

As unfavourable views of China rise, Canadians are split over wisdom of Meng arrest

Preference for trade with China has dropped by nearly half since 2015

December 11, 2019 – News that China is now moving to prosecute two Canadian citizens who have been imprisoned without charge for a year represents the latest development in ongoing diplomatic strife between the two countries.

The diplomatic crisis, which began with the arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou and subsequent detentions of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor under unclear pretences, has complicated the trade and investment relationship between the two nations.

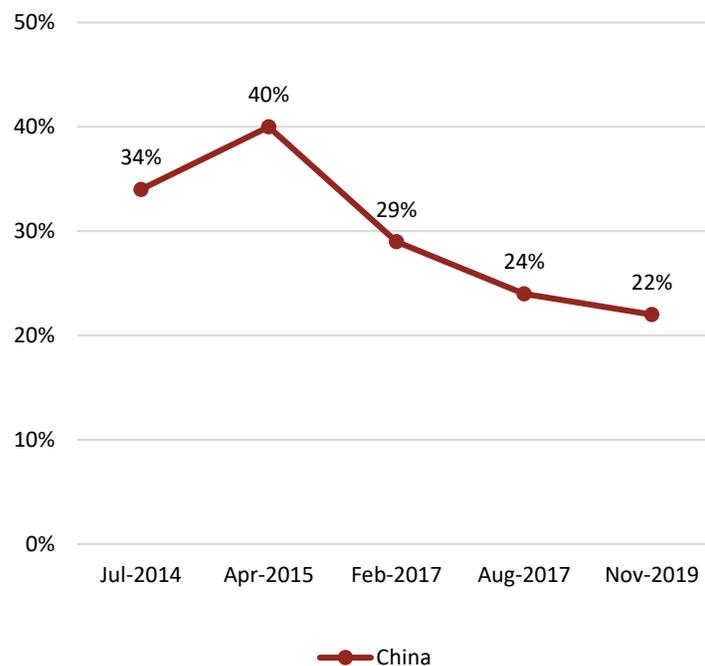
While the Trudeau government considers its options to resolve simmering tensions, Canadians are growing more frustrated with China.

The latest public opinion study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute shows unfavourable views of the country rising considerably over the past year from 51 per cent in 2018 to 66 per cent today.

Further, the data reveal an increasing number of Canadians saying human rights should be more important in Canada's dealings with China (70% say this) than trade opportunities.

As to the ongoing state of affairs, half of Canadians say that in retrospect, this country should not have arrested Meng in the first place. The same number also say the federal government should forego court proceedings and intervene directly to end the extradition process, in order to repair the strained relationship with China.

As we look to the future, with which of the following countries or regions do you think Canada should try to develop closer trade ties?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 16 – 20, 2019 among a representative randomized sample of 1,499 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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More Key Findings:

- Seven-in-ten (69%) say that Canada should not allow Huawei to be involved with the production of future 5G mobile networks in this country due to security concerns
- Just over half of Canadians (54%) say they expect the relationship between Canada and China to be repaired soon and get back to firmer ground
- Nine-in-ten Canadians (90%) say that China cannot be trusted on the rule of law and upholding human rights

About ARI

*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.*

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Part One: Canada and China's complicated relationship

Negative perceptions hamper trade enthusiasm?

The last year has been a rocky one for the Sino-Canadian relationship.

Canadian police arrested Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou last December at Vancouver International airport at the request of the United States, which is seeking to extradite Meng on charges that she violated U.S. sanctions laws.

