

## Passing on Pyeongchang? Most Canadians less interested in Olympic hockey without NHL players

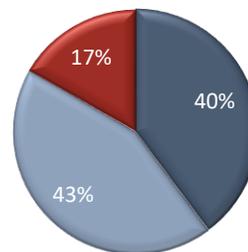
*More than half still say they're looking forward to the games overall, up slightly from Sochi*

**February 7, 2018** – The Olympic hockey tournament has been home to some of the most iconic moments in Canadian sports history. Whether it's the lore of the [Lucky Loonie](#) and a 50-year drought-ending win from Salt Lake City in 2002, or Sidney Crosby's [Golden Goal](#) from Vancouver in 2010, Canadians have enjoyed some great history over the two decades since the International Olympic Committee voted to allow professional athletes to compete in the games in 1998.

This year, for the first time since that decision, there will be no NHL players participating. A new Angus Reid Institute study finds most Canadians saying the competition has lost much of its lustre as a result of this change. Further, one-in-five hockey viewers say they're not going to watch at all this time around.

The news isn't all bad for Olympic broadcast partners. Four-in-ten (40%) hockey viewers say they're just as enthusiastic for an amateur-only tournament, and interest levels for the Winter Games overall have ticked up slightly. Overall, 58 per cent of Canadians say they'll be following the games this month.

**How does this decision to not allow NHL players to participate affect your likelihood to follow the hockey tournament in Pyeongchang?**  
(Among potential viewers, n = 966)



- I will still watch with the same level of interest
- I will still watch, but I won't care as much
- I'm not going to watch at all anymore

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from February 2 – 5, 2018 among a representative randomized sample of 1,514 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:**

- One-third (36%) of Canadians say they were not going to watch the Olympic hockey tournament at all. Among those who were or are going to tune in, 40 per cent say the lack of NHL players will not change the way they watch the tournament, while 43 per cent say they're still going to tune in, but they won't care as much.
- Quebecers lead the way in interest for the Olympic Games overall. 62 per cent within that province say they will be tuning in while Albertans and Atlantic Canadians are least likely to say they'll be watching – half say they will and half say they won't.

- While Quebec residents are the most likely to say they're engaged in the games, they're also the least likely to say hosting the Olympics is a worthwhile investment – probably reflecting [the three decades worth of tax dollars spent paying off Olympic debt](#) from the 1976 games in Montreal.

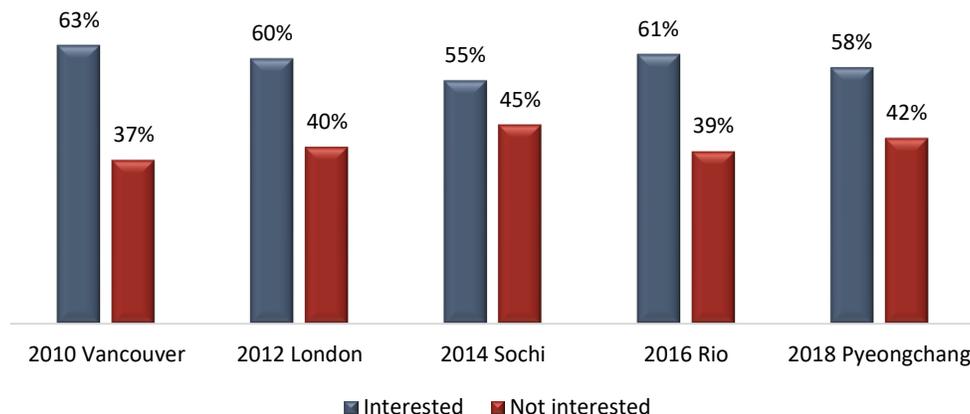
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**How does interest in Pyeongchang compare to previous Olympic games?**

Historically Canadians have a relatively high level of interest in the Olympic games. Roughly six-in-ten people across the country say they followed the most recent summer games in Rio, and the Angus Reid Institute has documented similar interest levels going back to 2010, when a Canadian city (Vancouver) last hosted.

