

## Canadians feeling confident, not cowed, post G7; prefer harder line in negotiations with Trump

*Prime Minister's approval sees double-digit jump after tête-à-tête with U.S. President*

**June 15, 2018** – In the week since a post-G7 escalation in rhetoric and diplomatic tension between the U.S. and Canada, a majority of Canadians appear to have warmed to their government's handling of trade negotiations with the Trump administration.

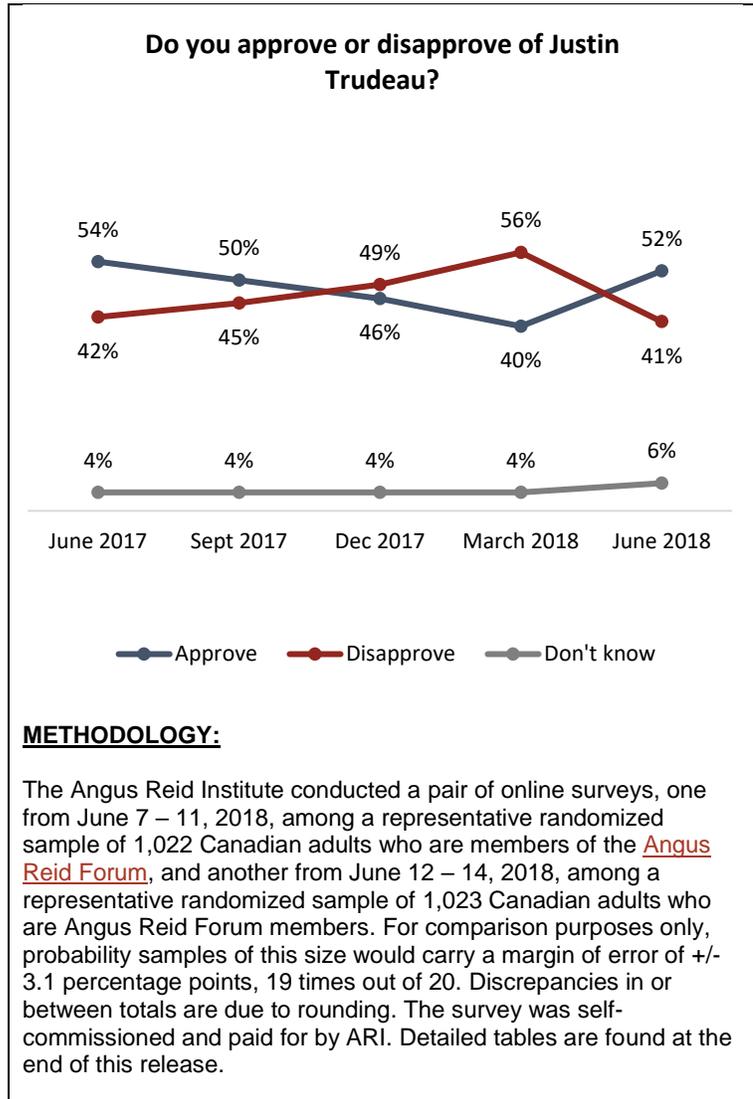
A pair of new studies from the Angus Reid Institute – conducted before, during, and after the fractious G7 meeting – find strong support for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (62% say he has handled his spat with Trump well) and for his government's countervailing tariffs in retaliation to Trump's on steel and aluminum (59% say this is the right approach to take).

Indeed, Canadians overwhelmingly favour taking a "hard" approach toward trade negotiations with the Trump administration going forward, with seven-in-ten (70%) preferring to risk further angering the President rather than taking a "soft" approach to try to win back and maintain his goodwill (30%).

The tougher tone on trade from south of the border is also proving to be a political boon for the Prime Minister. After a year of continually [diminishing approval](#), Trudeau sees a 12-point jump since the last time ARI asked Canadians to assess his performance and has regained the endorsement of a majority of Canadians (52%) for the first time since last fall.

### More Key Findings:

- Canadians overwhelmingly find Trump's reaction to Trudeau's statements about trade "inappropriate," with 81 per cent saying he is acting erratically and damaging trust between allies



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- Two-thirds of Canadians (65%) say they are concerned that these latest escalations between the U.S. and Canada will lead to an all-out trade war between the two nations
- Indeed, when asked whether the current public feud between the two countries is a sign of the “fundamental deterioration” of the Canada-U.S. relationship or something more fleeting, Canadians are divided: 51 per cent choose the former perspective and 49 per cent the latter
- The surge in Trudeau’s approval rating comes alongside an uptick in support for his Liberal Party. If a federal election were held tomorrow, 36 per cent of decided and leaning voters say they would cast ballots for the Liberals, up from 30 per cent the last time ARI asked

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#### Trump as foil galvanizes support for PM

The G7 Summit in Charlevoix, Quebec was relatively uneventful while leaders met and discussed issues of common concern this past weekend. That ended, however, when U.S. President Donald Trump boarded Air Force One.

While many observers in Canada and the United States found little provocative as they watched Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s wrap up press conference for the G7, the president responded to Trudeau’s statement that Canada would “not be pushed around” via Twitter.



