

Mali Peacekeeping: Politics divides Canadian support for mission, but majority say Canada should help

Trade negotiations take higher priority for Canadians in foreign affairs over humanitarian, military aid

July 24, 2018 – What started as a civil war in Mali, is now a simmering conflict with deadly eruptions of violence, alliance switching and political manipulation. And while the strife in West Africa has evaded Canadian attention thus far, a year-long military engagement for Canadian troops may capture more attention.

A new Angus Reid Institute study finds majority support for Canada's recent announcement of involvement in Mali, though political leanings drive views on this issue.

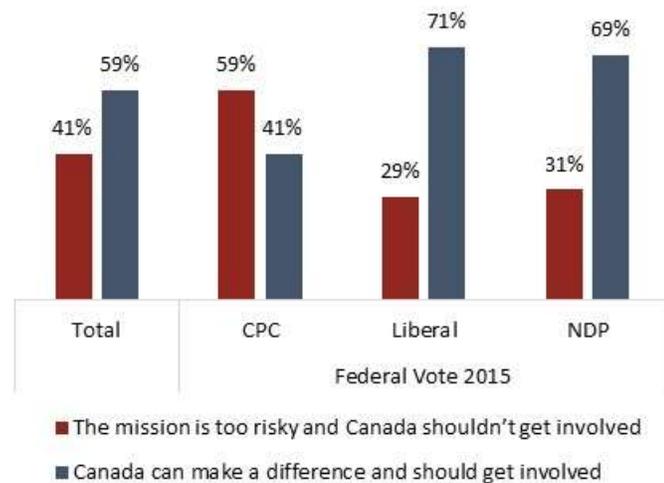
Six-in-ten (59%) Canadians say the Trudeau government's decision to deploy approximately 250 troops to Mali is the right move. Four-in-ten (41%) however, led heavily by past Conservative (CPC) voters (59%), say that the mission is too risky and Canada should avoid participation.

Much public opinion divide on this issue however, rests on prioritization. While most Canadians (70%) say national peacekeeping efforts are a "source of pride", they also say the country's top international priority is not military presence on the global stage (10%), or humanitarian aid (25%), but focusing on trade ties with foreign partners (65%).

More Key Findings:

- Political affiliation is a key factor in support or opposition of the Mali Mission. Past Liberal voters (71%) and New Democrats (69%) are equally likely to say Canada should be taking part, while only 41 per cent of past CPC supporters agree
- Those most aware of the conflict in Mali are the most opposed to the mission. Just over half (53%) among this group say the mission is too risky to participate in
- While Canada is sending a contingent of military personnel, and has donated hundreds of millions of dollars to Mali, half of Canadians (50%) say they would prefer to send troops over funding, while one-third (34%) say the opposite

Which of these perspectives is closer to your own, even if neither is exactly how you feel?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from July 4 – 9, 2018 among a representative randomized sample of 1,000 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.1 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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- Canadians are near unanimous in agreeing that Canada has a positive reputation abroad, but they're divided over how it has changed in the past 10 years. Three-in-ten (29%) say it has improved, 24 per cent say it has worsened, and four-in-ten (40%) say it is about the same as it was a decade ago