**How closely Canadians followed previous games, will follow Pyeongchang:**



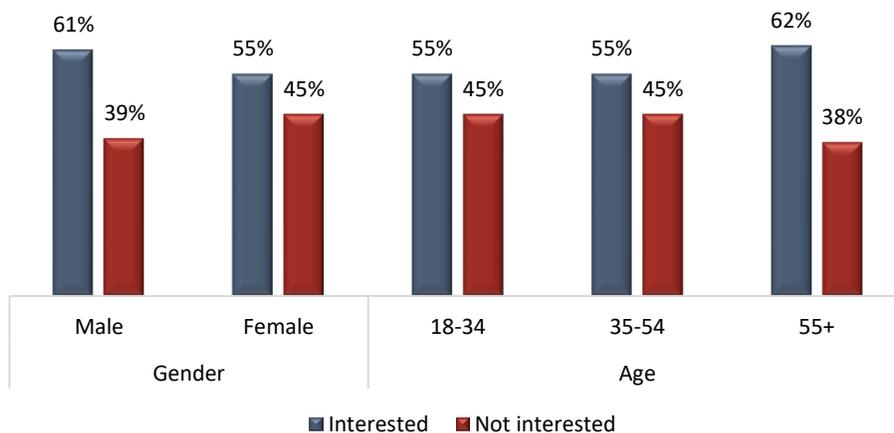
While this six-in-ten represents a majority, it's worth noting that in 1975 - when Gallup Canada asked this question heading into Montreal's hosted games in the coming year – fully [four-in-five](#) said they were looking forward to watching the games. Those halcyon days may be gone, [withered by disillusionment, corruption and doping scandals](#), but there are still many who look forward to the competition.

So, who's most excited for the opening ceremony to get underway? Enthusiasm may be slightly dampened by the start time – 3am PST/6am EST – but a majority of each age and gender cohort say they're looking forward to the games, with those over 55 most likely to tune in:

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**Thinking about the upcoming Olympic games in Pyeongchang, how interested are you?**



The games in Pyeongchang, South Korea appear to be on track for a similar level of support as previous games, but beyond a softening of interest among all important younger viewers, there's also one area where interest appears likely to decline – the men's hockey tournament.

**Ho-hum about hockey**

The Olympic hockey tournament has provided some of the all-time highs and lows for Canadian hockey fans.

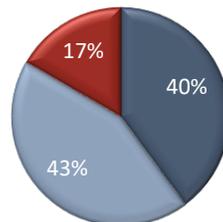
Who can forget Joe Sakic putting the finishing touches on a 5 to 2 win over Team U.S.A. at the 2002 games in Salt Lake City? The iconic play-by-play call of Bob Cole on the goal “Jeee-oe Sakic” ringing through millions of Canadians households, as the team claimed its first gold medal since 1952. Or what about the most watched event in Canadian history - Sidney Crosby's overtime winner in 2010?

It doesn't get much better for Canadian sports fans. (We don't necessarily have to talk about 1998, when the country collectively gasped while Wayne Gretzky remained on the bench for an elimination shootout loss to the Czech Republic.)

The allure of the Olympic tournament is clear. The best of the best, taking a break from the NHL regular season to fight for international supremacy. But this year, the tournament will be contested without current NHL players. This, after the league and the IOC could not come to terms on an agreement. The NHL stated concerns over the costs, scheduling difficulty, and potential injuries to players, as its main cause for non-participation.

With this change comes depressed interest for the tournament. Roughly four-in-ten Canadian viewers (43%) say they will still tune in when the puck drops on February 15 and their enthusiasm will be unchanged. A similar number (40%) say they will still watch, but they're not going to be as invested this time around. This leaves under one-in-five (17%) potential viewers who say they are not going to watch at all this time. Note that 36 per cent of Canadians said they would not watch the tournament at all, regardless of who was playing, and are not included in the following graph:

**How does this decision to not allow NHL players to participate affect your likelihood to follow the hockey tournament in Pyeongchang?  
(Among potential viewers, n=966)**