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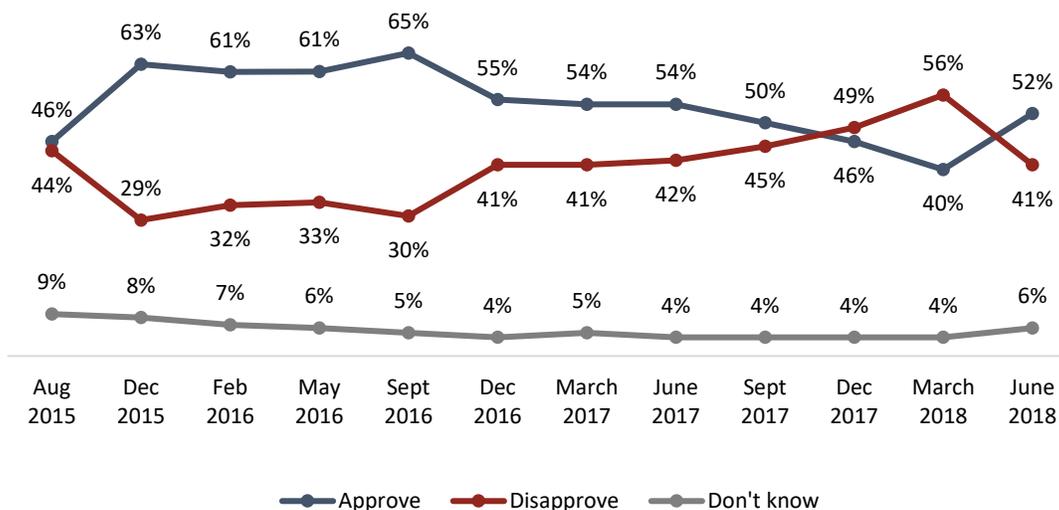
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It is still too early to say what affect this disagreement will have on the ongoing renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has seen [little progress](#) in recent months. That said, the impact for Trudeau domestically appears to be a positive one. After a year of criticism and downward trending approval ratings, the Prime Minister appears to have gotten a boost from last weekend's events.

More than half of Canadians (52%) now say they approve of the PM, a 12-point increase since the Angus Reid Institute [last asked](#) in March, and the largest increase in Trudeau's approval rating since he won the 2015 election:

### Do you approve or disapprove of Justin Trudeau?

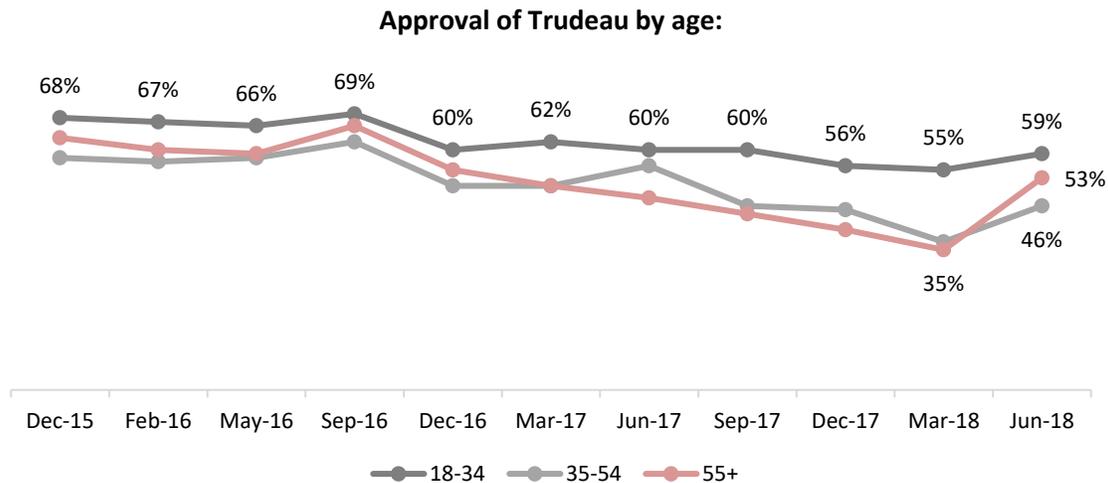


Approval of Trudeau is highest in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, where it tops six-in-ten. The only other province where more than half approve of Trudeau is British Columbia (53%), though his approval rating in Ontario is only slightly lower (49%). See [comprehensive tables](#) for greater detail.

