

## In debate over first PM's legacy, vast majority say John A. MacDonald's name, image should stay in public view

*Most say Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools and should move on*

**September 5, 2018** – As a long summer of discussion over the legacy of the country's residential school system and dispute over the subsequent actions of politicians comes to an end, Canadians are weighing in.

After a decision by Victoria, B.C.'s mayor and council to remove a statue of John A. MacDonald, a new public opinion survey from the Angus Reid Institute finds the majority say remembering the trauma of residential schools should not come at the expense of memorializing the country's first Prime Minister.

While twice as many are opposed to the specific removal of the statue in Victoria as supportive (55% versus 25%), fully seven-in-ten (70%) say, generally, the name and image of John A. MacDonald should remain in public view. This compares to just one-in-ten (11%) who say his name and image should be removed.

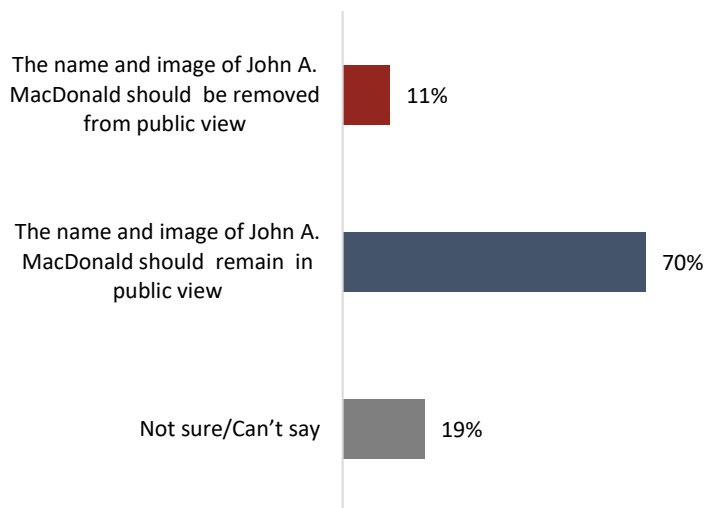
Canadians are also nearly twice as likely to say their country "spends too much time apologizing for residential schools" as to say the harm from that policy continues and cannot be ignored.

Against this backdrop, however, half the country is also supportive of either a statutory holiday commemorating the legacy of residential schools (51% support this) or designated "day of remembrance" that is not a statutory holiday (53%).

### More Key Findings:

- Nearly six-in-ten Canadians say the country "spends too much time apologizing for residential schools" (57%). Conversely, about one-third (31%) say "The harm from residential schools continues and cannot be ignored". The rest (12%) are unsure
- More than half (55%) are opposed the removal of the John A. MacDonald statue from in front of Victoria city hall, but Canadians are divided over whether it should be restored to its original spot (37%), displayed elsewhere publicly (13%), or placed in a museum (44%)

### Which of these perspectives is closest to how you feel?



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from August 21 – 24, 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.

### CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

- Age and political affiliation are highly correlated with views on these issues. Past Conservative Party of Canada voters overwhelmingly oppose removing the Victoria statue (81%), while past Liberal Party supporters are more divided – with nearly half (47%) also opposed

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**Part 1: Remembering John A. MacDonald**

**Most oppose Victoria's decision**

The decision by officials in Victoria, British Columbia, to remove the statue of Canada's first Prime Minister that had stood outside their city hall for decades has prompted [both praise and condemnation](#). But just a few weeks after the statue's removal, Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps [issued an apology](#) for the process by which the decision to remove it was made.

In it, she wrote that she had failed to realize that many residents felt excluded from the decision-making process and pledged to engage in broader consultations with the public as the city considers what to do with the statue in the future.

Helps also wrote that she still believes taking down the statue was the right decision. On this, a majority of Canadians (55%) disagree with her.