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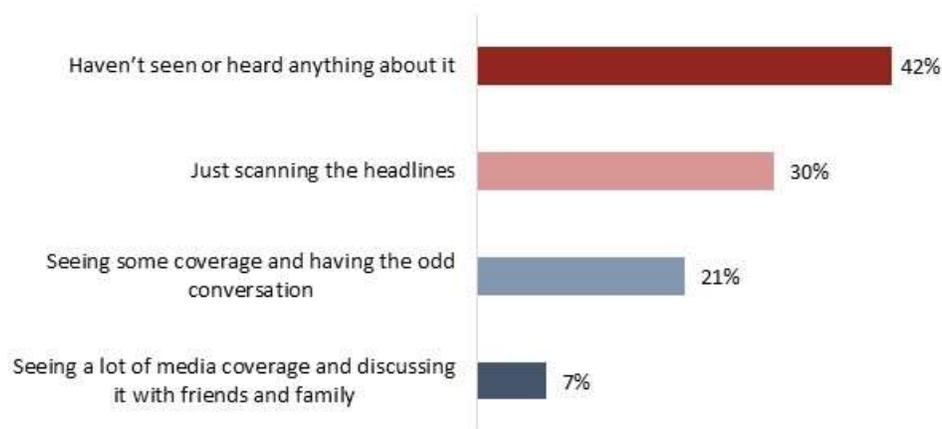
- **Majority support involvement in Mali, though politics a factor**
- **Most prefer troops over increased funding for peacekeeping efforts**
- **Trade negotiations are more of a foreign affairs concern for most**
- **Peacekeeping is esteemed, but many say Mali is not Canada's problem**
- **Nearly all say Canada's reputation abroad is a good or very good**

Majority support involvement in Mali, though politics a factor

In late June, the Canadian military began [Operation Presence](#), a peacekeeping mission in the landlocked West African nation of Mali. This year-long deployment was announced by the federal government in March, but if one were to ask the average Canadian, they likely have no idea.

Indeed, when asked by the Angus Reid Institute, four-in-ten Canadians had never heard of the conflict in Mali or Canada's plan to deploy troops, and another three-in-ten had seen headlines at best.

Awareness of Mali conflict, Canada's plan to participate in Mali peacekeeping



Since 2012, Mali has been involved in a civil war. Although a peace deal was signed in 2015, the warring sides are now fighting over that agreement. With 162 peacekeepers killed since 2013, Mali is considered the most dangerous United Nations peacekeeping mission in the world.

In March, the Trudeau government announced that Canada would be sending around 250 military personnel to Mali to commence work in August, and has [since added](#) 20 police officers who will arrive

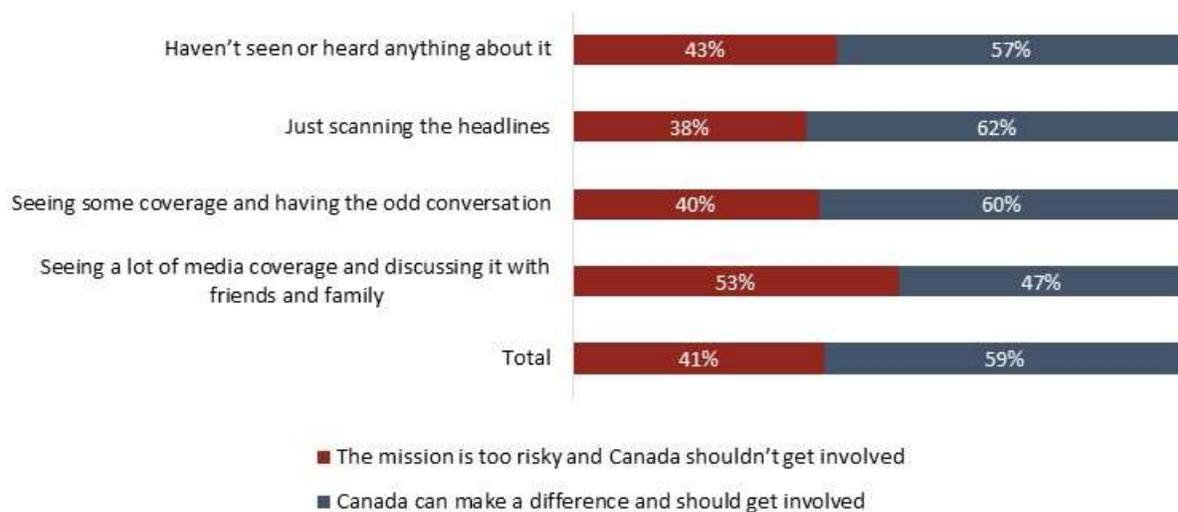
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later in the fall to assist with operations. This announcement was in response to a request from the UN, which, alongside French and West African troops, has been maintaining peace in the country.