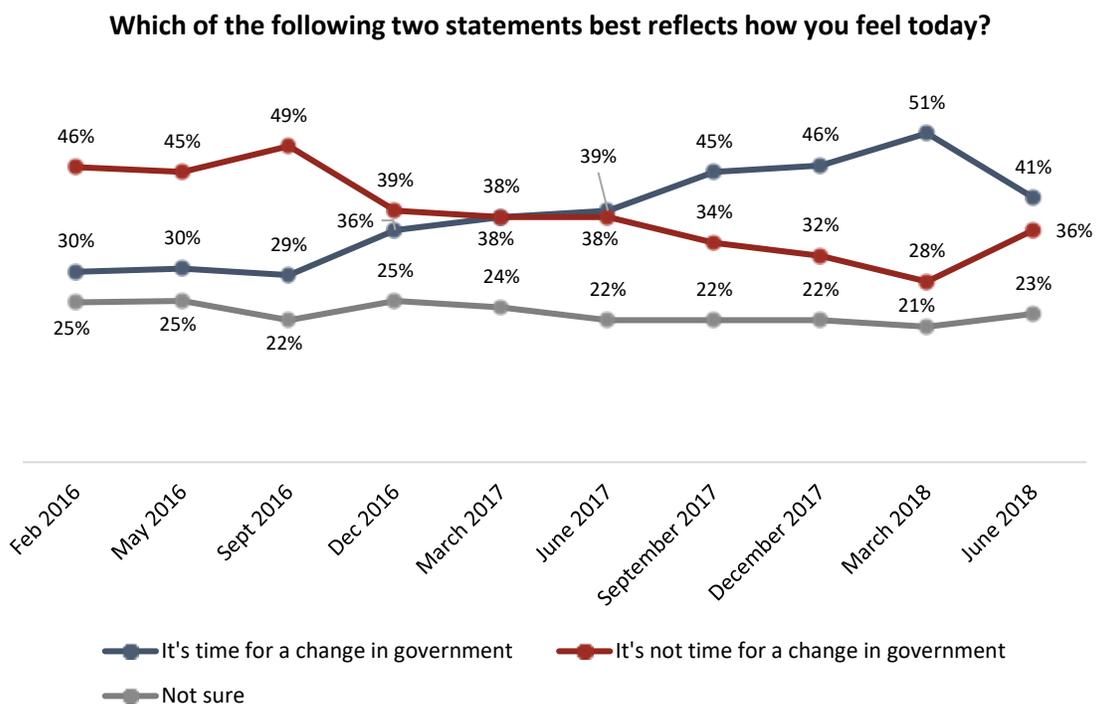
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As has been the case since he took office, Trudeau enjoys his highest levels of support from Canadians under the age of 35 (59% in this age group approve of him). In this survey, he also receives the approval of more than half of those ages 55 and older – an increase of nearly 20 percentage points since March – as seen in the following graph:



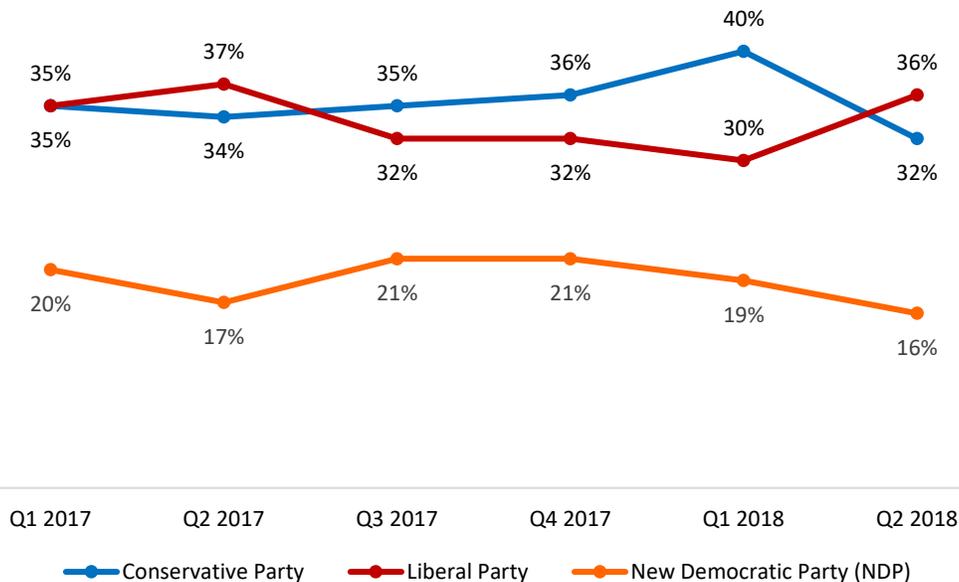
The overall jump in the Prime Minister's approval rating is mirrored by a corresponding decline in the number of people saying it is time for a change in the federal government. Those who say it is time for a change still outnumber those who don't, but the trend has shifted this quarter in favour of the government:



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The permanence of these gains won't be known for some time. However, with just over one year to go until the 2019 federal election and as campaign strategies are undoubtedly being prepared, Trudeau's Liberals have regained their lead over the opposition Conservatives in vote intention:

**Decided and leaning vote intention over time:**



This is a marked-change from the institute's analysis of [vote intention](#) in March, which showed the Conservatives holding a 10-point lead among decided and leaning voters.

### Canadians want to play hardball

One of the aspects of public opinion that appears to be playing in Trudeau's favour is a Canadian desire to stand up to Donald Trump. (Indeed, when the Angus Reid Institute [asked recently](#) what words Canadians would use to describe Trump, six-in-ten (61%) said they viewed him as a bully).

In fact, seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) say that when it comes to trade negotiations with the United States, they would like to see the Canadian government take a hard approach, standing up to Trump even at the risk of the consequences this may engender. The rest (30%) say the better part of valour would be to take a soft approach, being careful not to offend Trump and risk further hostility.