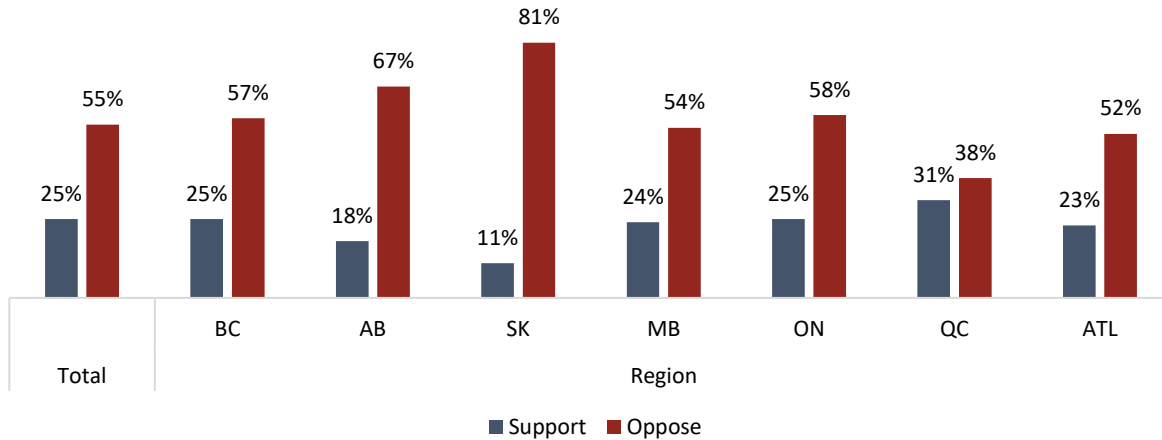
As seen in the graph that follows, opposition to the statue's removal tops 50 per cent in every region except Quebec, where a higher number of respondents (30% – not shown in the graph) are unsure:

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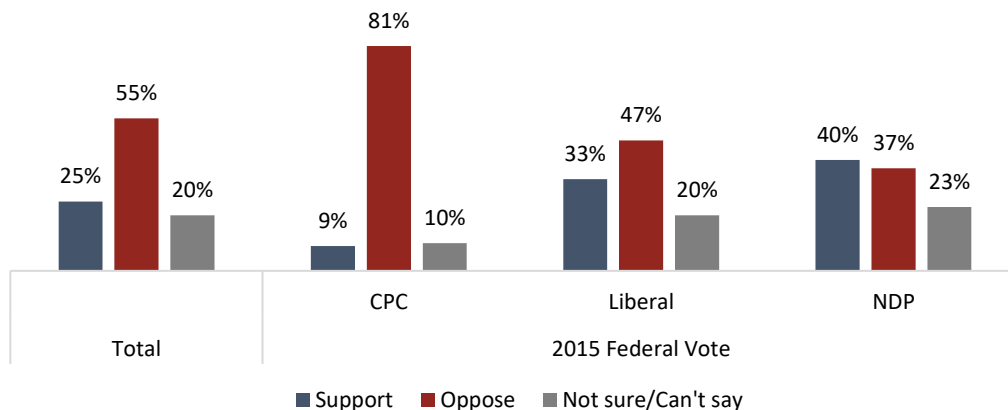
**Do you support or oppose the removal of the statue of John A. MacDonald from city hall in Victoria, B.C.?**



The fact that the highest levels of opposition to the statue’s removal are found in Saskatchewan and Alberta is likely related – at least in part – to the dominance of the CPC in those two provinces’ political scenes. Those who cast ballots for the Conservatives in 2015 overwhelmingly oppose the statue’s removal.

It is worth noting, however, that more past Liberal voters – nearly half – are opposed to the removal than in support of it. And those who identify has having voted for the NDP in 2015 are divided:

**Do you support or oppose the removal of the statue of John A. MacDonald from city hall in Victoria, B.C.?**



**Should the statue be relocated?**

The statue is currently in storage while the city decides what to do with it. Helps has [repeatedly stated](#) that it will be displayed publicly again in the future, though likely not in the same place outside city hall where it had been located since 1982.

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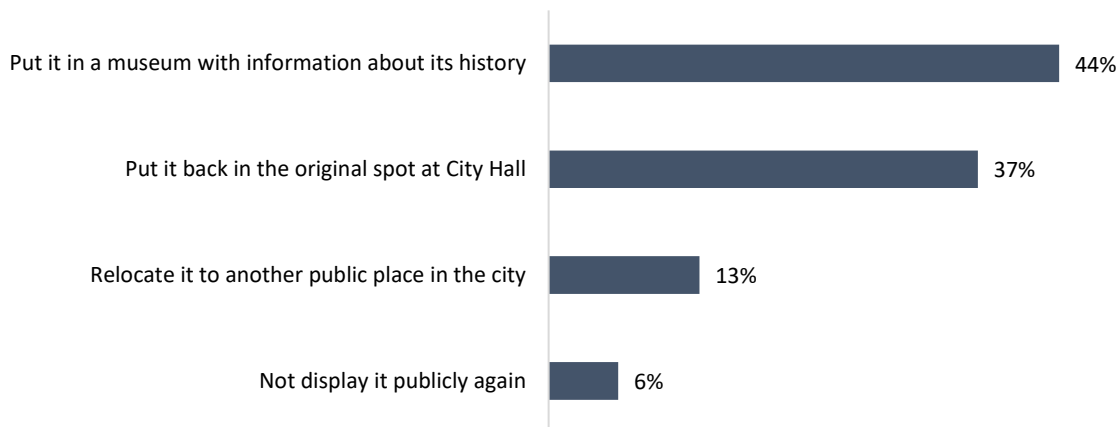
Shortly after the statue was removed, the Ontario provincial government wrote a letter to the city offering to take possession of it. Victoria officials [rejected the offer](#).