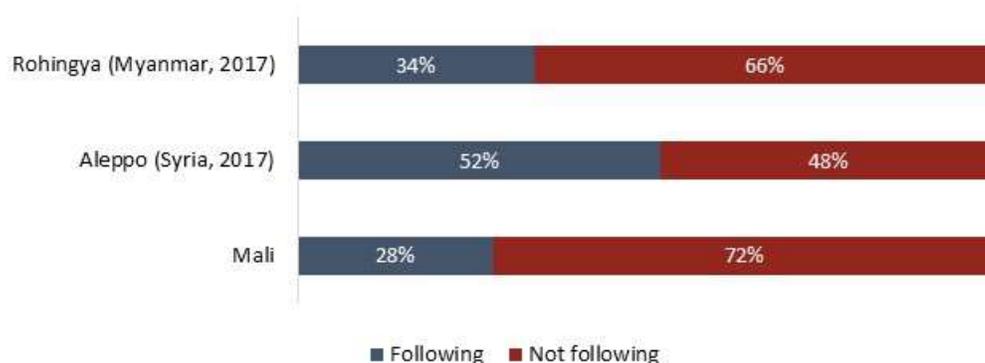
Notably, those who are following the most closely express the highest degree of concern over Canada's participation, while subsequent groups of are following to a lesser degree, or not at all, are more likely to support Canada's participation:

Which of these perspectives is closer to your own, even if neither is exactly how you feel?



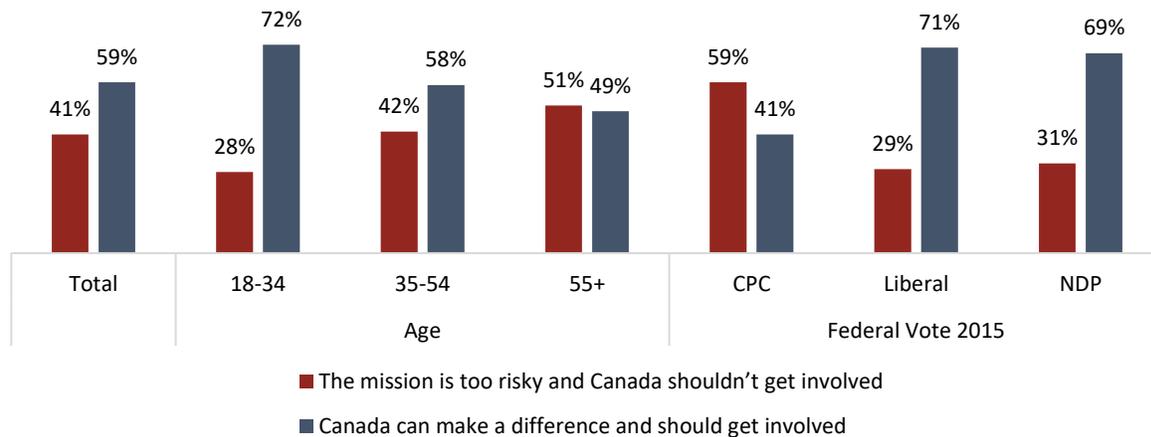
This trend of a lack of attention for international crises is evident in previous work done by the Institute. Last year, just 34 per cent of Canadians said they were following the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, while a half said they were aware of the siege of Aleppo in Syria.

Awareness of international crises



Though they lack widespread awareness of the issue, a majority of Canadians say this country should get involved in the conflict. Those views on this differ significantly based on age of respondents, and the party for which they voted in 2015.

Which of these perspectives is closer to your own, even if neither is exactly how you feel?