This split is fairly consistent across demographic groups, with solid majorities in all regions and age-groups preferring a hard approach ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

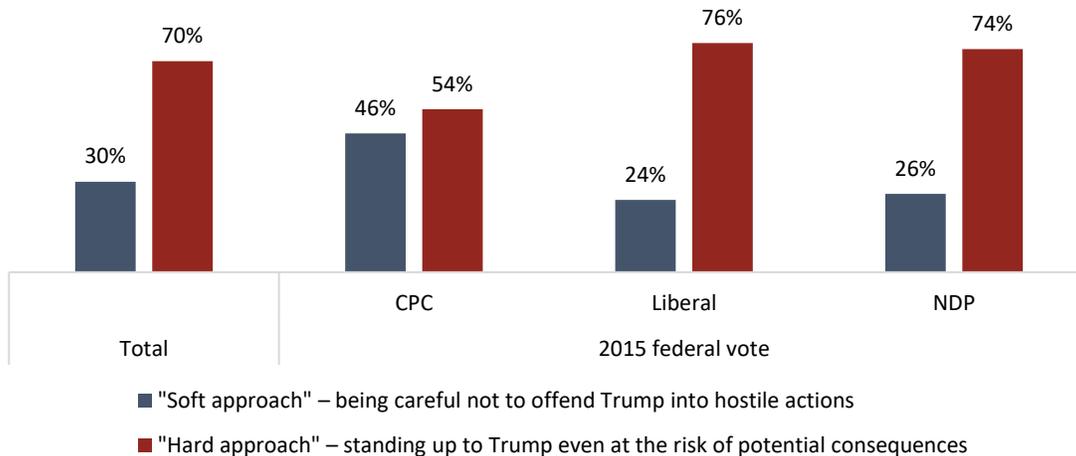
Canadians are more divided on this question along political lines, with only a small majority of past Conservative voters preferring a hard approach:

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**Going forward, overall, do you think it would be best for the Trudeau government to respond to anything further like this with a ...**

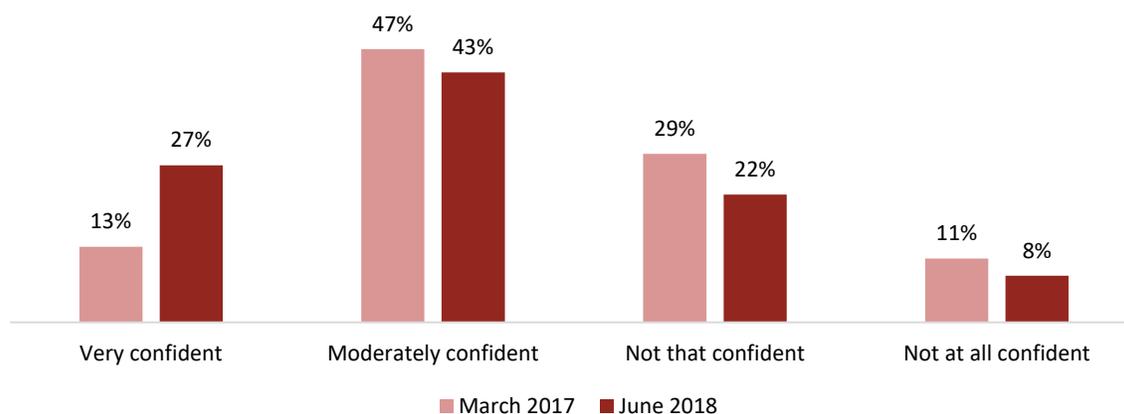


In addition to wanting their government to play hardball, Canadians express increasing confidence in its ability to do so.

In early 2017, When [the Angus Reid Institute asked](#) Canadians how confident they were in the ability of the Trudeau government to represent Canada’s national interests in future trade negotiations with the Trump administration, some six-in-ten (60%) expressed at least moderate confidence.

Today, that number has increased to seven-in-ten (70%), and the proportion saying they are “very confident” has more than doubled:

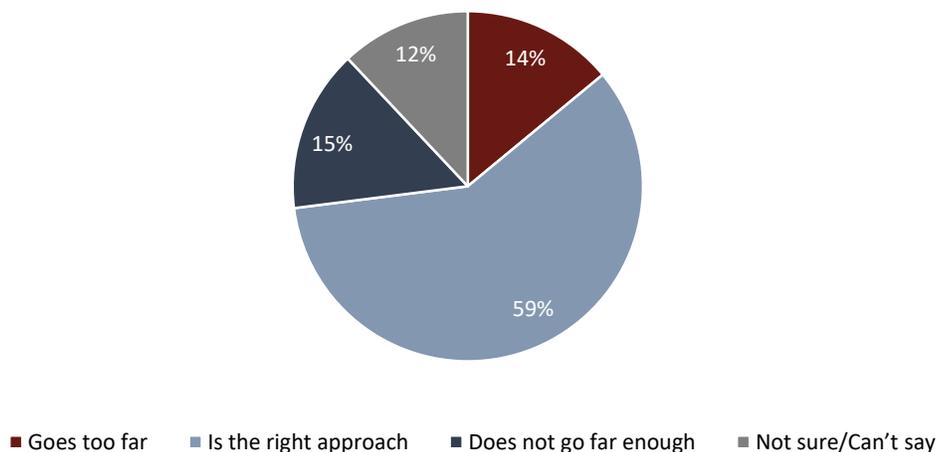
**How confident are you in the ability of the Canadian government to effectively represent Canada's national interests in future trade negotiations with the Trump administration?**