MacDonald was Canada’s first Prime Minister and served as the MP for Victoria from 1878 to 1882. He was also a [key architect](#) of the residential schools system that removed Indigenous children from their families and sent them to church-run boarding schools where they were prohibited from speaking their native languages or practicing their traditional customs.

The city has framed removing the statue as an “[act of reconciliation](#)” with local First Nations. Discussions of what to do with the statue in the future are expected to centre on how best to include the context of MacDonald’s policies toward Indigenous people in the city’s commemoration of him.

As previously noted, most Canadians disagree with the removal of the statue in the first place. But they are divided over what should be done with the monument now that it has been taken down. Just over two-in-five (44%) say they would put it in a museum, while slightly fewer (37%) say they would put it back in its original place. Others would relocate it to another public place in the city, while only 6 per cent would keep it out of the public eye forever:

**If you were in charge of this decision, what would you do with the statue?**



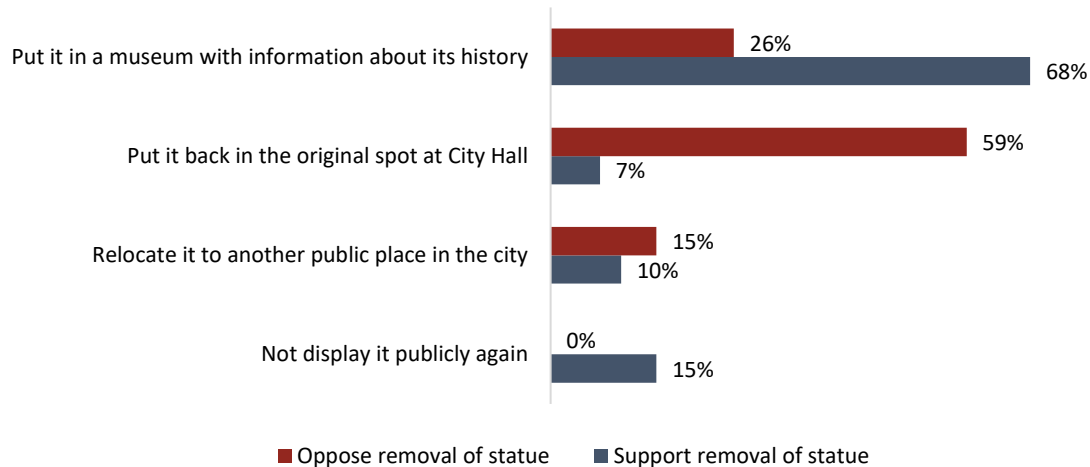
Asked what they would do if they were in charge of the situation, most of those who opposed taking down the monument say they would put it back up (59% say this). Similarly, most of those who supported the statue’s removal say they would prefer to see it placed in a museum (68% do).

Notably, those who disagree with the city’s decision to remove the statue are less unified than those who agree with it. Fully one-in-four (26%) who opposed taking down the statue say they would nevertheless place it in a museum if they were in charge. Those who support the monument’s removal, meanwhile, are more than twice as likely to say they would not display it publicly at all (15%) than to say they would put it back in its original location (7%).

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**If you were in charge of this decision, what would you do with the statue?**



Asked in August 2017 about relocating statues of colonial leaders, more than seven-in-ten Canadians (71%) agreed with the statement “These statues would be better placed in museums, where they are able to be viewed with proper historical context.”

**[Related – What’s in a name? Call to remove John A. MacDonald’s from schools meets firm opposition](#)**

**Part 2: Remembering residential schools**

**Stat holiday or ‘day of remembrance’? Canadians support both**

Another “act of reconciliation” that has generated headlines in recent weeks is the Trudeau government’s effort [to create a statutory holiday](#) commemorating the legacy of residential schools. Creating such a holiday was one of the 94 “calls to action” included in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s [final report](#).

