

Two-thirds call irregular border crossings a 'crisis,' more trust Scheer to handle issue than Trudeau

More view the border-crossers as "economic opportunists" than "genuine refugees"

August 3, 2018 – Weeks of questions and criticism from opposition politicians and provincial leaders about asylum-seekers crossing the border – an issue already the source of heightened anxiety and concern for Canadians – have taken a further toll on the Trudeau government's perceived ability to manage the situation.

In the wake of emergency meetings of the Parliamentary Immigration Committee, and as Ontario Premier Doug Ford [demands compensation](#) from Ottawa for the cost of caring for those who cross the border irregularly, Canadians are growing increasingly concerned about the country's ability to handle the flow.

Despite the recent addition of Bill Blair to cabinet as Minister of Border Security, the latest survey from the Angus Reid Institute finds two-thirds of Canadians (67%) call the current situation a "crisis".

Further, about the same number (65%) are of the view that Canada has received "too many" irregular crossers for the country's authorities and service providers to handle.

These views are held not only by conservative-minded individuals, but also by more than half of those who voted for the Liberal and New Democratic parties in 2015, suggesting that asylum-seekers and border security are areas of vulnerability for the Liberal Party – and a potential effective wedge for the Conservative Party in next year's anticipated election.

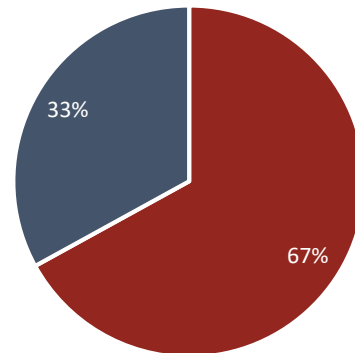
Indeed, a plurality of Canadians, including sizeable segments of past left-leaning voters, say they trust CPC leader Andrew Scheer more than the other main party leaders to deal with this file.

More Key Findings:

- Canadians are paying a great deal of attention to this issue. It scores higher on the ARI Awareness Index than any other topic ARI has polled on so far in 2018 (see notes on methodology at the end of this report)

Canadian views on irregular border crossings:

- This situation is a crisis – Canada's ability to handle the situation is at a limit
- This situation is NOT a crisis – the situation is being overblown by politicians and the media



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from July 25 – 30, 2018, among a representative randomized sample of 1,500 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 +/- 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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- Six-in-ten (58%) say Canada is “too generous” to those crossing the border irregularly. This is a slight increase since the last time ARI asked this question [last year](#) (when it was 53%)
- Most Canadians would rather focus on border monitoring and security than on accommodating these new arrivals. Roughly half (50%) say assisting asylum-seekers is “important” or a “major priority,” compared to 78 per cent who say this of increasing border security
- Roughly three-in-ten Canadians (30%) say the country should suspend its Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) with the United States, which would allow asylum-seekers to cross at official border-crossings. A larger number (43%) say the STCA should remain in place

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Is the flow of asylum-seekers manageable?

The phenomenon of people walking across unguarded sections of the border from the United States to claim asylum in Canada has been in the news since early 2017, when newly inaugurated U.S. President Donald Trump announced the first version of his travel ban and border towns in Quebec and Manitoba [began seeing an influx](#) of asylum-seekers in their communities.

Since then – encouraged, [some argue](#), by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s anti-travel-ban [#WelcomeToCanada tweet](#) – the number of people crossing the border irregularly [has surged](#) past 1,000 per month.

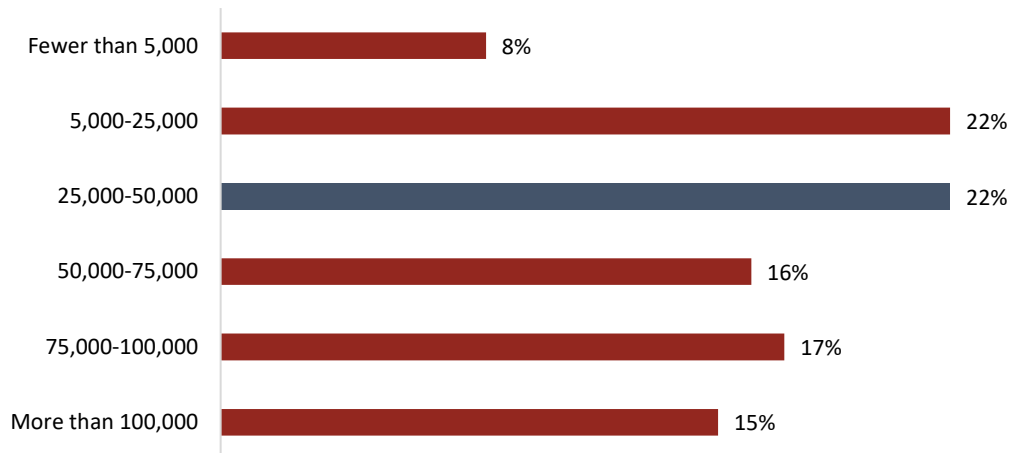
Awareness of this issue among the Canadian public is high. The topic registers a score of 62 on the ARI Awareness Index, the highest score recorded in 2018 so far. For more on the awareness index, see notes on methodology at the end of this report.

