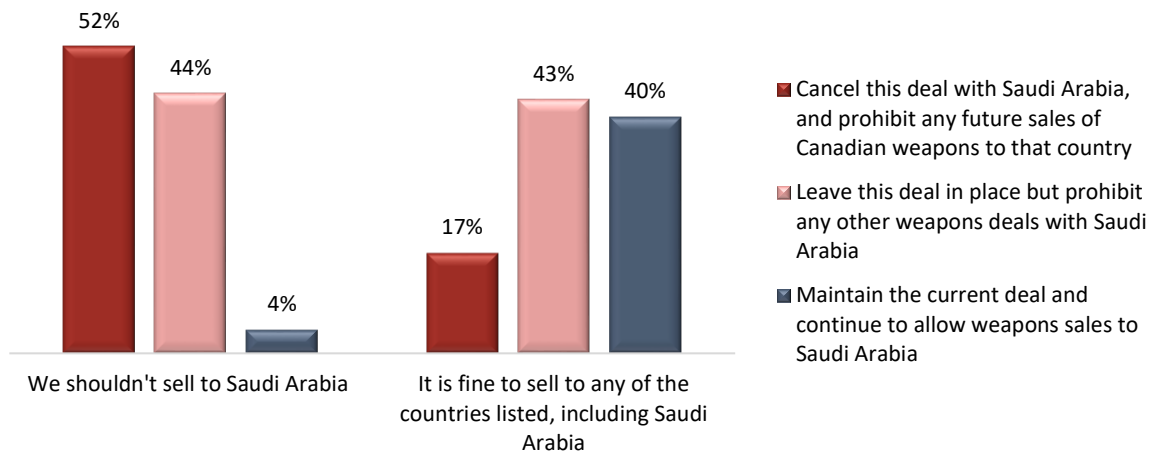
In terms of the current deal for armoured vehicles with Saudi Arabia, what would you advise the government to do?



Even those who say Canada should not sell any military goods and technology to Saudi Arabia are divided over what to do: Half (52%) would advise the government to cancel the deal, while 44 per cent say leave it in place but prohibit any other weapons deals with Saudi Arabia.

By contrast, people who say it is fine to sell to any of the countries listed in the survey, including Saudi Arabia, are significantly less likely to say they would advise the government to cancel the deal. They are also ten times more likely than their counterparts to advise maintaining the current deal and allowing future sales:

In terms of the current deal for armoured vehicles with Saudi Arabia, what would you advise the government to do?

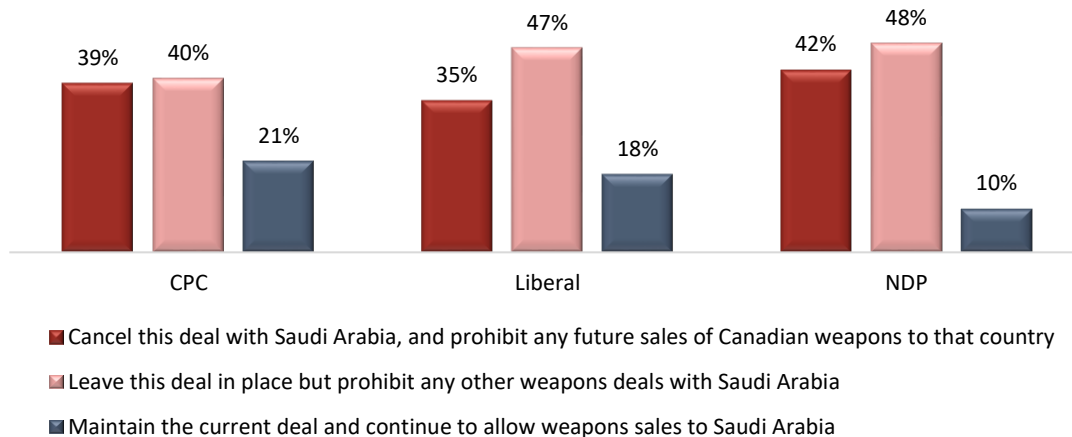


Again, opinion on this question varies by past political leanings and by gender. Men are almost twice as likely as women to say Canada should maintain the current deal and allow future sales (21% versus 11%; [see comprehensive tables](#)).

Likewise, past Conservatives are twice as likely as past NDP voters to choose this option (21% versus 10%), with past Liberals in between.

Notably, past Liberal voters – not past Conservatives, whose party was in power when the deal was negotiated – are the group least likely to say the deal should be cancelled, as seen in the following graph:

**In terms of the current deal for armoured vehicles with Saudi Arabia,
what would you advise the government to do?**



*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 foundation 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](#).

Suppose you were an advisor to the Canadian government. Based on what you know today, including what you've learned in this survey, what would you advise the government to do?

	Total (1505)	When Canadian-made military technology is used against civilians abroad ...	
		Canada is responsible (704)	Canada is NOT responsible (801)
Cancel this deal with Saudi Arabia, and prohibit any future sales of Canadian weapons to that country	40%	58%	24%
Leave this deal in place but prohibit any other weapons deals with Saudi Arabia	44%	36%	50%
Maintain the current deal and continue to allow weapons sales to Saudi Arabia	16%	6%	25%

Suppose you were an advisor to the Canadian government. Based on what you know today, including what you've learned in this survey, what would you advise the government to do?

	Total (1505)	Willingness to sell military technology	
		Should not sell to Saudi Arabia (925)	It is fine to sell to any/all countries on the list (472)
Cancel this deal with Saudi Arabia, and prohibit any future sales of Canadian weapons to that country	40%	52%	17%
Leave this deal in place but prohibit any other weapons deals with Saudi Arabia	44%	44%	43%
Maintain the current deal and continue to allow weapons sales to Saudi Arabia	16%	4%	40%

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