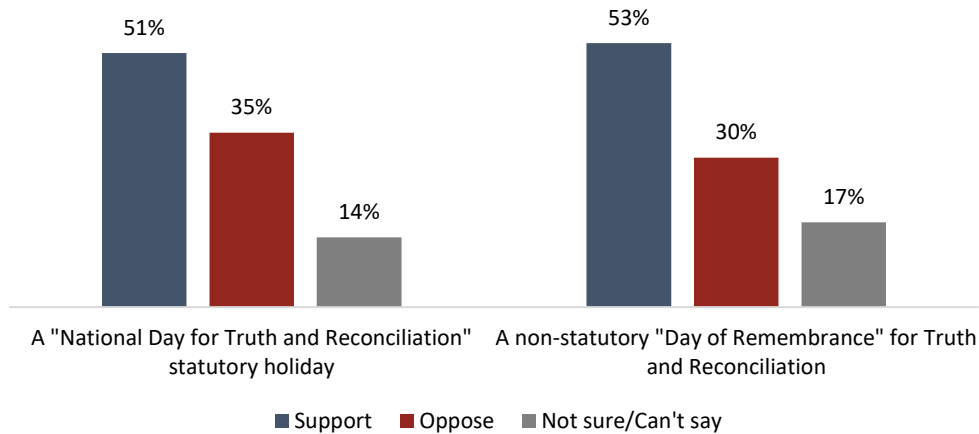
Shortly after the commission released its findings in 2015, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians about a variety of its recommendations, including the creation of a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. At the time, slightly more than half (55%) supported such a holiday.

**[Related – Truth and Reconciliation: Canadians see value in process, skeptical about government action](#)**

This survey aimed to gauge support for both a statutory holiday – which would be a mandatory day off for federal employees and those working in federally regulated industries – and for a hypothetical “day of remembrance” that would be designated for remembrance, but would not be a day off.

Each of these scenarios receives roughly equal support from the public, as seen in the following graph:

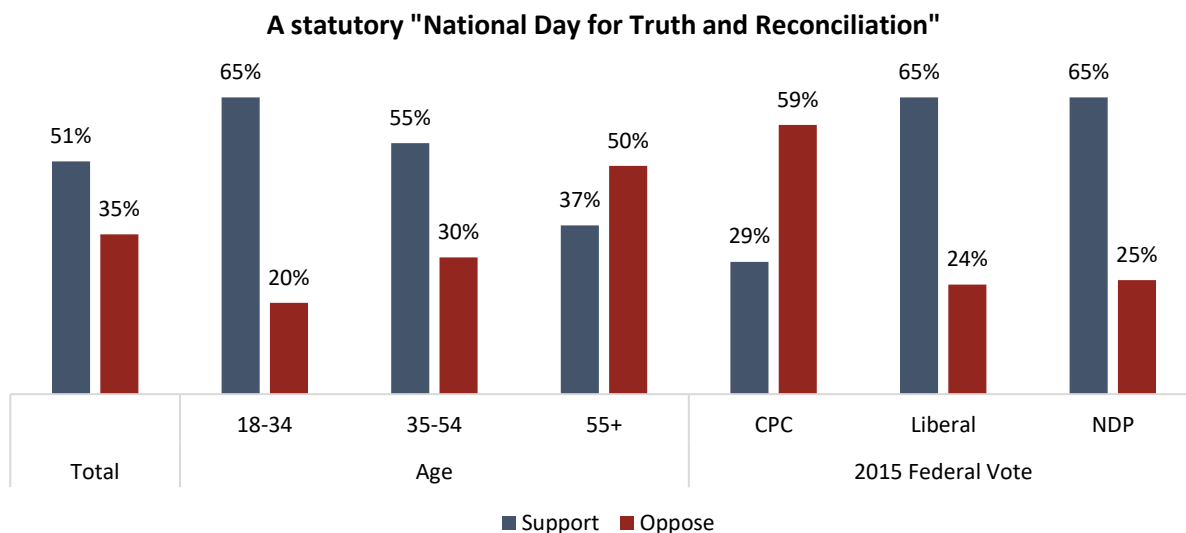
**Views on statutory and non-statutory commemorations of the legacy of residential schools:**



