

Fear of nuclear war rising significantly, but more Canadians inclined to “stay out” of missile defence

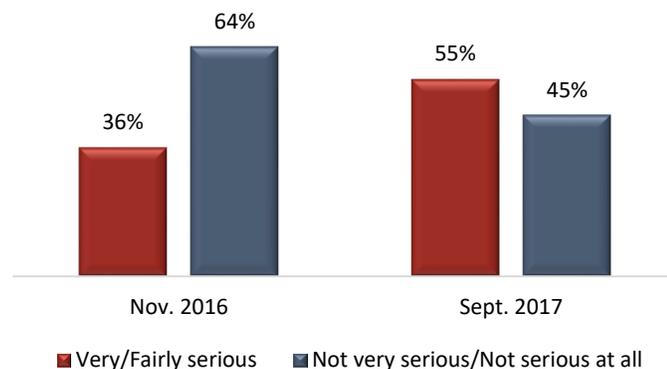
Four-in-ten say joining US in defence system would make Canada safer

October 17, 2017 – As U.S. President Donald Trump continues to threaten war with North Korea, Canadians are markedly more nervous about the possibility of a nuclear conflict in 2017 than they were before Trump took office. This, after recent claims from North Korean leaders that it now possesses the ability to reach North America with a nuclear strike through the use of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

These concerns don't have many clamouring for Canada to join American missile defence systems, however. A new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds fewer than three-in-ten Canadians (29%) saying their country should join the U.S. anti-ballistic missile shield, either by paying for protection or hosting American weapons on Canadian soil.

And while most Canadians aren't keen on cooperating with the U.S. on missile defence, most reject the notion that the war of words between that country and North Korea is “not Canada's problem.” Six-in-ten (60%) disagree with a statement to this effect.

How serious do you think the following problems are in Canada? (Responses for “the threat of nuclear war” shown)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from September 12 – 18, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,534 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.

More Key Findings:

- While 29 per cent of Canadians say Canada should join the U.S. ballistic missile defence system, fewer than half (44%) say Canada should “stay out” of the system. More than one-in-four (27%) “really can't say” what they think Canada should do
- Asked whether “joining the U.S. ballistic missile defence system would ultimately make Canada safer,” Canadians are divided: 40 per cent agree with this statement, while 42% disagree. The rest (19%) are unsure.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

- Women are more likely than men to say the threat of nuclear war is a “very” or “fairly” serious one. Nearly two-thirds of women (64%) choose one of these options, while fewer than half of men do (45%)

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Majority say threat of nuclear war ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ serious

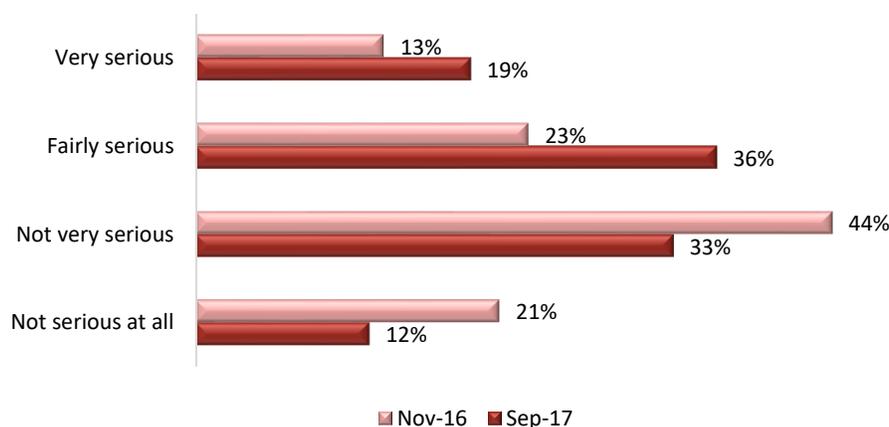
Verbal sparring has escalated in recent months between the United States and North Korea, with United States President Donald Trump referring to North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un as ‘[rocket man](#)’ while addressing the United Nations, and North Korea releasing statements calling Trump [a lunatic](#), and [a dotard](#). Both nations have issued threats of military action.

While analysts have been [skeptical](#) of North Korean advancements in missile testing in recent years, 2016 marked a shift in that opinion. Observers noted that North Korean progress, paced by an “[unusual number of tests](#)” in the first quarter of 2016, was beginning to signal the ability to threaten other nations, including the United States and Canada.

Recent months have seen North Korea conduct its most powerful detonation to date, breaking numerous United Nations sanctions. North Korea claims it has an intercontinental ballistic missile [capable of travelling 3,000 kilometres](#), though this is unconfirmed.