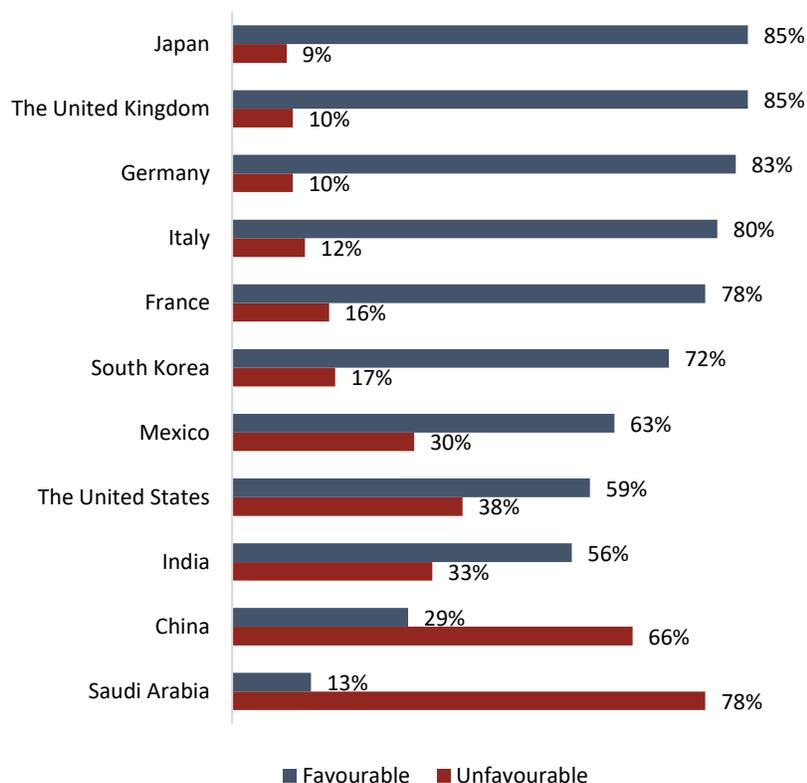
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In what is widely seen as [retaliation](#), China detained two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor on allegations related to national security, which have [yet to be defined](#) in full. China also [banned the import](#) of Canadian canola oil, and [blocked meat imports](#) from June to November this year.

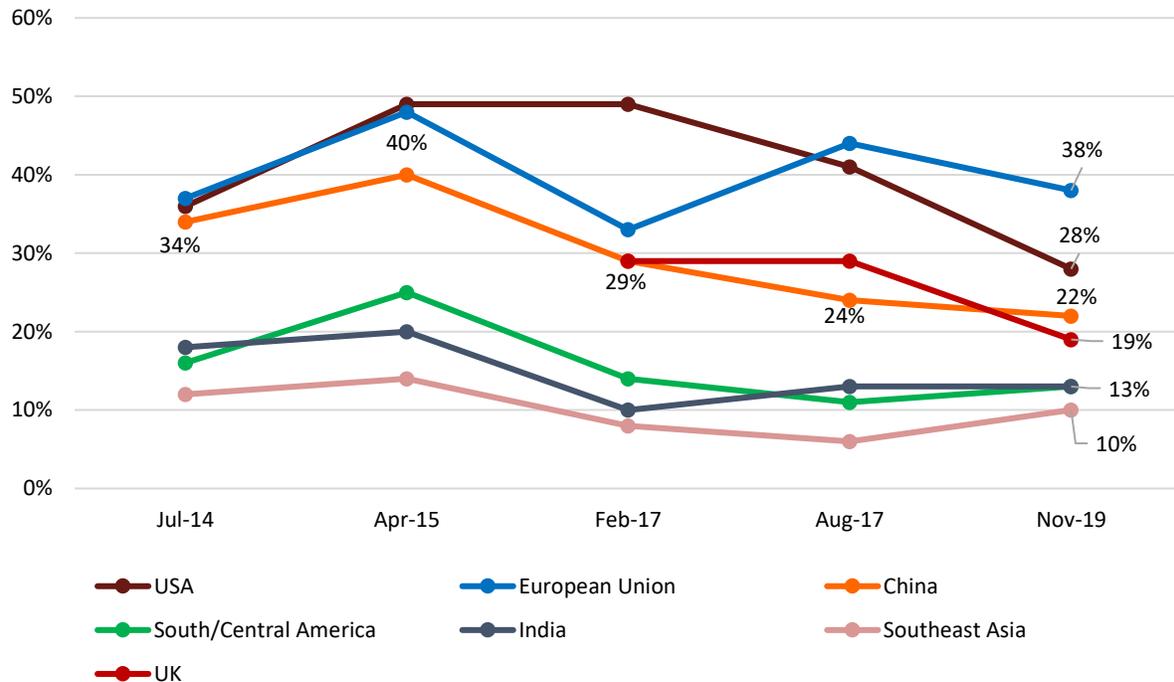
Against this backdrop, views of China are largely unfavourable in Canada. In fact, two-thirds of Canadians (66%) say they have an unfavourable view of the nation that is Canada's [second largest](#) trading partner. Among a list of some of Canada's major trading partners, China emerges as the second most unfavoured after Saudi Arabia.