**Generational gap in support for stat holiday**

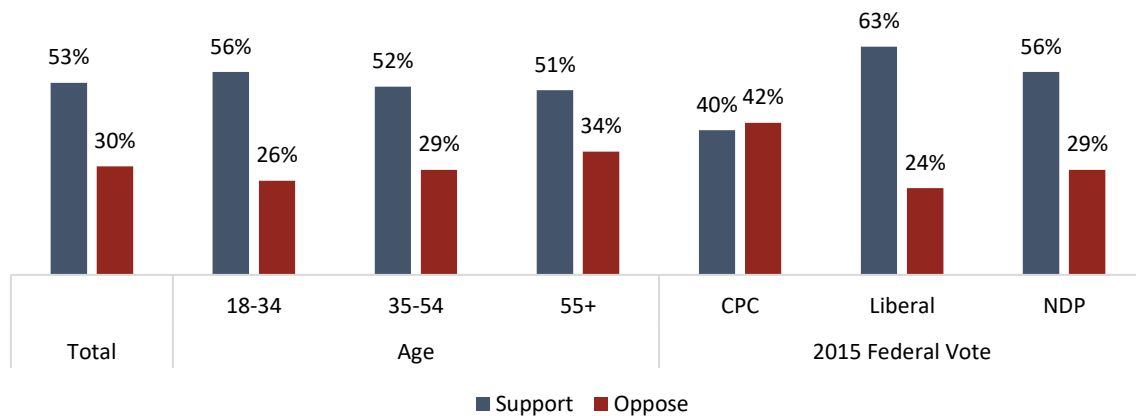
While the overall picture is similar for both of the observances asked about in this survey, there are some notable demographic differences hidden behind these topline findings.

In general, a statutory “National Day for Truth and Reconciliation” is more controversial than a non-statutory observance. The former elicits significant divergence in opinion between younger respondents – those under age 55, and particularly those under age 35 – and older ones, as well as between past Conservative voters and those who supported other parties in 2015:



These differences become far less pronounced when considering a non-statutory “Day of Remembrance:”

**A non-statutory "Day of Remembrance" for Truth and Reconciliation**



**Part 3: Underlying dynamics**

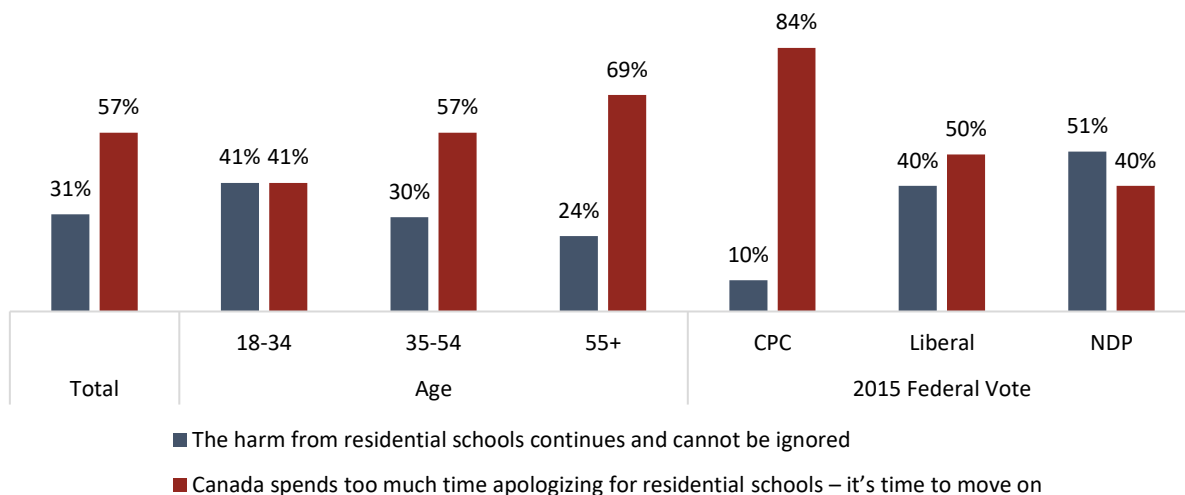
**Most say Canada has done enough apologizing**

Views on both the formal commemoration of the legacy of residential schools and the removal of statues of historical figures who advocated for the creation of such schools are heavily influenced by views on the current state of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Asked choose between two broadly opposing statements about the legacy of residential schools, a majority of Canadians (57%) choose “Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools – it’s time to move on,” over “The harm from residential schools continues and cannot be ignored,” (31%). The rest (12%) are unsure.