However, when asked to estimate how many people have crossed outside an official point of entry since 2017, almost half (48%) of Canadians overestimated the number at more than 50,000. In actuality, the number of people who have crossed this way in that time frame – [according to government statistics](#) – is more than 31,000.

CONTACT:

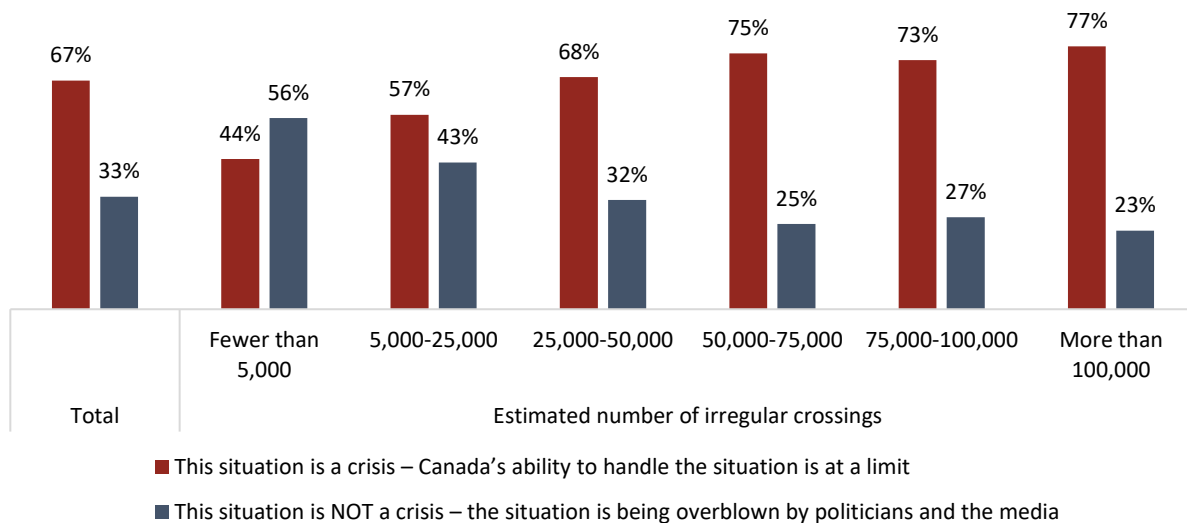
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Based on whatever you've seen, heard, or read, how many people would you estimate have crossed into Canada this way since the beginning of 2017? (Correct range in blue)



Those who overestimate the number of irregular crossers tend to be more likely to see the issue as a crisis, while those who underestimate it are much less concerned:

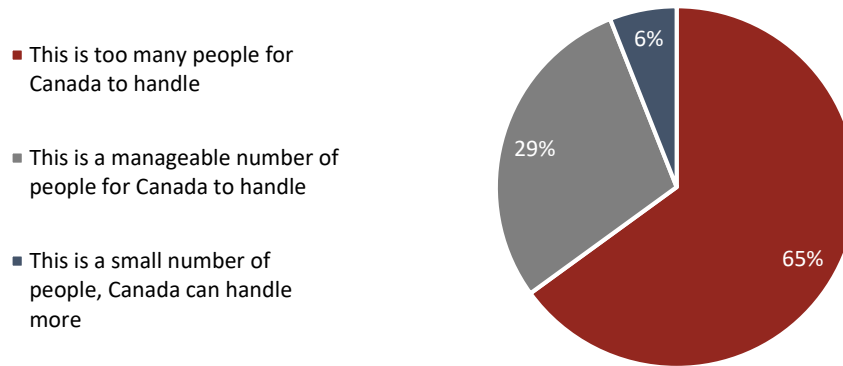
Which is closest to your view?



Responses to this crisis question are discussed in greater detail later in this report.

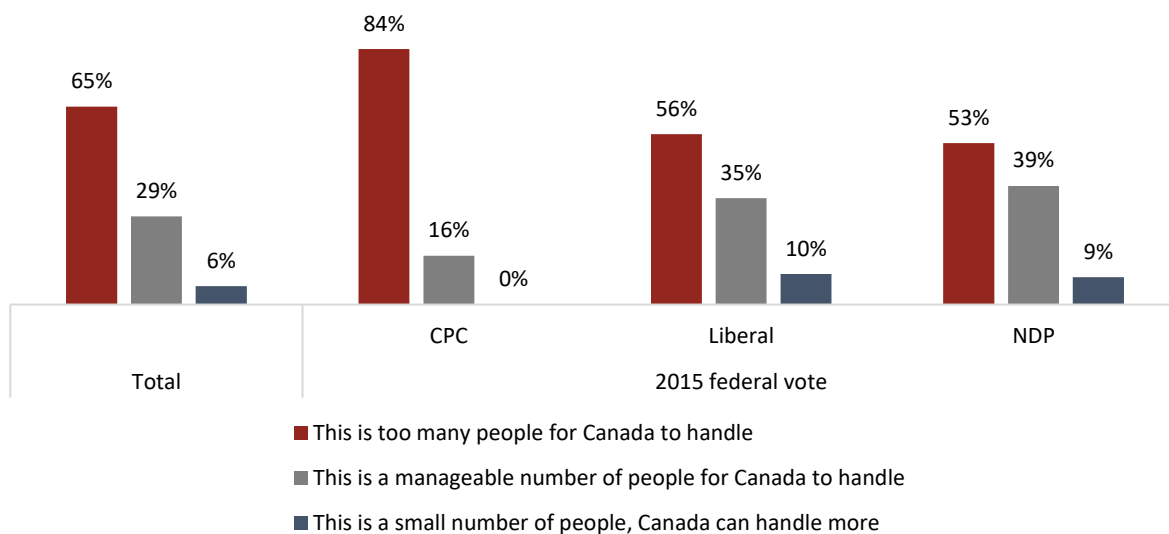
After being presented with the correct number of irregular crossers, most Canadians say it amounts to “too many people for Canada to handle”:

Thinking about the border and priorities for Canada's resources and attention, which statement best reflects your view?



Majorities across all demographic groupings say the number of border-crossers is too high, but certain groups are much more likely to feel this way. Most notably, those who cast ballots for the Conservative Party of Canada in 2015 are overwhelmingly of the opinion that more than 30,000 asylum-seekers is too many. More than half of past Liberals and New Democrats also feel this way, but those groups are considerably more divided than past Conservatives:

Thinking about the number of people who have come, the Canadian border, and priorities for Canada's resources and attention, which statement best reflects your view?

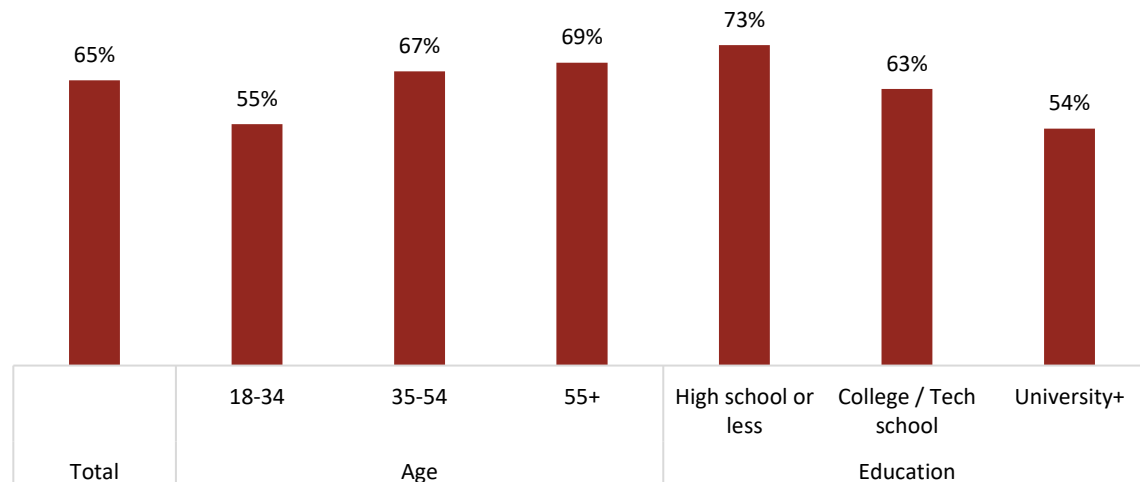


Age and education are also highly correlated with the perception that Canada cannot handle the flow of people seeking refugee status across its border.

Among those over age 35, fully two-thirds say there are too many asylum-seekers for Canada to handle, while those in the 18-34-year-old age group are more divided.

A similar pattern emerges across education levels, with those without university degrees much more likely to say too many people are arriving in Canada irregularly:

Percentage saying "this is too many people for Canada to handle"



Most say Canada is 'too generous' to border-crossers

Chief among the province of Ontario's [complaints](#) about the federal government's handling of asylum-seekers is the expense of providing these new arrivals with housing, health care and other services while they wait for their claims to be heard.

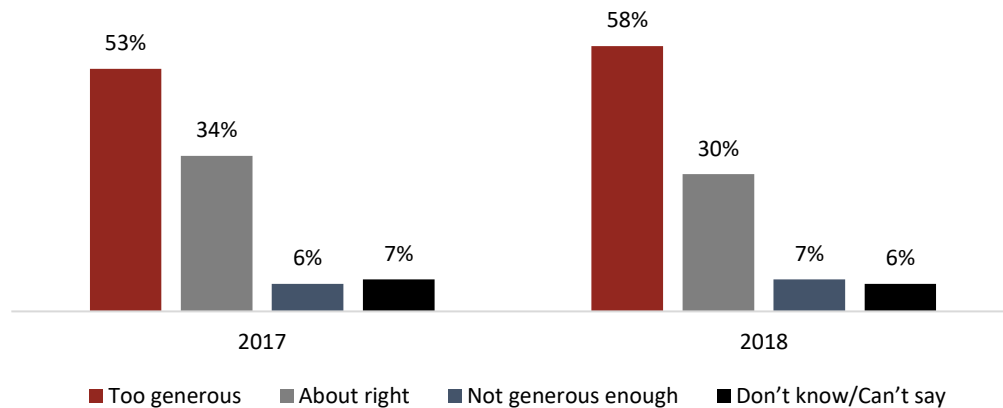
The federal government has [promised \\$50 million](#) to help provinces deal with these costs, including \$11 million for Ontario, specifically, but the Ford government says that total will only amount to [a fraction of the costs](#) the province has incurred.