And, more than six-in-ten Canadians (62%) say Trudeau has been handling his public disagreement with Trump well. Those who don't feel this way are more likely to say the PM has been "too weak" in his confrontation with the U.S. leader (29% say this) than to say he has been "too aggressive" (10%).

On the subject of tariffs, specifically, Canadians are similarly onside with Trudeau and his government's approach. Some six-in-ten (59%) say Canada's "dollar-for-dollar" retaliation to Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminum is the right course of action, with the rest divided between feeling Canada has gone too far or not far enough:

**The Canadian government says it plans to retaliate "dollar-for-dollar" against these new U.S. tariffs... would you say this response...?  
(see questionnaire for full question wording)**

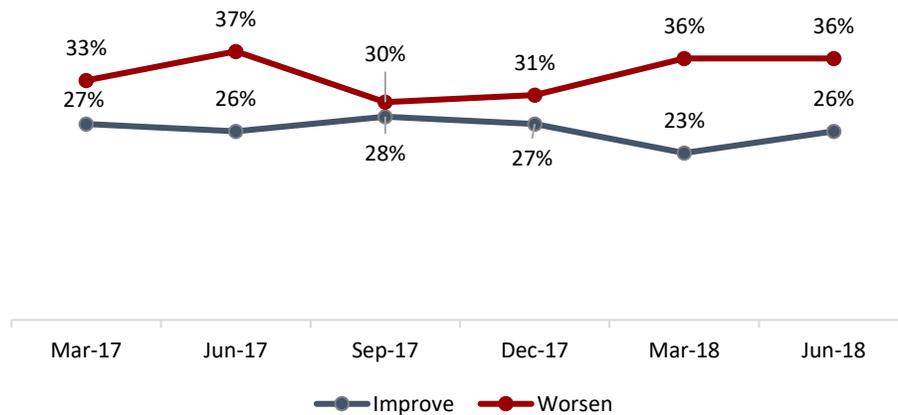


**Economic confidence holds, but trade war concerns abound**

Amid the hullabaloo of the Trudeau-Trump exchange, Canadian economic confidence remains stable. At this point, stagnant NAFTA negotiations and new tariffs on aluminum and steel have so far not made a significant impact on the Canadian consciousness.

Confidence in the future of the Canadian economy is relatively unchanged from last quarter, with the largest number of respondents saying they expect to see no change:

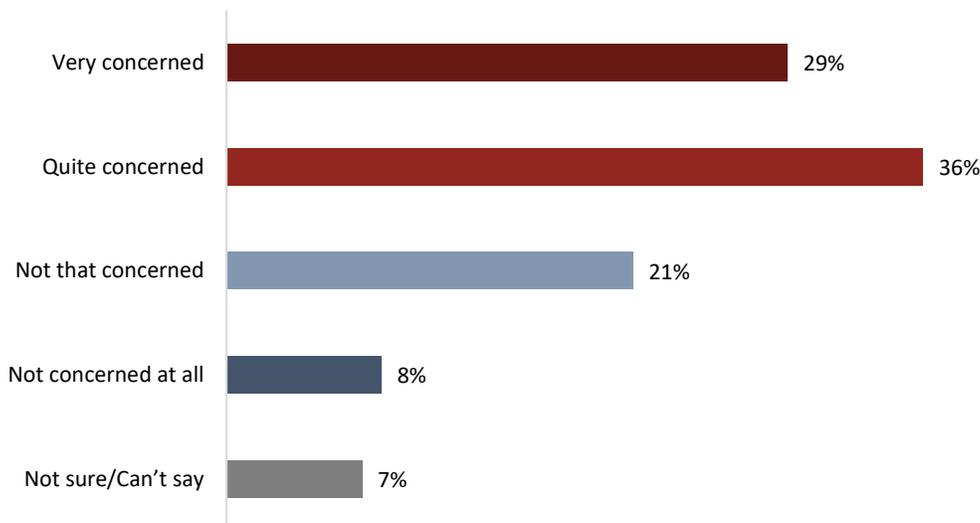
**Over the next twelve months, do you think the Canadian economy will improve, remain the same, or worsen?**



One of the biggest concerns from observers watching the escalation of language recently is the possibility of a trade war. Royal Bank of Canada chief executive Dave McKay expressed concerns about the diminishing relationship and increased potential of retaliatory actions from both governments.