Age and political affiliation are key drivers of opinion on this question as well:

**Which of these perspectives is closer to your own?**



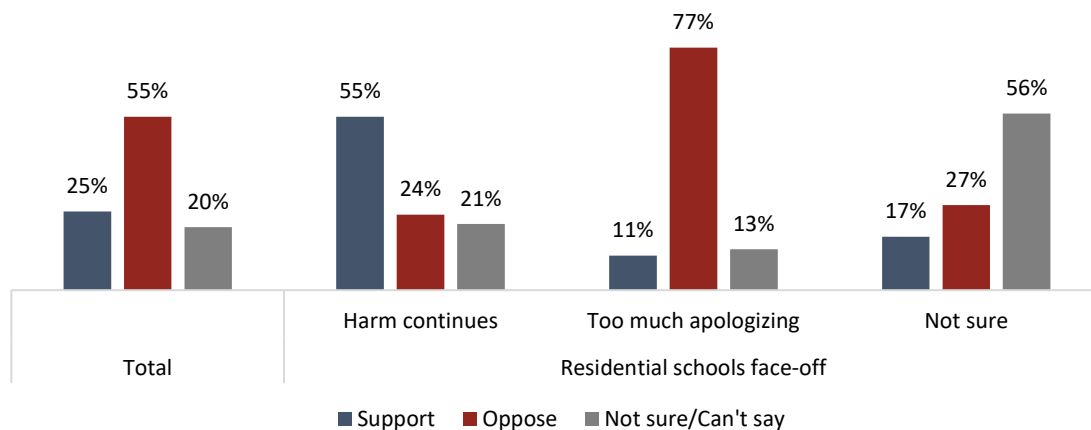
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As might be expected, those who say Canada has done enough apologizing are more likely to oppose the removal of Victoria’s John A. MacDonald statue, as well as to oppose the creation of a statutory holiday honoring residential school survivors.

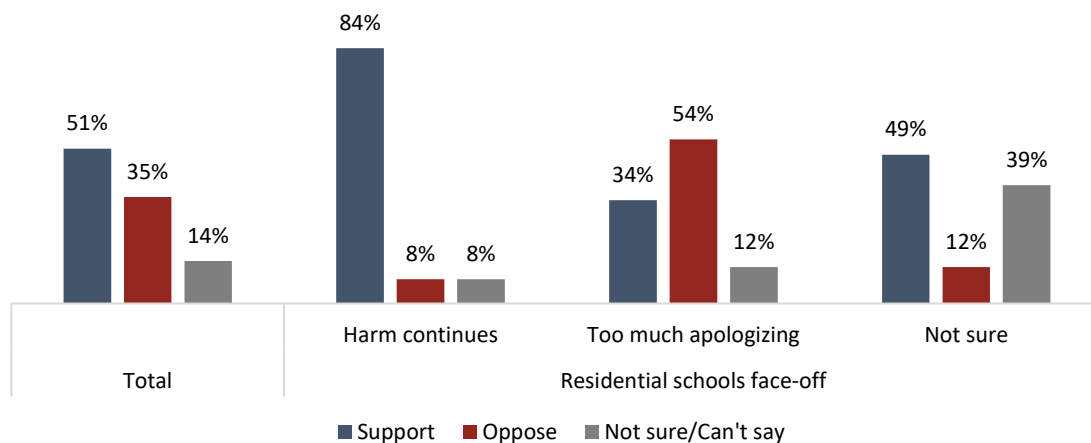
On the statue question, specifically, those who feel Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools overwhelmingly oppose the Victoria decision (77%), while those on the other side of this face-off support the decision, albeit less overwhelmingly:

**Do you support or oppose the removal of the statue of John A. MacDonald from city hall in Victoria, B.C.?**



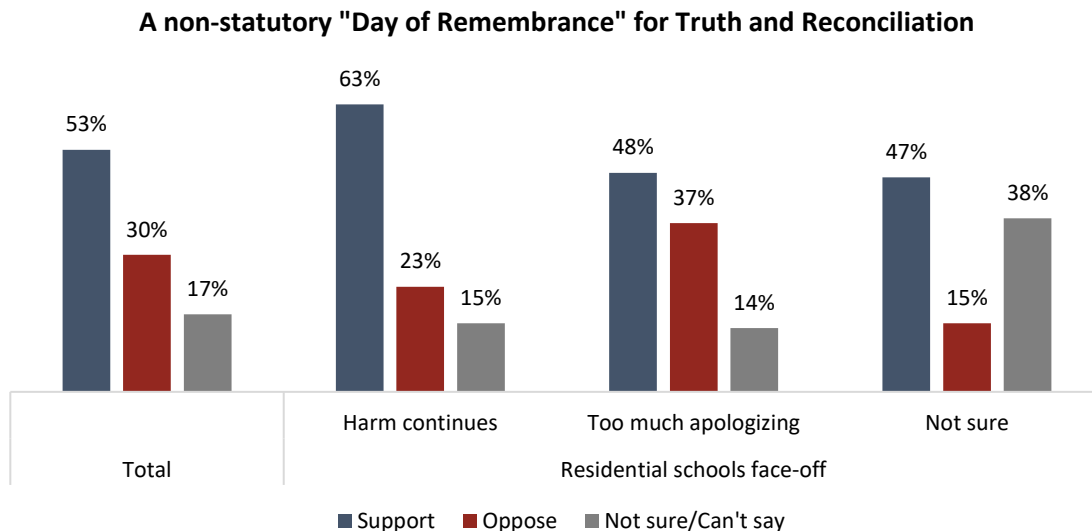
This binary question is similarly illustrative of the topline results of the holiday questions. When it comes to commemorating the legacy of residential schools, it is those on the “harm continues” side of this divide who are overwhelming in backing their position. More than eight-in-ten in this group (84%) support a statutory holiday, while those who say Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools are more divided. More than half of them (54%) oppose a statutory “National Day for Truth and Reconciliation,” but a significant one-in-three support it:

**A statutory "National Day for Truth and Reconciliation"**





Again, the idea of a day of remembrance is less polarizing. Such an observance earns more support than opposition from those who say Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools, though it earns less enthusiastic support from those on the “harm continues” side of this question than a statutory holiday does:



For those who are inclined to believe Canada has already done all that is needed to atone for its residential schools policy, a statutory holiday commemorating that policy’s legacy may feel like unnecessary overcompensation.

By contrast, for those who feel that the harm of residential schools is ongoing and must continue being addressed, a statutory holiday likely seems like a more concrete step than a non-statutory observance.

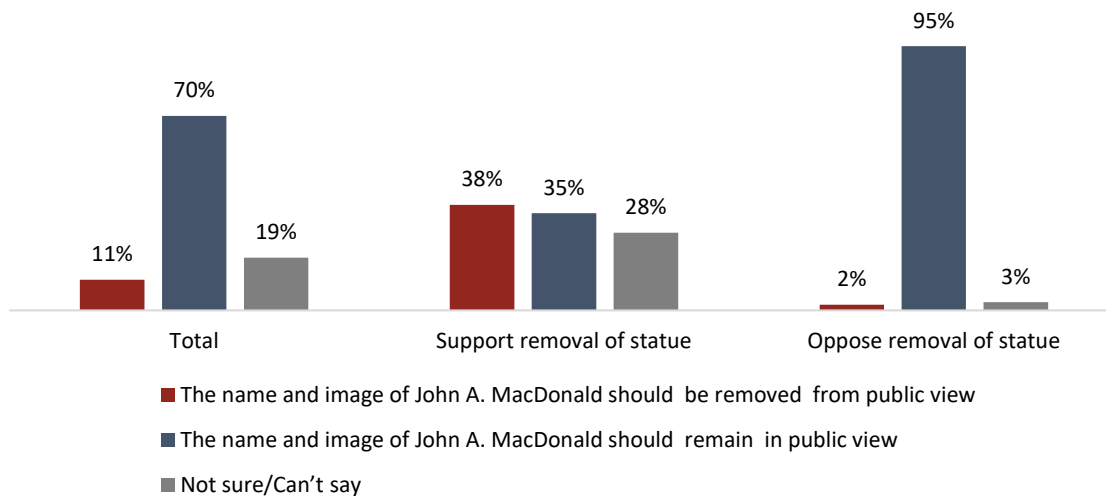
### MacDonald name is sacred for many

Asked another face-off question regarding the removal of John A. MacDonald’s name and likeness from public buildings and monuments, Canadians overwhelmingly choose the statement, “*The name and image of John A. MacDonald should remain in public view*” (70% do), rather than the statement, “*The name and image of John A. MacDonald should be removed from public view*” (11%). The rest are unsure (19%).

This view persists across all demographic groups.