With all of this as a backdrop, Canadians’ knuckles are turning whiter. Asked last November how serious a threat they considered potential nuclear war, just over one-in-ten (13%) said it was very serious, and another 23 per cent said it was fairly serious. The same question, posed 10 months later, elicits concern from 55 per cent of Canadians – a 19-point increase.

How serious do you think the following problems are for Canada? 'The threat of Nuclear War'



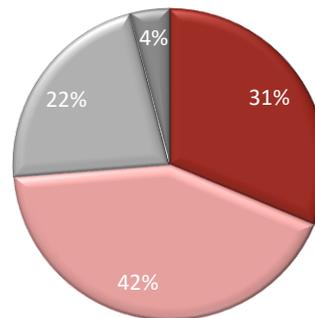
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Renewed threats from each side have engendered a great deal more tension internationally, and most Canadians say they've been following the news closely. Seven-in-ten say they have been following some of the media conversation and speaking with friends or family about it:

How closely would you say you have been following this issue?

- Seeing a lot of media coverage and discussing it 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

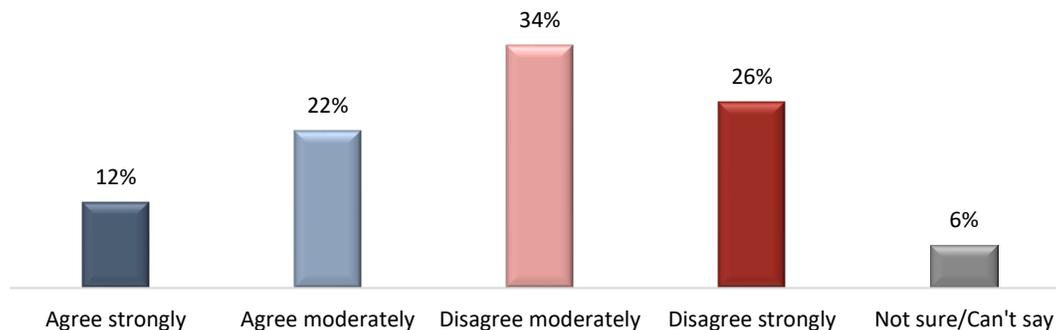


A problem for Canada

The United States and international allies have responded to recent North Korean ballistic missile tests with uniform condemnation, but mixed messaging about responses. While President Trump has threatened to wipe North Korea out completely, bringing [fire and fury](#) upon the nation, the Pentagon and State Department are reportedly [pursuing a diplomatic solution](#) to the problem. Trump has appeared at odds with his Secretary of State at times, recently tweeting that Rex Tillerson was "[wasting his time](#)" trying to negotiate with North Korea.

The majority of Canadians feel at least partially enmeshed in these disputes. Asked whether they feel the tensions between the US and North Korea are also Canada's problem, close to twice as many (60%) say they are a concern to this country than say they are not (34%).

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Tensions between North Korea and the United States are not Canada's problem"



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No consensus on joining U.S. missile defense program

Canada has a history of joint ventures in air defense partnership with the United States – including the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) created in 1957. However, in 2005 the government of Paul Martin decided against joining the United States' ballistic missile defence (BMD) system. The BMD is designed to counter intercontinental ballistic missiles through land, sea, and air based interception, utilizing missiles.

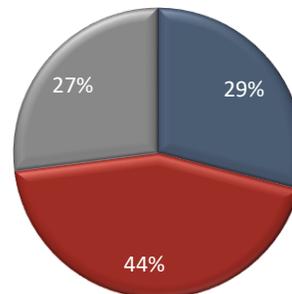
Under NORAD and its information sharing capacity, Canadian officials could theoretically detect a threat but not be able to take action through the missile defence system. As former diplomat Colin Robertson told a Senate committee in 2014 “when it comes time to make the critical launch decisions, our officials literally have to leave the room” under the current system.

The government is reportedly weighing the possibility of joining the program now. Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan noted in early October that the government needs to make sure they “get this right”, after Conservative foreign affairs critic Erin O’Toole called on the government to act.

Just over four-in-ten Canadians (44%) say this country should not join the U.S. ballistic missile defense system. The rest are split between saying Canada shouldn’t join, or aren’t sure:

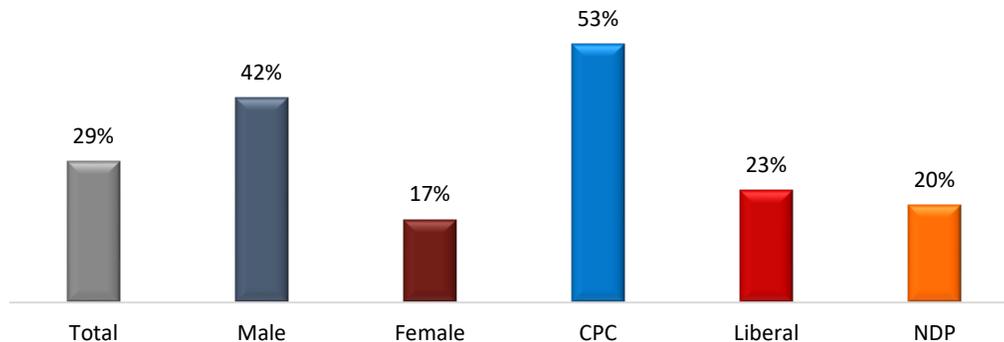
Based on whatever you may have seen or heard about this issue, which of these perspectives is closer to your own? Should Canada ...