Asked whether or not the possibility of a trade war is a concern to them, three-in-ten Canadians are “very concerned” (29%) while another 36 per cent are “quite concerned”:

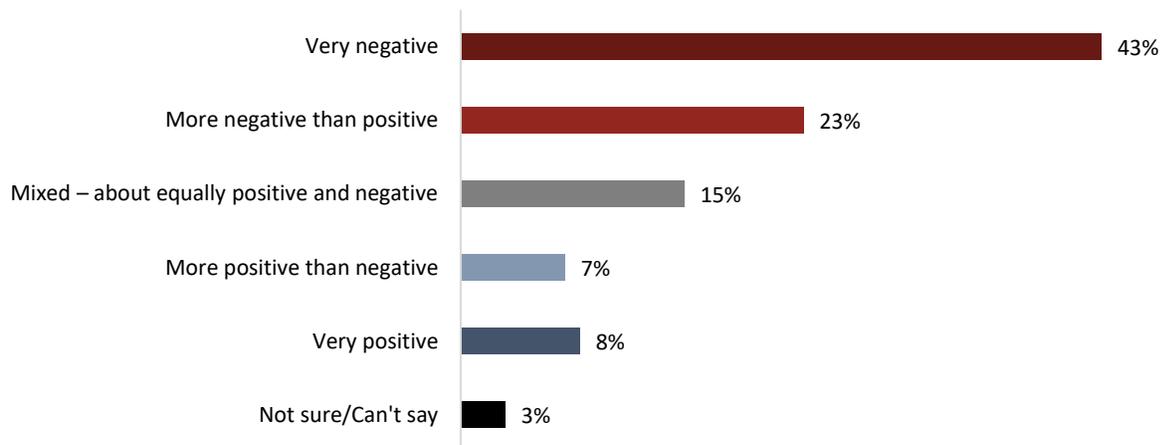
**Level of concern - These escalations leading to a trade war between Canada and the United States**



**Most question Trump's behaviour and motivation**

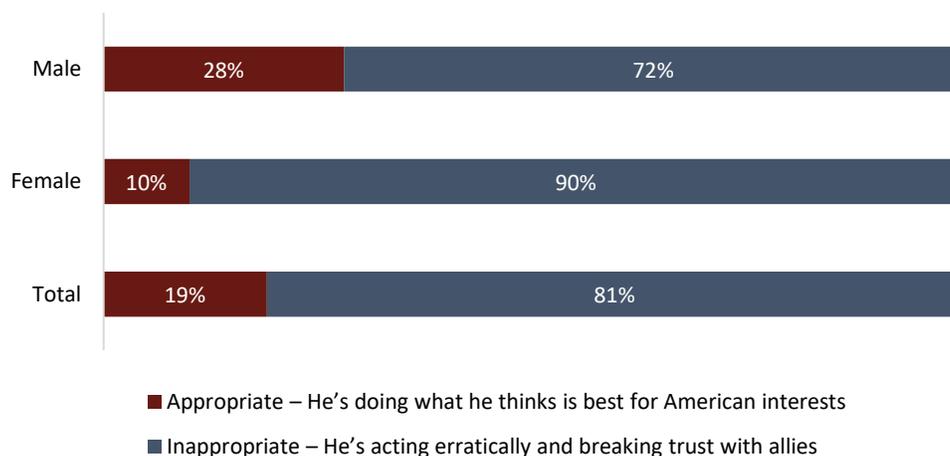
The majority of Canadians are not fond of the current U.S. President. Since the 2016 election, the Angus Reid Institute has found a strong majority saying that their impression of the administration has been more negative than positive. After the G7 controversy, four-in-ten Canadians (42%) say they have a very negative impression of Trump and his White House, while one-quarter (23%) say more negative than positive:

**Based on the Trump Administration's performance so far, since the inauguration in January of 2017, is your overall impression positive or negative overall?**



Asked whether or not his behaviour during and after the G7 was appropriate, and grounded in the best interests of his country, or inappropriate and breaking trust with allies, Canadians largely express the latter. Men are three times more likely than women to take Trump's side:

**Would you say Trump's actions have been:**



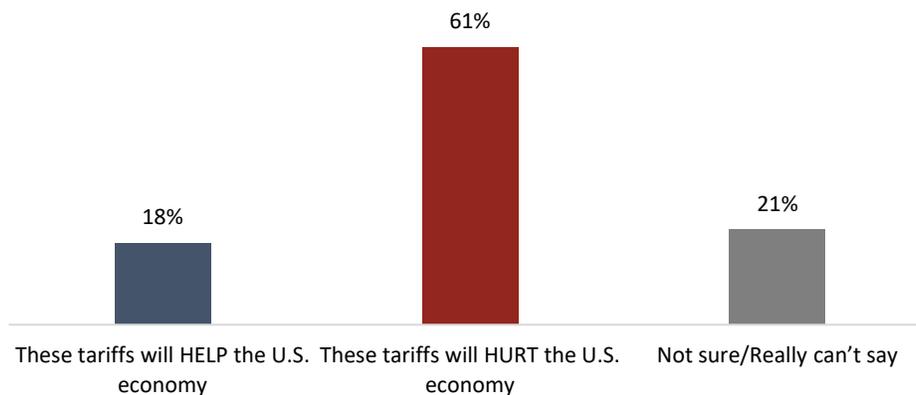
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Trump's decision to levy tariffs of 25 per cent on Canadian steel and 10 per cent on aluminum was reportedly based on the identification of Canada as [a national security threat](#). Canada was not alone, as Mexico and the European Union were both also hit, triggering retaliation against the U.S. from all three.