For its part, the Canadian public tends to be of the opinion that Canada is "too generous" to people who cross the border at an unofficial point of entry and attempt to claim asylum here. Almost six-in-ten (58%) hold this perspective, a slight increase from the 53 per cent who said this in an ARI poll released [in September 2017](#):

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Based on whatever you have seen, read, or heard about this issue, would you say Canada is too generous, about right, or not generous enough toward these people?

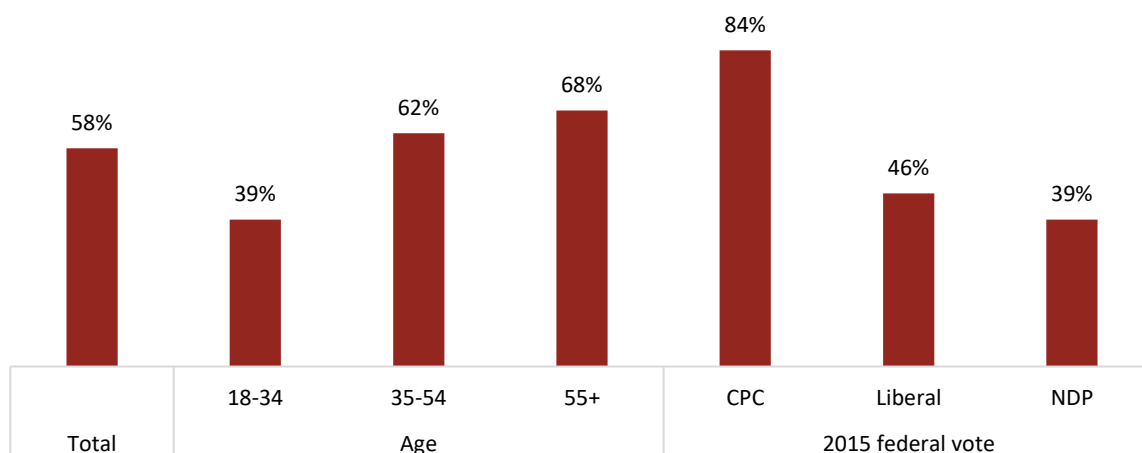


Related: Half of Canadians say their country is 'too generous' toward illegal border crossers

As was the case last year, age and political partisanship are key sources of disagreement on this question. While at least six-in-ten of those in over-35 age groups take the perspective that Canada is too generous toward these newcomers, those ages 18 to 34 are more divided.

Similarly, while 84 per cent of past CPC voters say Canada is too generous to these people, fewer than half of past Liberal and NDP supporters say the same:

Percentage saying Canada is "too generous" toward people crossing the border irregularly:



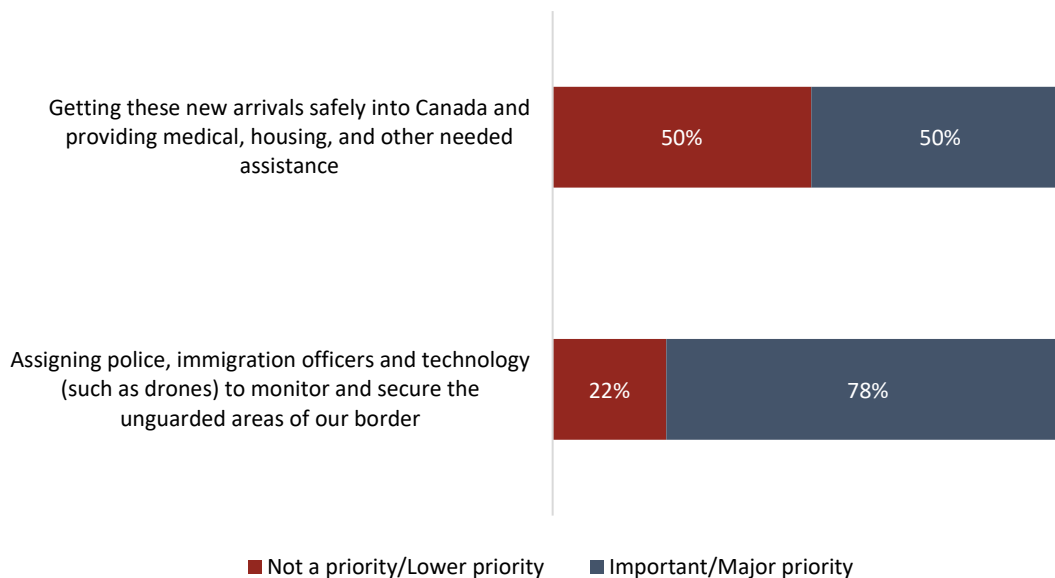
This widespread sense that Canada is too generous to these would-be refugees corresponds with a lesser emphasis from Canadians on accommodating them than on improving border security.