- Join the U.S. ballistic missile defence system
- Stay out of the U.S. ballistic missile defence system
- Really can't say



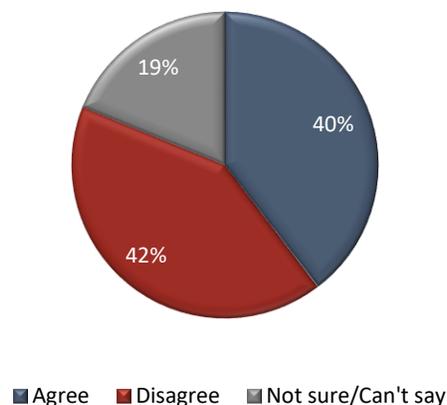
Opinions are driven strongly by gender and political affiliation. Men are more than twice as likely as women to say that Canada should join the program, while the same goes for past Conservative voters compared to those who voted Liberals and New Democrats in 2015:

Percentage of Canadians who say Canada should join the U.S. ballistic missile defence system



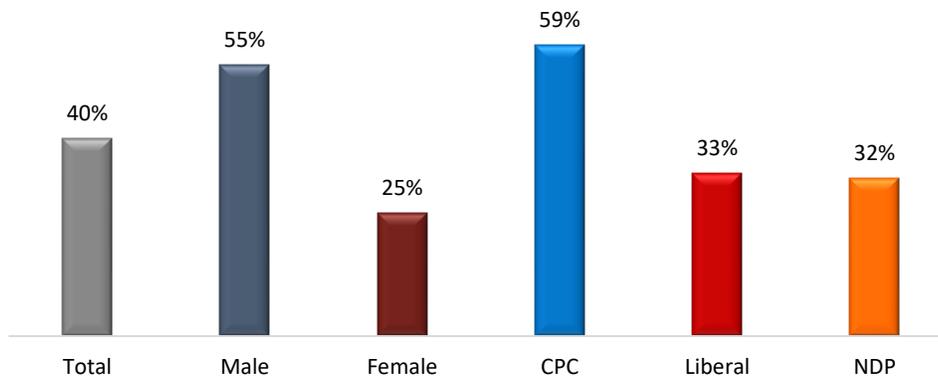
Perhaps paradoxically, while more Canadians tilt towards staying out of BMD, they also say Canada would be safer under such a partnership. Four-in-ten Canadians (40%) say that joining the BMD program would ultimately make Canada safer. An equal number disagree (42%), while two-in-four are unsure (19%).

Joining the U.S. ballistic missile defence system would ultimately make Canada safer



The same demographic distinctions are noted for this question. Men and past Conservatives feel most strongly about the appeal of joining the U.S. in this program:

Percentage of Canadians who say Joining the U.S. ballistic missile defence system would ultimately make Canada safer



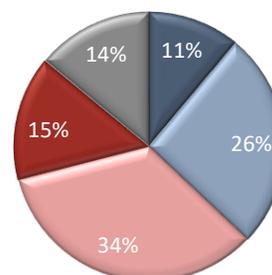
An intractable problem: is nuclear war inevitable?

Canadians show a fair amount of pessimism when it comes to the resolution of these tensions with North Korea. Indeed, nearly eight-in-ten (78%) say “this issue of North Korean weapons testing will never go away.” On this question, Canadians are unified. Whether it’s age, gender, region or political affiliation, at least seven-in-ten in each demographic holds this view ([view comprehensive tables](#)).

That said, this doesn’t mean Canadians necessarily expect the worst. Asked whether they think nuclear war is in the future, just one-in-ten (11%) firmly say it is, while half (49%) disagree.

Percentage of Canadians who agree that "nuclear war is inevitable"

- Agree strongly
- Agree moderately
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree strongly
- Not sure/Can't say



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.

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

How serious do you believe each of the following to be? The Threat of Nuclear War November, 2016				
(Weighted sample sizes)	Total (3215)	Age		
		18-34	35-54	55+
Very serious	13%	13%	14%	12%
Serious	23%	21%	20%	26%
Not very serious	44%	42%	44%	44%
Not serious at all	21%	23%	22%	18%