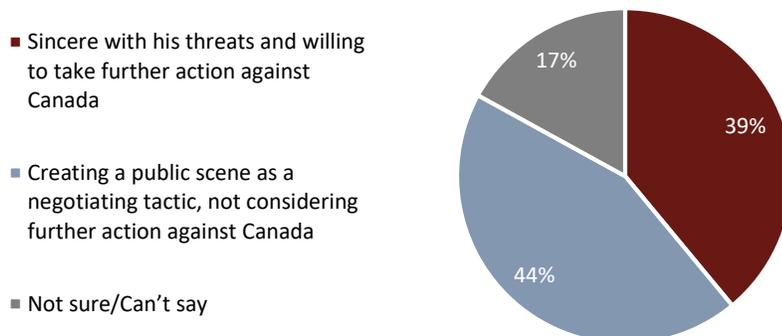
Only one-in-five Canadians say they believe that the new tariffs will positively impact the U.S. economy, while three-times that amount say America will be hurt. An [analysis from the C.D. Howe Institute](#) suggests that both the U.S. and Canada will be negatively impacted.

**Based on whatever you may have seen or heard about these new tariffs, would you say...**



And what about the threat of further actions from Trump as it relates to Canada? While the U.S. leader has been vocal about Justin Trudeau's comments costing the country "a lot of money", Canadians aren't so sure the public threats are genuine. While four-in-ten say Trump is sincere (39%), and prepared to take further action against Canada, a slightly higher number say that this is all a negotiating tactic (44%), and they don't believe additional measures are being prepared:

**Based on what you have seen or heard about this, do you think that President Trump is...**

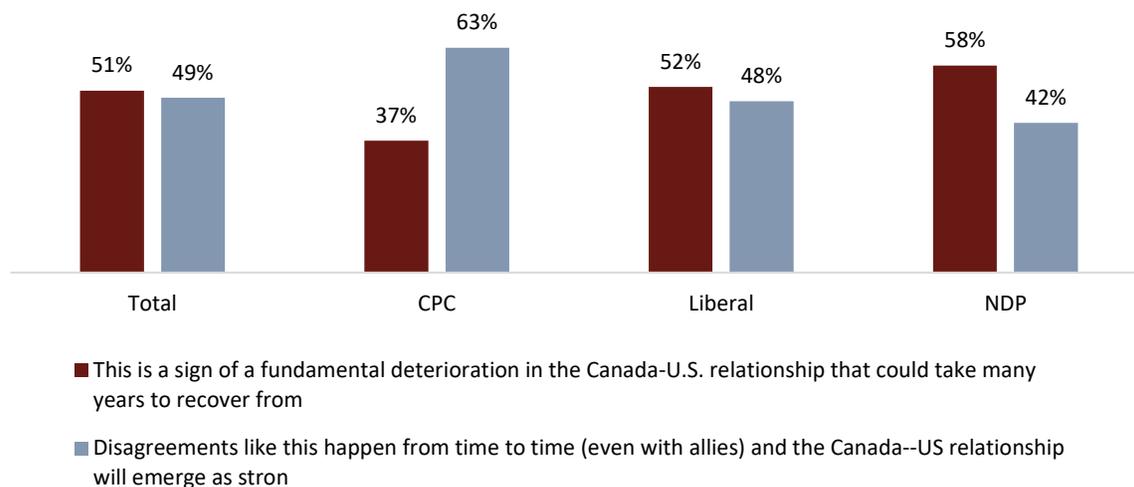


## A new normal for Canada-U.S. relations?

Canada has had an historically close relationship with the United States – despite what President [Trump has stated](#) about the country burning down the White House during the War of 1812 (Canada wasn't a nation yet). Thus, the dispute between the two allies has confused many people on both sides of the border. Many Americans took to Twitter with the hashtag [#ThanksCanada](#), which trended after the Trump's initial attack on Trudeau.

There is an air of uncertainty in Canada about what all of this means for the future. Canadians are divided into two camps, those who say this is just a passing phase (49%), and those who think this is a fundamental shift in the way the two countries relate (51%), with more contention ahead. Notably, Conservatives are much less convinced that this spat will lead to any long term changes:

**People have been discussing what this public disagreement between Trump and Trudeau might mean about the overall Canada—US relationship. Which of the following is closer to your own view ?**