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Roughly half of Canadians (50%) say getting these new arrivals safely into Canada should be an important or major priority, compared to more than three-quarters (78%) who say this of assigning additional police and immigration officers to monitor and secure unguarded areas of the border.

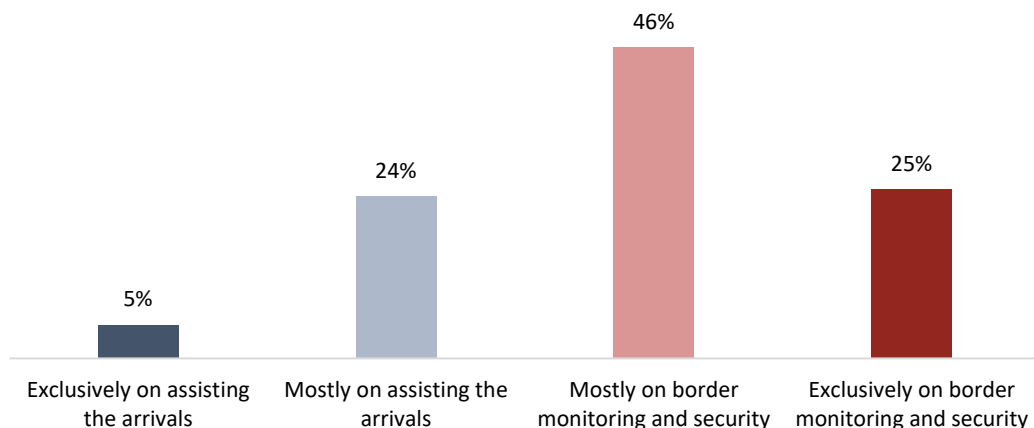
How much priority do you think should be given to the following?



These findings are essentially unchanged since the last time ARI asked these questions.

Asked the question a different way, Canadians make their preference for border monitoring and security even clearer. Fully seven-in-ten (71%) say they would focus either mostly or exclusively on securing the border, rather than on assisting new arrivals, if they were in charge of dealing with this situation.

And, if you were in charge of the Canadian border, how would you focus available resources? Would you focus ...



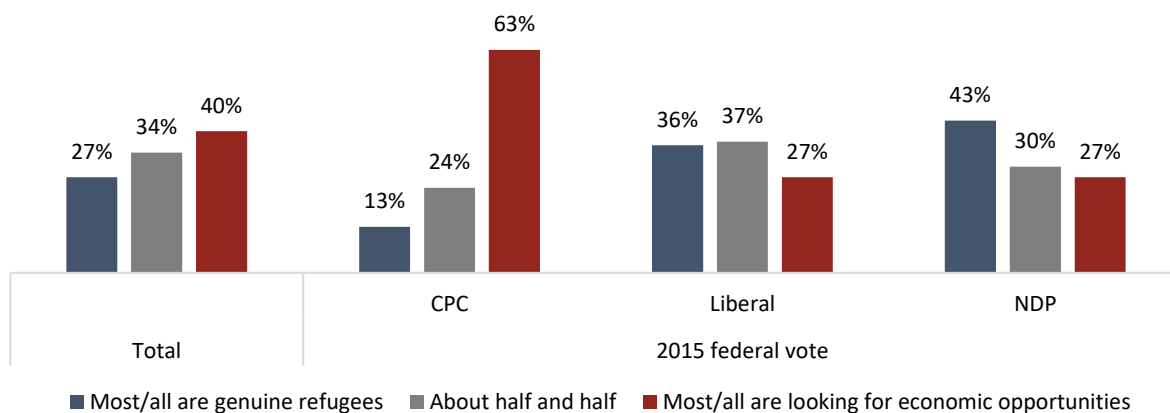
Genuine refugees or economic opportunists?

Canadians' lower level of concern for the people crossing the border than for the security of the border itself may be related to doubts about the legitimacy of the asylum claims being made.

Fewer than three-in-ten (27%) say they believe most of the people crossing the border are genuine refugees, while four-in-ten (40%) say the majority of these people are looking for economic opportunities, rather than fleeing violence or persecution abroad. The rest (34%) are of the opinion that about half of those crossing the border have genuine claims and half are economic opportunists.

Again, political partisanship appears to have a strong influence on Canadians' responses to this question. More than six-in-ten past Conservative voters (63%) believe most of the people crossing the border are not legitimate refugees. Among past Liberals and New Democrats, more respondents see these newcomers as genuine than not:

There's been debate about how many people crossing the border are genuine refugees fleeing a crisis and how many are just looking for economic opportunities. What's your own impression?