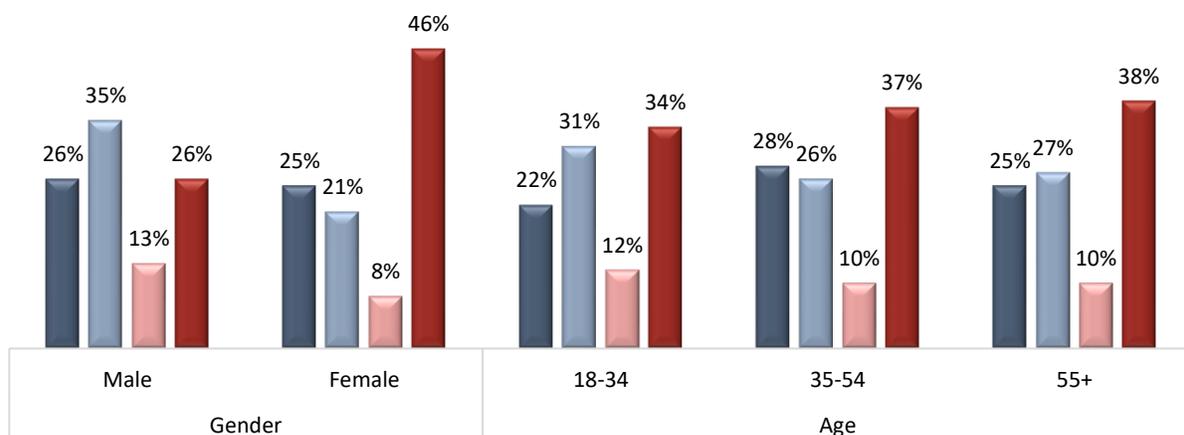


- I will still watch with the same level of interest
- I will still watch, but I won't care as much
- I'm not going to watch at all anymore

Long-time NHL fans will know plenty of names, as many of those on Team Canada's roster have played for Canadian NHL teams in recent years. The competition will be stiff, as most European league's including Russia's KHL, will take a break from their regular schedule to accommodate the Olympics.

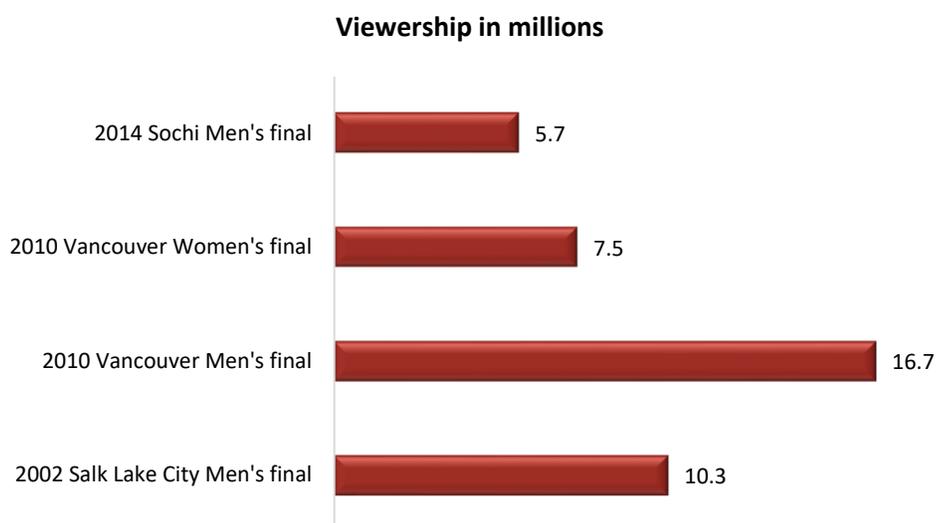
Looking at the overall number, 61 per cent of men say they will tune in, compared to 46 per cent of women. Responses across age are close to identical:

**How does this decision to not allow NHL players to participate affect your likelihood to follow the hockey tournament in Pyeongchang?**



- I will still watch with the same level of interest
- I will still watch, but I won't care as much
- I'm not going to watch at all anymore
- I wasn't going to watch anyway

While it is not yet known what viewership will look like, it appears that the record viewership for Salt Lake City in 2002 and Vancouver in 2010 will be unchallenged. The undesirable start time combined with diminished prestige will see to that. Perhaps the women's hockey tournament will capture Canadian imaginations. That tournament championship in 2010 netted the 10<sup>th</sup> most viewers in Canadian broadcast history.



### Is hosting the Olympics a worthwhile investment?

If the Olympic games do return to Canada in the coming years, there are two likely hosts – Calgary and Toronto. IOC Vice President Juan Antonio Samaranch [was reported](#) recently as saying of Calgary's current exploration of a bid - "It's a good project, it's based very much on the legacy of something that already happened. We like that word, 'legacy,' they like it too."

Meantime, Toronto has bid on [multiple previous games](#) unsuccessfully, and may explore another bid for the 2032 Summer games.