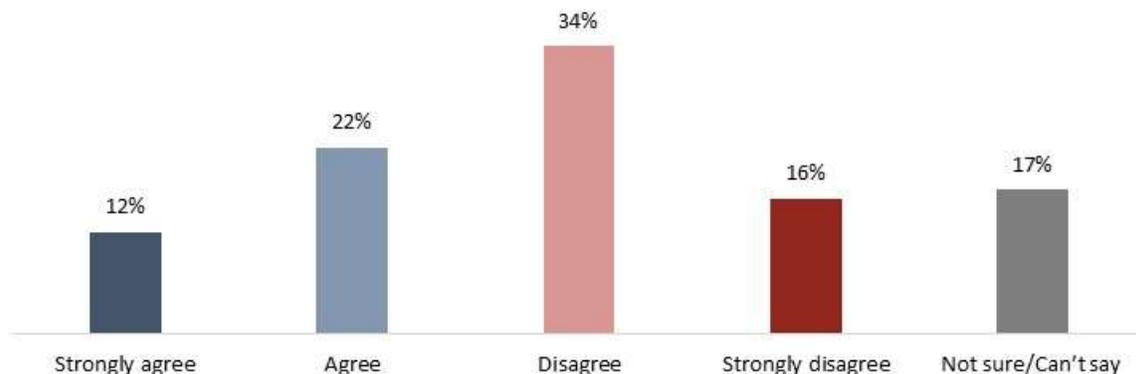


Most prefer troops over increased funding for peacekeeping efforts

In addition to the recent commitment of Canadian forces, the government has long contributed to Mali in a humanitarian aid capacity. Since 2006, Canada has donated nearly \$1.5 billion to the struggling nation, an area that holds significant Canadian mining interests.

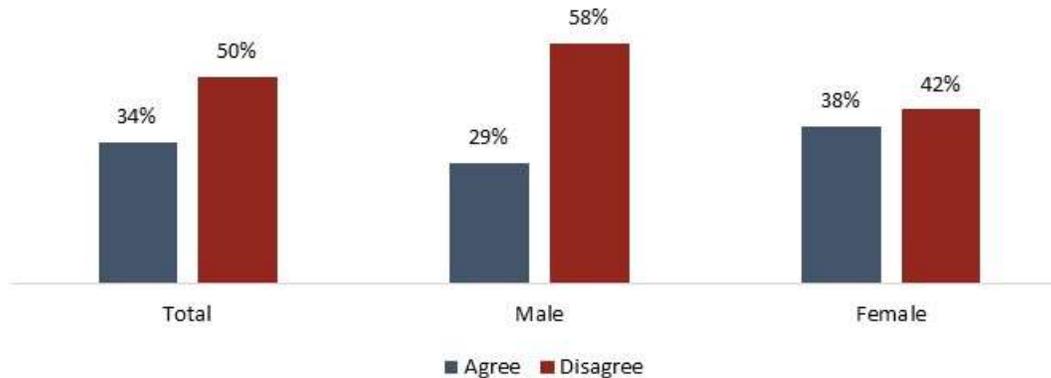
The Canadian public, however, are less enthusiastic about adding more funding. Asked whether they would rather send more money to help in Mali, rather than soldiers, half (50%) disagree, while one-in-three (34%) say this would be the preferable approach. Approaching one-in-five (17%) are unsure what the best course of action would be:

I would rather Canada just donate funds instead of sending soldiers to Mali



Notably, women are close to divided on this question, while men prefer troops to funding by a two-to-one ratio:

I would rather Canada just donate funds instead of sending soldiers to Mali



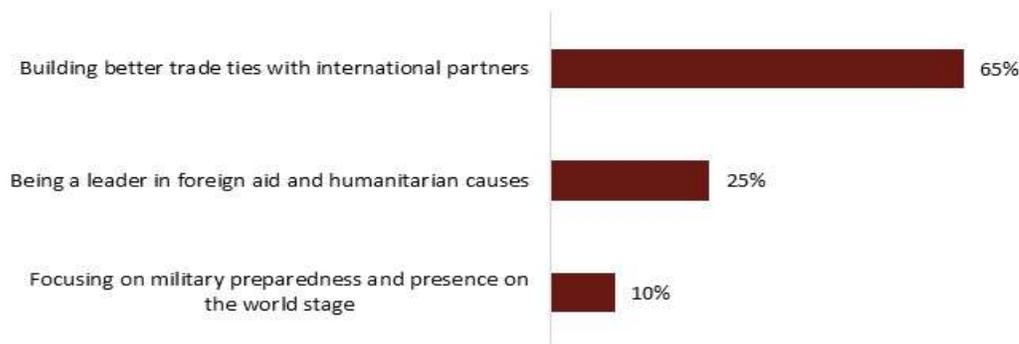
Trade negotiations are more of a foreign affairs concern for most

This Canadian preference for military aid over financial aid is perhaps predictable, given previous Angus Reid Institute findings. [Earlier this year](#), after being presented with the knowledge that Canada spends well under the United Nations target for international aid, only 28 per cent said they would like to see Canada’s spending increase.

Related: Two-thirds see moral obligation to help abroad, fewer say Canada should raise spending

Further, when asked about their priorities for international engagement, Canadians are focused firmly on trade. Amid tense renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Canadians overwhelmingly choose a focus on trade negotiations over humanitarian aid or military presence. The climate of anxiety created by [tariffs](#), [countervailing duties](#) and [threats](#) from President Trump is plainly clear:

And, when you think about foreign affairs, what should Canada’s TOP priority be?

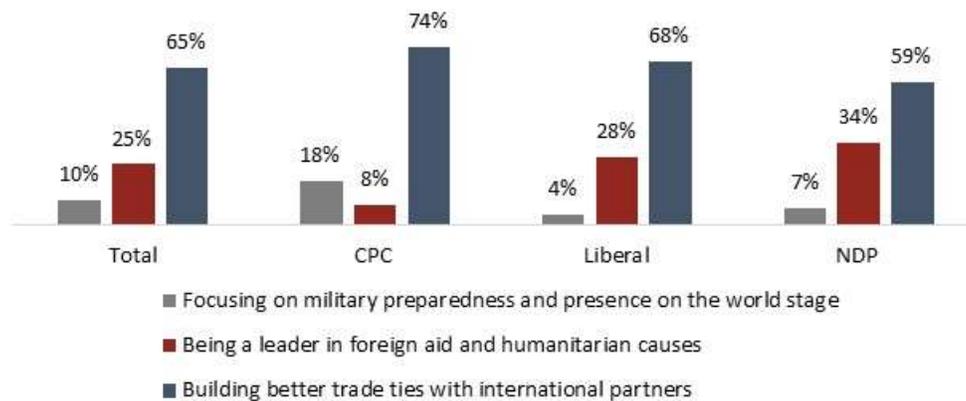


Past Conservative voters express the greatest interest in building better trade ties with international partners over other priorities, while approximately three-in-ten Liberal and NDP supporters show support for humanitarian causes as the top option. A majority of each of the three cohorts say trade ties should take precedence:

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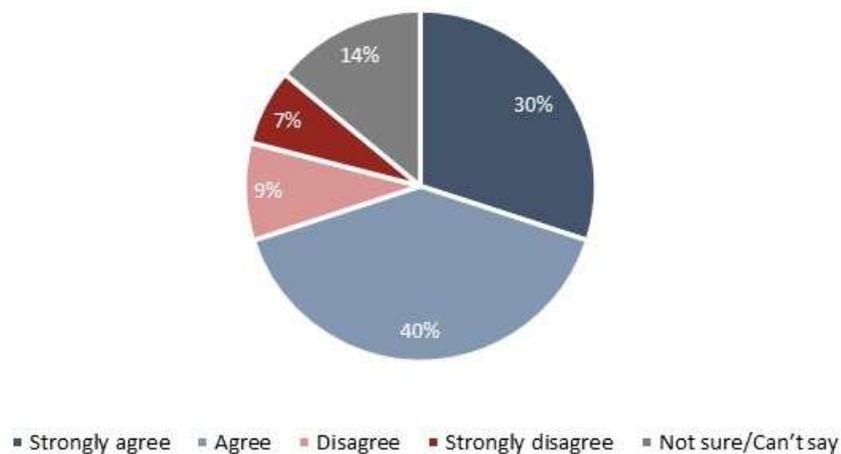