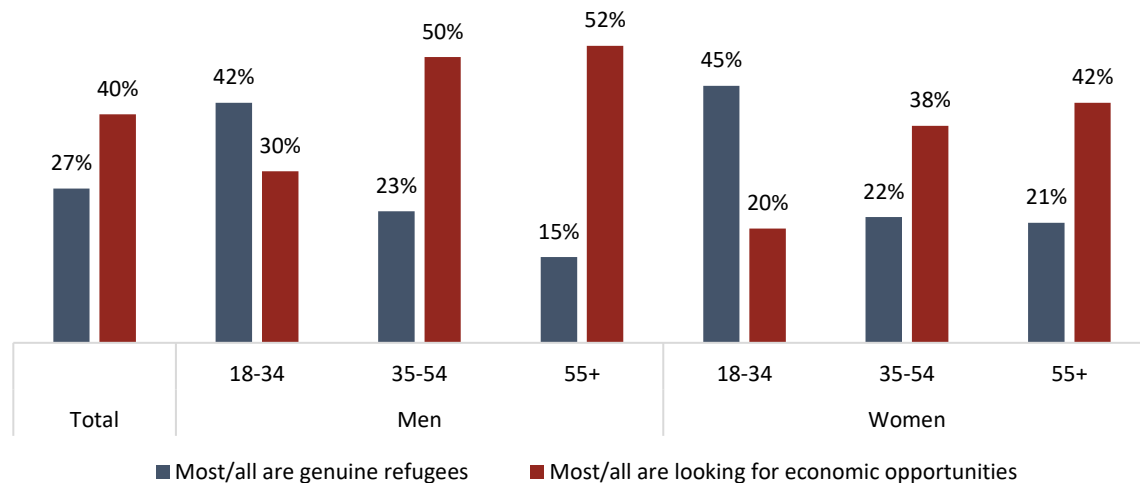


Other than past CPC voters, the only other demographic group in which at least 50 per cent respondents see border-crossers as economic opportunists is men over the age of 35. In all other demographic groupings, respondents are more divided ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

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There's been debate about how many people crossing the border are genuine refugees and how many are just looking for economic opportunities. What's your own impression?



Uncertainty about the Safe Third Country Agreement

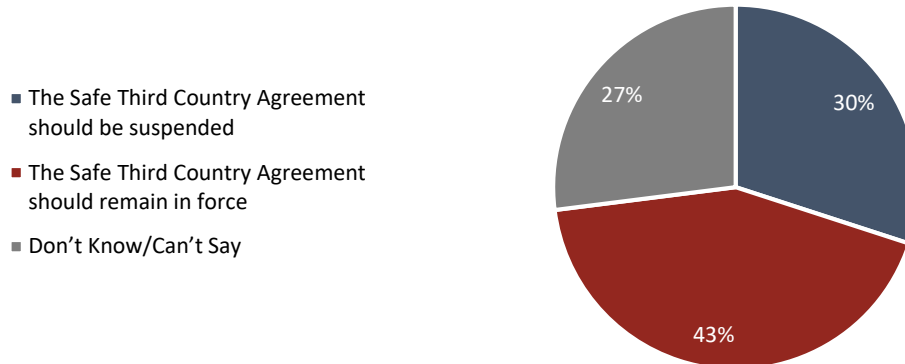
When the asylum-seekers cross the border, they are arrested, screened for security, and turned over to the Canada Border Services Agency to claim asylum. This process is governed by something called the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA). The agreement prohibits people entering Canada from the U.S. from applying for refugee status here. However, it doesn't apply to people who enter by walking across at an unguarded section of the border. People who do this are allowed to apply for refugee status in Canada – though there is no guarantee they'll be allowed to stay.

Some observers have called on Canada to suspend the STCA, which would allow people seeking refugee status to enter Canada at a legal border-crossing, as it would no longer recognize the U.S. as a safe country for refugees. They argue that this would be safer for those seeking refugee status, and more orderly for processing.

Others have said Canada should not suspend the STCA. They argue that doing so would encourage larger numbers to seek refugee status here, and that those currently crossing outside of normal points of entry are breaking the law and should not be rewarded for doing so.

Four-in-ten (43%) are inclined to have the agreement remain in place, while three-in-ten (30%) say it should be suspended. A significant portion (27%) say they are not sure what should be done:

Should Canada suspend the Safe Third Country Agreement?