Overall, would you say you have a favourable or unfavourable view of each of the following countries?



This is notable, in particular because of the changes in public opinion over the last 13 months. The percentage of Canadians holding an unfavourable view of China has risen significantly, from half (51%) in 2018 to fully two-thirds (66%) in 2019. Additionally, the number who identify China as a nation with whom we should be building closer trade ties has halved over the last four years. Today, one-in-five (22%) say Canada should focus its trade development efforts on the economic giant, down from 40 per cent who held this view in 2015:

As we look to the future, with which of the following countries or regions do you think Canada should try to develop closer trade ties?



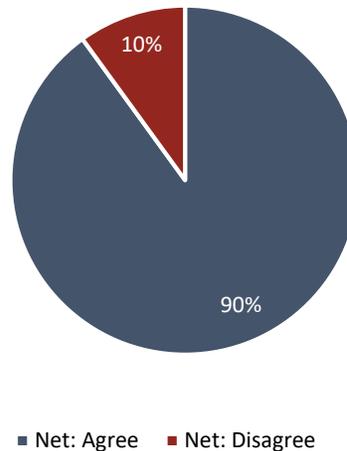
Canada’s new Foreign Affairs Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne has expressed support for [diversifying trade in Asia](#), in part by taking advantage of existing free trade agreements with other countries in the region. While one such agreement, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), provides new access to key Asian markets such as Japan, Vietnam and Singapore, just ten per cent of Canadians say they would like to see closer trade ties with Southeast Asia.

Human rights trumps trade for most

Over the past year, China has come under fire for its human rights record, including [censorship of the country’s #MeToo movement](#), [supporting](#) police violence against pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong and acts of violence against its [minority Uighur Muslim population](#) in Xinjiang.

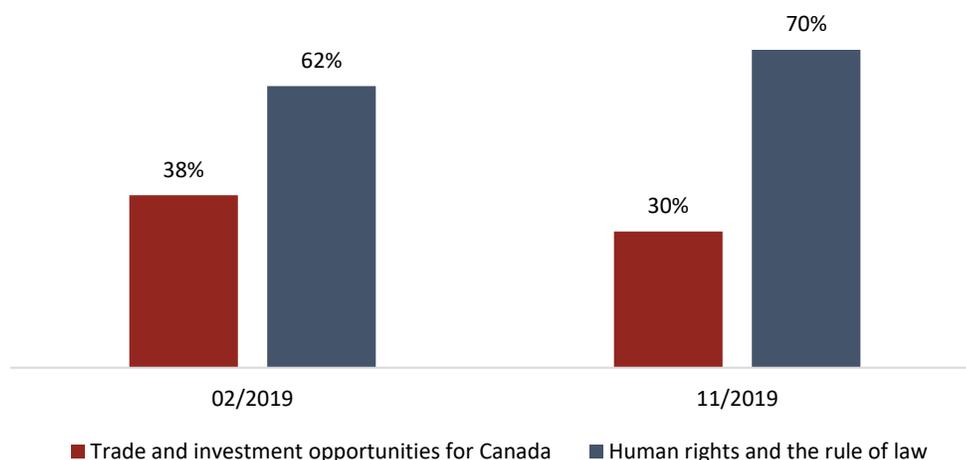
Likely attuned to this, Canadians voice near unanimous agreement (90%) with the statement “China can’t be trusted on human rights or the rule of law”:

Agree/Disagree: "China can't be trusted on human rights or the rule of law"