Peacekeeping is esteemed, but many say Mali is not Canada's problem

One of the foundations of Canada's international reputation has been its role in peacekeeping. Indeed, before he became Prime Minister, then Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, was fundamental in organizing the first official UN peacekeeping force in response to the [Suez Crisis](#) in 1956. Pearson won a Nobel Prize for his role in the endeavour. Between 1948 and 1988 Canada was responsible for [10 per cent](#) of total peacekeeping forces.

In the 21st century much of Canada's focus in foreign policy was centered on Afghanistan, though the Prime Minister campaigned on a return to [renewed peacekeeping](#) commitments. For most Canadians, this is a source of great pride. Indeed, the vast majority say these missions make them more proud to be Canadian:

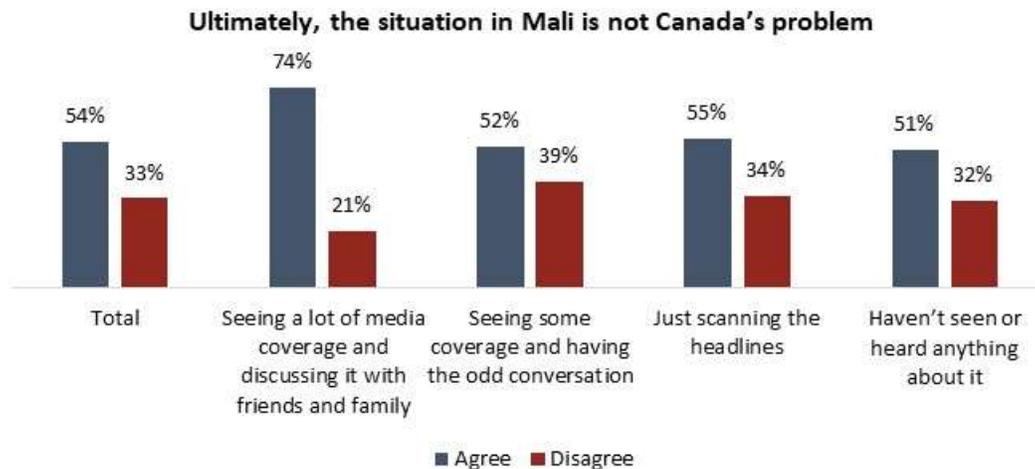
Canada's peacekeeping missions are a source of pride for me



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At the same time, however, Canadians express another, contradictory majority opinion. Just over half (54%) say that ultimately, the situation in Mali is not Canada’s problem. Those following the issue most closely are vastly more likely to agree, suggesting perhaps an awareness of the mission’s label as “most dangerous”.