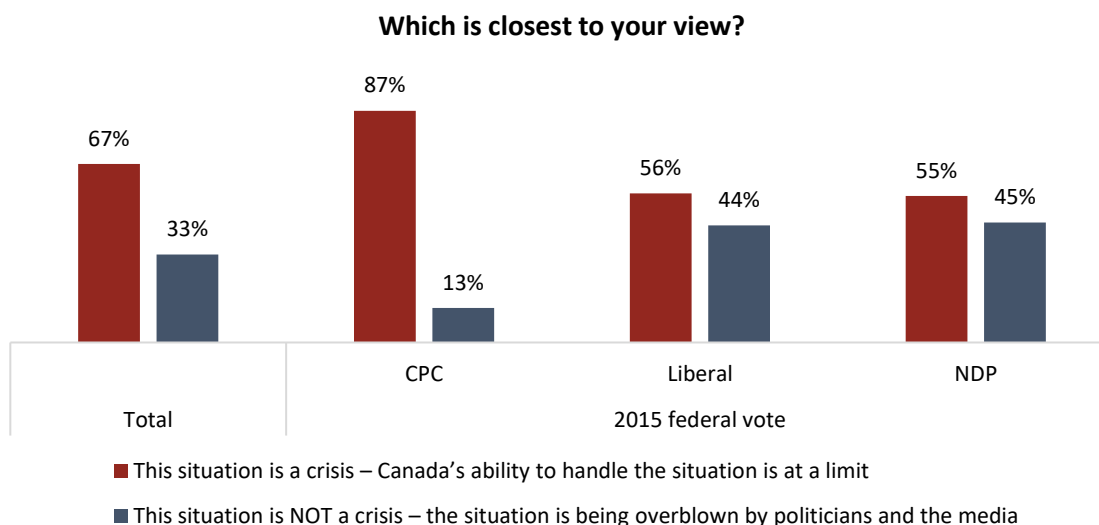


Two-in-three say irregular border crossings are ‘a crisis’

The steady stream of border crossers, and the federal government’s at-times-unclear response to it, has led some to call the situation at the border a “crisis.” At a special meeting of the House of Commons immigration committee last month, Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale disputed this characterization, but this Angus Reid Institute poll finds two-thirds of Canadians agreeing with it.

Asked to choose between two opposing statements on this issue, some 67 per cent of Canadians say, “*This situation is a crisis – Canada’s ability to handle the situation is at a limit,*” rather than, “*This situation is NOT a crisis – the situation is being overblown by politicians and the media.*”

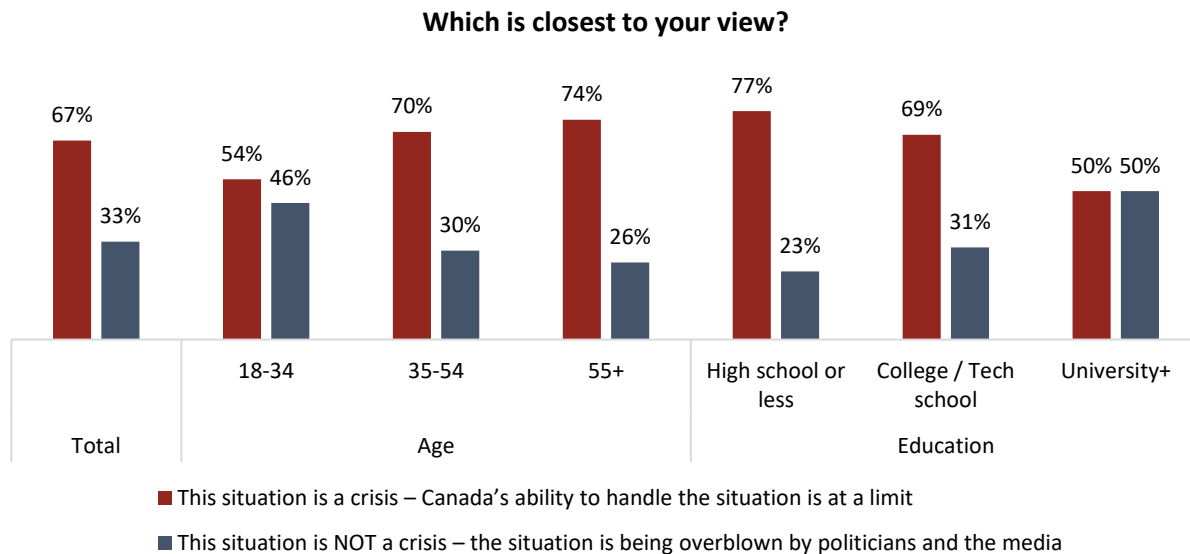
Troublingly for Trudeau and Goodale, it’s not just supporters of the opposition parties who feel the situation at the border has reached a crisis point. A full majority (56%) of those who voted for the Liberals in 2015 also feel this way, as seen in the following graph:



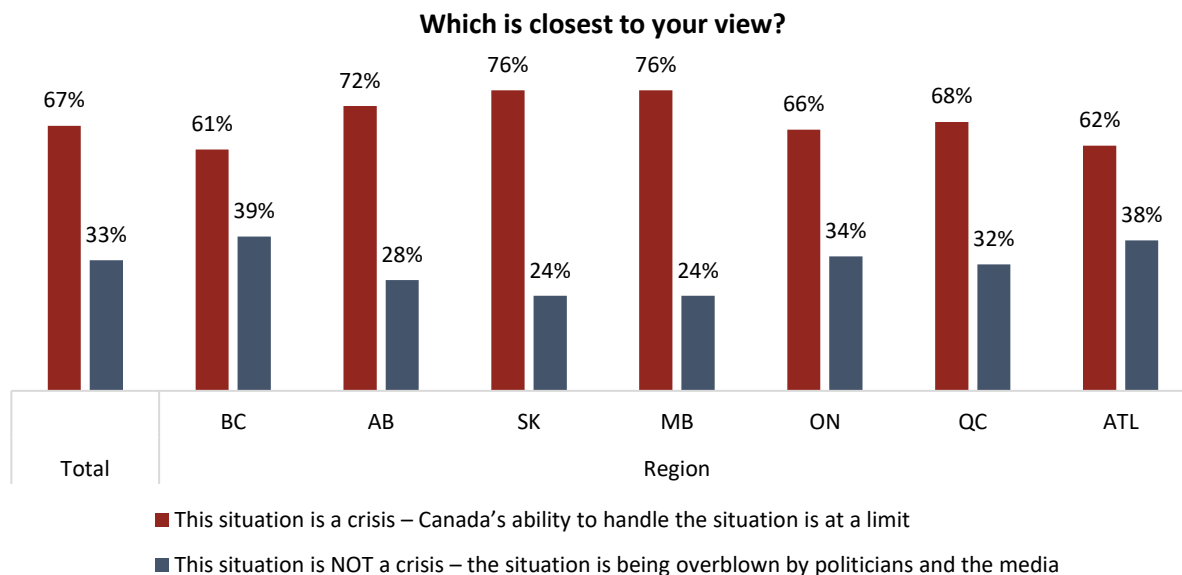
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Age and education also correlate with opinions on this question. While majorities in all age groups see the border issue as a crisis, respondents under age 35 are much more divided than those in older age groups. Likewise, those with at least some university education are split down the middle, while people with lower levels of formal education overwhelmingly view the situation as a crisis:



Regionally, it’s notable that Quebec – the province where the vast majority of irregular border crossings have taken place – is not significantly more likely than other regions to say such crossings amount to a crisis. Rather, it is Prairie residents – whose provinces have seen comparatively few asylum-seekers cross irregularly in 2018 – who are most likely to say Canada’s ability to handle this situation is at its limit:

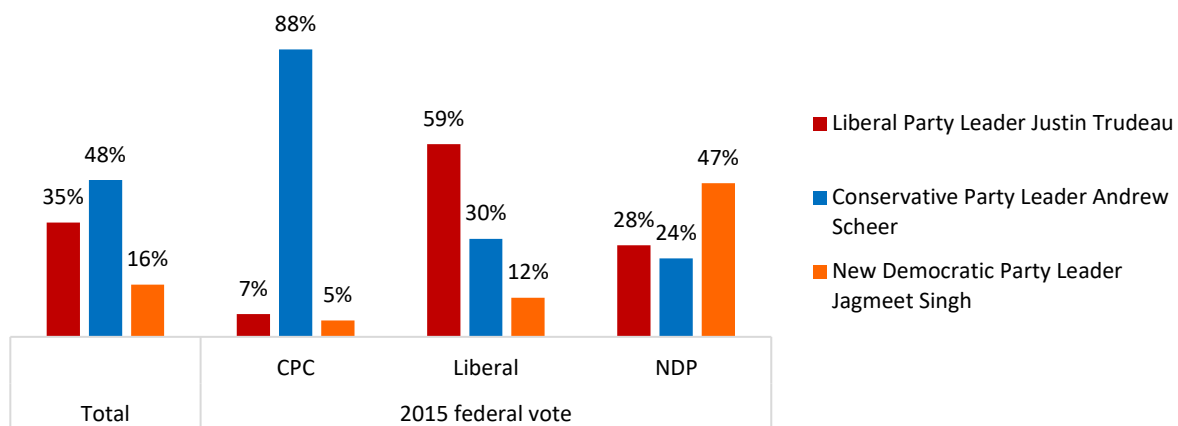


Scheer most trusted to handle the issue

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the consistency and relative uniformity with which past Conservative voters express concern about border security and asylum-seekers, CPC leader Andrew Scheer is the federal party leader most likely to be trusted on this issue.

Scheer earns the overwhelming backing of those who voted for his party in 2015, as well as that of three-in-ten who voted for the Liberals and one-in-five who voted for the NDP:

Overall, which major party leader do you trust most to handle this issue of people crossing the border irregularly?



With slightly more than 14 months left before the next scheduled federal election, these findings suggest the Conservatives are in a strong position on this issue. How well they are able to capitalize on this position remains to be seen.

Notes on Methodology

Since early 2015, the Angus Reid Institute has been asking Canadians a standardized question about how closely they are following the topics of ARI polls. To facilitate easy comparisons across disparate topics, ARI researchers have developed an Awareness Index based on respondents' answers.

For each issue, respondents are asked to say whether they are "following it in the news and discussing it with friends and family," "seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation," "just scanning the headlines," or not seeing or hearing anything about the issue.

The index is based on the average response to this question over the years, with greater weight given to the highest level of awareness on the scale, and lesser weight given to the "having the odd conversation" and "just scanning headlines" responses. An "average" issue scores a 50 on the index, with scores higher than 50 representing above-average awareness and scores lower than 50 representing below-average awareness.

On this particular topic of irregular border crossings, more than one-in-three (34%) say they are "following it in the news and discussing it with friends and family." Another 36 per cent are "seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation." One-in-five (20%) are "just scanning the headlines," and just one-in-ten (10%) haven't seen or heard anything about this story.

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Responses on this topic equate to a score of 62 on the ARI Awareness Index, which is the highest score recorded so far in 2018, tied with the score registered by the [opioid crisis](#) in January. This is also the highest score recorded since October 2017, when [nuclear tensions](#) between the United States and North Korea registered at a 63.

*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](#).

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