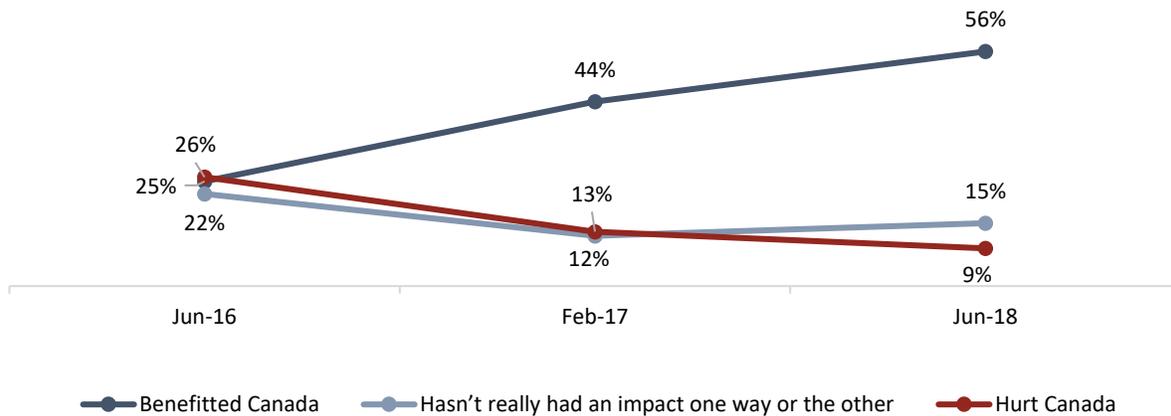
## Canadian appreciation for NAFTA continues to grow

Last year, with NAFTA renegotiations turning tense, Canadians discovered a renewed appreciation for their largest trade agreement. This is a trend that continues to intensify. In two years, the number of Canadians saying NAFTA has been a benefit to Canada has more than doubled, from 26 per cent to 56 per cent:

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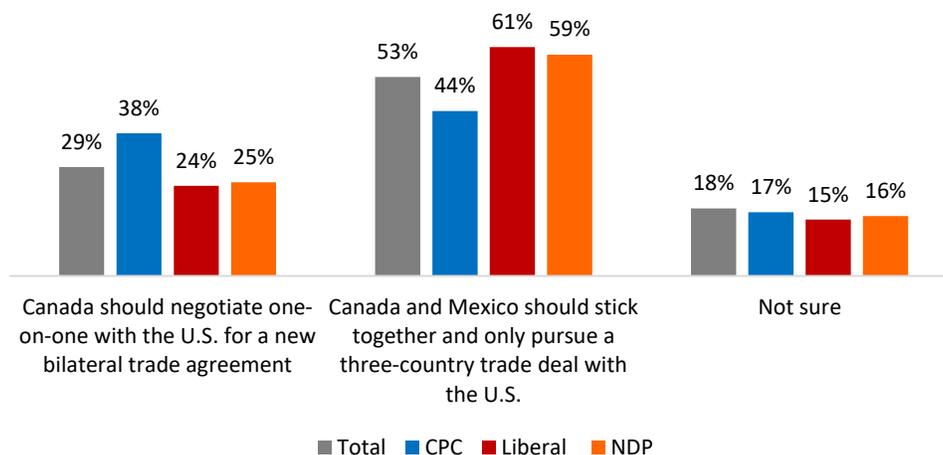
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Overall, would you say NAFTA has generally:



During negotiations, Trump and his team have repeatedly expressed interest in nixing NAFTA in favour of bilateral deals between their nation and each of Canada and Mexico. This is something that Ottawa has rejected outright. For their part, Canadians tend to agree with their elected leadership. Just over half say that Canada and Mexico should stick together to pursue a trilateral solution, while three-in-ten (29%), including a larger group of past Conservative voters (38%), say that they would be interested in one-on-one negotiations.

Which view is closer to your own?

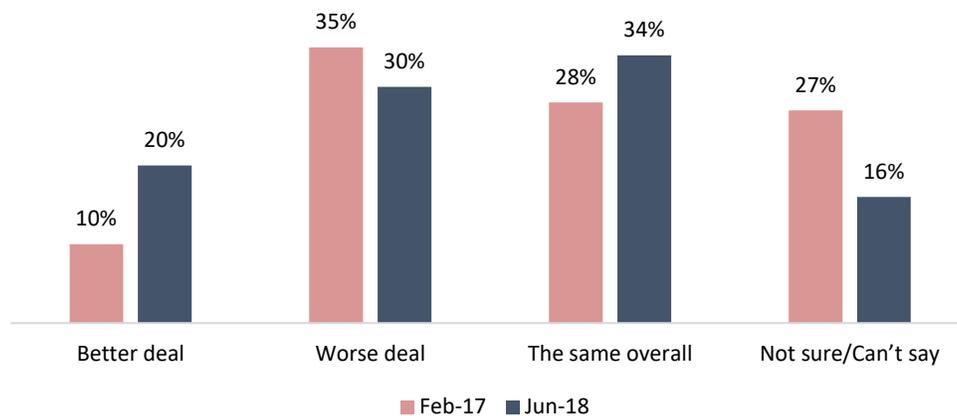


With all this in mind, it is perhaps notable that the number of residents saying that they expect a better deal for Canada if NAFTA is renegotiated has doubled since February of 2017. That said, those who expect a worse deal still outnumber the optimists:

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**Assuming negotiators are able to agree on a new NAFTA deal, do you expect the end result to be better or worse for Canada?**



*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 for the survey that concluded on June 11, 2018 by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).**

**For detailed results for the survey that concluded on June 14, 2018 by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).**