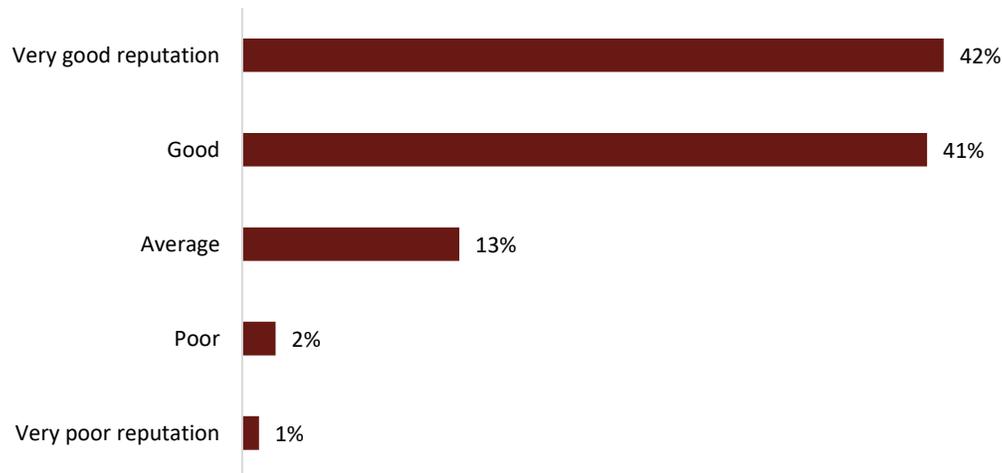
Thus, Canada is a nation divided between a prideful history of peacekeeping on the world stage and the practical realities of engagement. Most would prefer to focus on nailing down NAFTA, but they nonetheless see the impact that can be made by Canadian troops, and support the government policy to offer assistance.

Nearly all say Canada’s reputation abroad is a good or very good

Shortly after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party took over in Ottawa three years ago, Trudeau stated “we’re back”. The Prime Minister suggested that many Canadians were worried that Canada had “lost its compassionate and constructive voice in the world over the past 10 year”. Since that time, the government has signed the international Paris Agreement on climate change and boosted foreign aid spending, but has been criticized for its perceived delay in sending peacekeeping support for the United Nations.

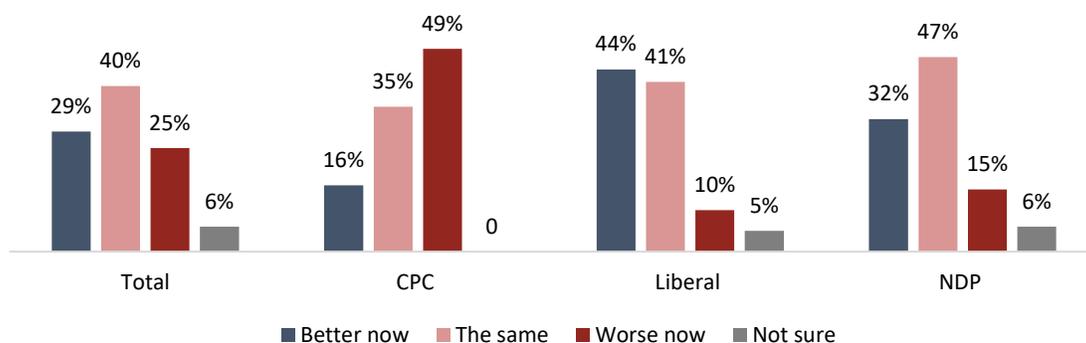
Overall, Canadians are extremely positive about how they believe Canada is perceived internationally. More than eight-in-ten say that Canada’s reputation is at least good, with half of that group saying it is very good. Nearly no one says the country is viewed poorly:

Overall, what kind of reputation would you say Canada has internationally?



As for the changes they have seen since 2008, Canadians are divided. The largest group, four-in-ten, say that nothing has really changed, while close to equal numbers say Canada's place on the world stage has improved, and worsened. This perception has significant divergences based on political affiliation. Half of past Conservatives (49%) say that Canada now has a diminished place in the international arena, while few 2015 Liberal (10%) or NDP supporters say the same:

All things considered, do you think Canada's reputation around the world is better or worse now than it was ten years ago?



*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](#).

Awareness of international crises				
	Level of awareness			
	Following closely	Some coverage and conversation	Scanning headlines	No awareness
Aleppo (1501)	16%	37%	36%	11%
Rohingya (1504)	8%	26%	32%	34%
Mali (1000)	7%	21%	30%	42%