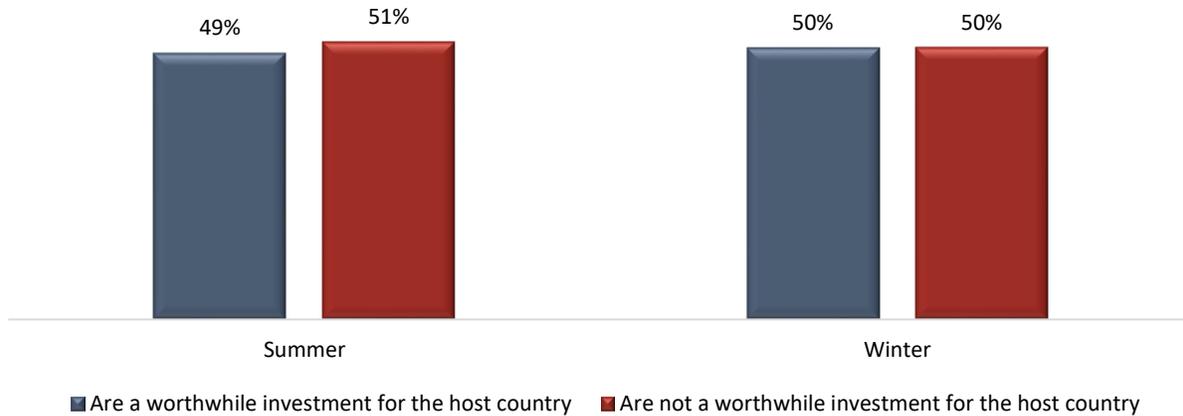
Canadians are in two camps about the value of hosting. Asked whether hosting the Summer Games or Winter Games is a worthwhile investment, half take each side on each season. (For the preamble to this question please view the [questionnaire here](#)):

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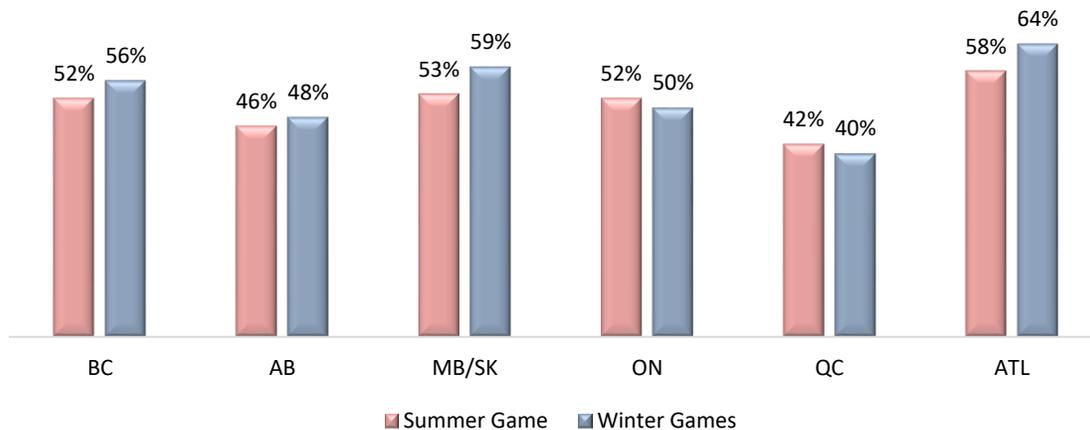
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**Are the Olympic Games a worthwhile investment for the host country?**



And while Calgary officials continue to discuss the prospect of hosting in 2026, the province is divided, if not slightly pessimistic, over whether a bid would be worth it. Overall, just under half say the games are worth the investment.

**Percentage who say each is a worthwhile investment for the host country**



The highest levels of support for the Winter Games comes from Atlantic Canada, the Prairies, and BC. Quebec, on the other hand, are the least likely to say the juice is worth the squeeze. This, after the legacy of a [\\$1.6B debt](#) left behind by the Montreal Olympics in 1976.

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](#).

Summary tables follow

How does this decision to not allow NHL players to participate affect your likelihood to follow the hockey tournament in Pyeongchang? (Among potential viewers, those who did not say "I wasn't going to watch anyway")	
	Total (966)
I will still watch with the same level of interest	40%
I will still watch, but I won't care as much	43%
I'm not going to watch at all anymore	17%

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