Even among those who support the removal of MacDonald’s statue from Victoria City Hall, less than a majority take the more extreme position that MacDonald’s name and image should no longer be displayed publicly:

**Which of these perspectives is closest to how you feel?**



*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](#).*

| If you were in charge of this decision, what would you do with the statue? |              |  |              |
|--|--------------|--|--------------|
| (weighted sample sizes)  | Total (1500) | Opinion on removal of John A. MacDonald statue |              |
|  |              | Support (377)                                  | Oppose (818) |
| Put it back in the original spot at City Hall                              | 37%          | 7%   | 59%          |
| Relocate it to another public place in the city                            | 13%          | 10%  | 15%          |
| Put it in a museum with information about its history                      | 44%          | 68%  | 26%          |
| Not display it publicly again  | 6%           | 15%  | 0%           |

| <b>Which of these perspectives is closest to how you feel?</b>                    |                         |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| <b>(weighted sample sizes)</b>  | <b>Total<br/>(1500)</b> | <b>Opinion on removal of John A. MacDonald statue</b> |                         |
|   |                         | <b>Support<br/>(377)</b>                              | <b>Oppose<br/>(818)</b> |
| <b>The name and image of John A. MacDonald should be removed from public view</b> | <b>11%</b>              | <b>38%</b>  | <b>2%</b>               |
| <b>The name and image of John A. MacDonald should remain in public view</b>       | <b>70%</b>              | <b>35%</b>  | <b>95%</b>              |
| <b>Not sure/Can't say</b>   | <b>19%</b>              | <b>28%</b>  | <b>3%</b>               |

| <b>And, based on whatever you have read, seen or heard about this issue, do you support or oppose the removal of the statue of John A. MacDonald from city hall in Victoria?</b> |                         |  |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>(weighted sample sizes)</b>   | <b>Total<br/>(1500)</b> | <b>Which is closer to your own view?</b>                     |  |                                     |
|  |                         | <b>The harm from residential schools continues<br/>(465)</b> | <b>Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools<br/>(854)</b> | <b>Not sure/Can't say<br/>(182)</b> |
| <b>Strongly Support</b>  | <b>10%</b>              | <b>24%</b>   | <b>3%</b>  | <b>4%</b>                           |
| <b>Support</b>   | <b>15%</b>              | <b>31%</b>   | <b>7%</b>  | <b>13%</b>                          |
| <b>Oppose</b>  | <b>21%</b>              | <b>14%</b>   | <b>25%</b>   | <b>21%</b>                          |
| <b>Strongly Oppose</b>   | <b>33%</b>              | <b>10%</b>   | <b>51%</b>   | <b>6%</b>                           |
| <b>Not sure/Can't say</b>  | <b>20%</b>              | <b>21%</b>   | <b>13%</b>   | <b>56%</b>                          |

| <b>Would you say you support or oppose creating a “National Day for Truth and Reconciliation”? (statutory holiday)</b> |                         |  |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>(weighted sample sizes)</b>   | <b>Total<br/>(1500)</b> | <b>Which is closer to your own view?</b>                     |  |                                     |
|  |                         | <b>The harm from residential schools continues<br/>(465)</b> | <b>Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools<br/>(854)</b> | <b>Not sure/Can't say<br/>(182)</b> |
| <b>Strongly Support</b>  | <b>23%</b>              | <b>47%</b>   | <b>11%</b>   | <b>15%</b>                          |
| <b>Support</b>   | <b>29%</b>              | <b>37%</b>   | <b>23%</b>   | <b>34%</b>                          |
| <b>Oppose</b>  | <b>14%</b>              | <b>5%</b>  | <b>21%</b>   | <b>8%</b>                           |
| <b>Strongly Oppose</b>   | <b>20%</b>              | <b>3%</b>  | <b>33%</b>   | <b>3%</b>                           |
| <b>Not sure/Can't say</b>  | <b>14%</b>              | <b>8%</b>  | <b>12%</b>   | <b>39%</b>                          |

| <b>Would you say you support or oppose creating a “Day of Remembrance” for Truth and Reconciliation? (non-statutory holiday)</b> |                         |  |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>(weighted sample sizes)</b>   | <b>Total<br/>(1500)</b> | <b>Which is closer to your own view?</b>                     |  |                                     |
|  |                         | <b>The harm from residential schools continues<br/>(465)</b> | <b>Canada spends too much time apologizing for residential schools<br/>(854)</b> | <b>Not sure/Can't say<br/>(182)</b> |
| <b>Strongly Support</b>  | <b>16%</b>              | <b>24%</b>   | <b>12%</b>   | <b>11%</b>                          |
| <b>Support</b>   | <b>37%</b>              | <b>39%</b>   | <b>37%</b>   | <b>36%</b>                          |
| <b>Oppose</b>  | <b>17%</b>              | <b>15%</b>   | <b>20%</b>   | <b>9%</b>                           |
| <b>Strongly Oppose</b>   | <b>13%</b>              | <b>8%</b>  | <b>17%</b>   | <b>6%</b>                           |
| <b>Not sure/Can't say</b>  | <b>17%</b>              | <b>15%</b>   | <b>14%</b>   | <b>38%</b>                          |