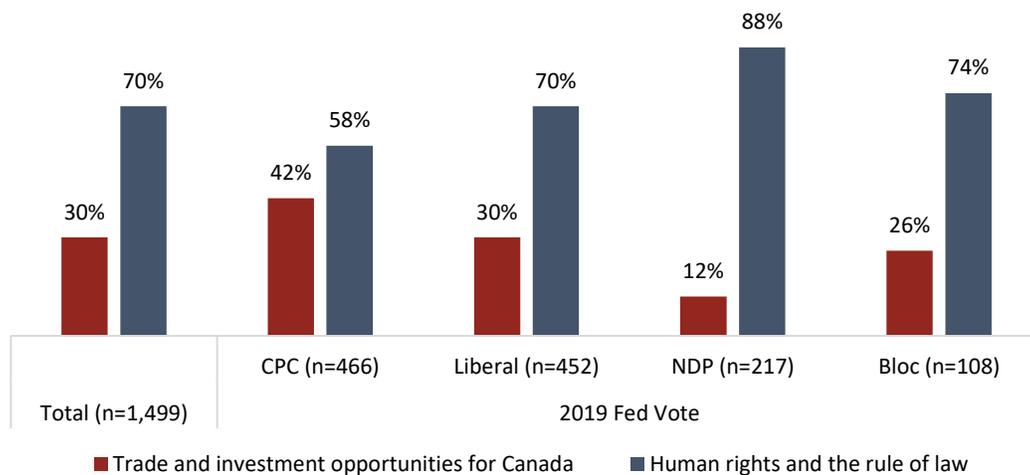
But when asked whether human rights or trade opportunities should take greater precedence in Canada's approach to its relationship with China, seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) say they are inclined to place greater emphasis on the former, while a significant number (30%) choose trade. Still, Canadian preference for the protection of human rights in China over Canada's trade opportunities has grown over the course of the last year:

Thinking about Canada's overall relationship with China, what should be more important to Canada:



Opinion in this country, however, is not unanimous. While more than half of each party's supporters say Canada should emphasize human rights and the rule of law over economic opportunity, supporters of the Conservative Party are more than three times as likely as NDP supporters to say that they prioritize trade:

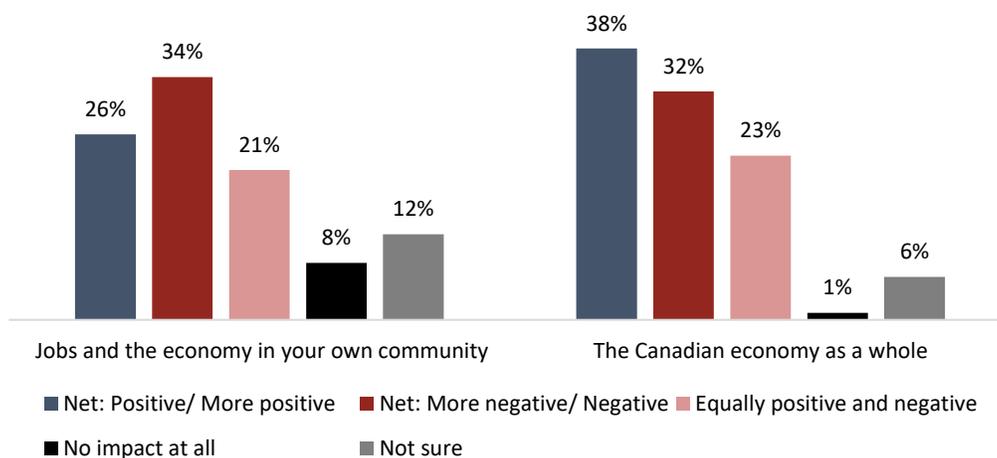
Thinking about Canada’s overall relationship with China, what should be more important to Canada:



Plurality see trade with China good for national economy, but bad for own communities

Despite significant concern over China’s human rights record, four-in-ten Canadians still say the Canada-China trade relationship has a positive impact on the Canadian economy. Trade between the two nations accounted for [approximately \\$38 billion](#) in 2018. Nonetheless, the population is divided about the impact that Chinese trade has on both the national economy and that of their own communities:

Overall, what kind of impact would you say the Canada – China trade relationship has on: (All respondents, n=1,499)



Given the recent [Chinese sanctions](#) on Canada’s beef and canola farmers this year, it is perhaps understandable that the highest levels of negative sentiment are generated in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the primary suppliers of those goods:

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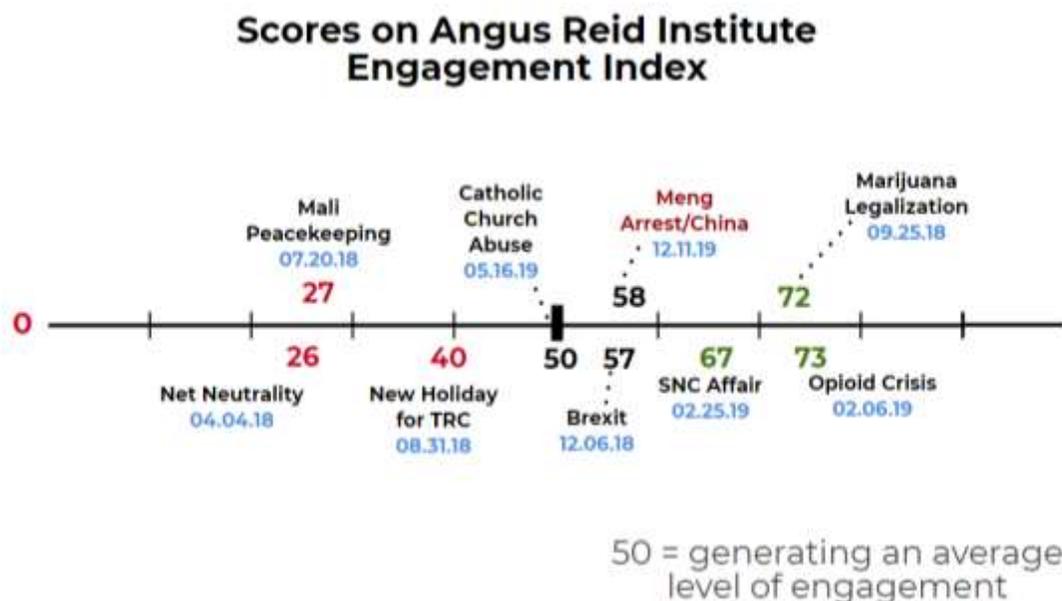
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Overall, what kind of impact would you say the Canada – China trade relationship has on jobs and the economy in your own community?								
*unweighted sample sizes	Total (1,499)	Region						
		BC (190)	AB (146)	SK (104)	MB (103)	ON (450)	QC (400)	ATL (106)
Positive/ More positive	26%	29%	23%	25%	27%	22%	30%	32%
More negative/ Negative	34%	30%	42%	42%	27%	35%	34%	27%
Equally positive and negative	21%	26%	19%	18%	21%	20%	20%	18%
No impact	8%	6%	4%	9%	10%	10%	6%	12%
Not sure	12%	10%	13%	6%	15%	13%	11%	11%

Part Two: The Meng situation

Vast majority following news on Meng arrest

A majority of Canadians have been paying attention to the saga involving the arrest of Meng Wanzhou. One-quarter (27%) say that they have been following closely, while another 41 per cent have been seeing coverage and having some conversations about the events. The overall level of awareness equates to a score of 58 on the ARI Engagement Index, which is above average but below some of the most engaging stories of the year:

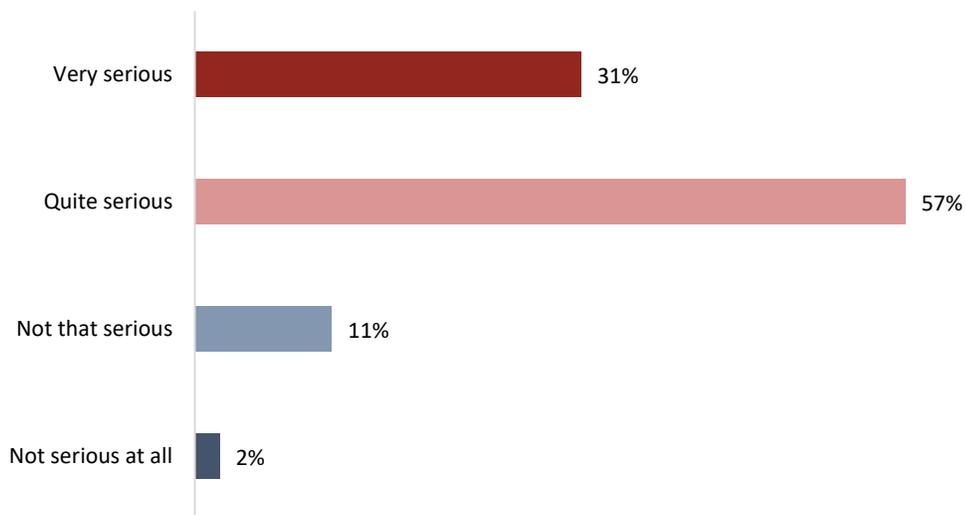


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Given the relatively high amount of attention they are paying to this issue, it is perhaps unsurprising that Canadians overwhelmingly view the situation as a serious one. Nine-in-ten respondents (88%) say tensions between Canada and China are either “very serious” or “quite serious,” as seen in the graph that follows:

Based on whatever you’ve seen or heard about this current tension between Canada and China, would you describe this situation as:



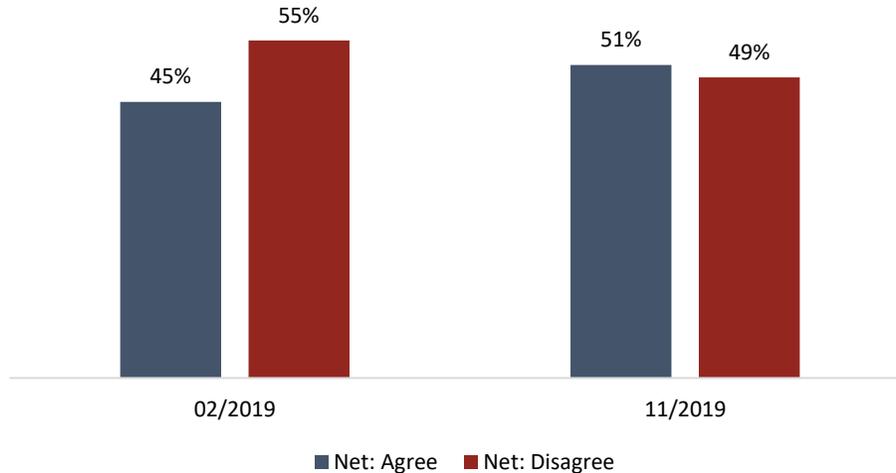
Conflicted opinion on past and future handling of Meng case

After seeing the strain it has put on the relationship between their country and China, Canadians are split on whether arresting Meng was indeed the correct decision. Equal numbers say that Canada should have resisted the request from the United States to arrest Meng (51%) or that they made the right decision (49%). Responses have changed slightly since the beginning of the year:

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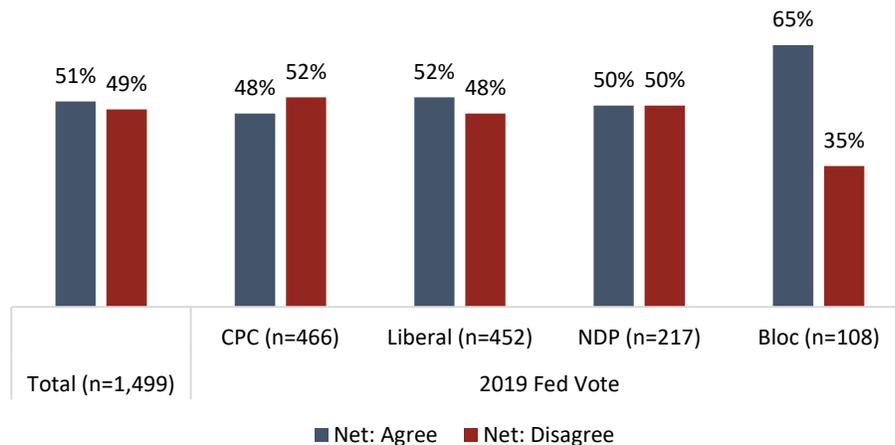
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Agree/Disagree: "Canada should have resisted the US request and not arrested Meng in the first place"



Notably, political affiliation plays little role in Canadian opinion on the handling of the Meng case. Supporters of all of the major federal parties are divided, while two-thirds of Bloc supporters say that Canada should have reacted differently to Meng’s arrival:

Agree/Disagree: "Canada should have resisted the US request and not arrested Meng in the first place"



China’s new ambassador to Canada recently reiterated that releasing Meng would help relations between the two countries “return to normal”. Observers have speculated that China will not release the two Canadians being held until Meng’s hearing is complete.

With this in mind, respondents were asked how the federal government should handle the situation going forward. Slightly more than half (53%) say the Trudeau government should continue its current approach – leaving resolution of the situation to the courts – regardless of the consequences to Canada-China

relations. The other half (47%) say they would prefer to have the government step in and try to end this saga.

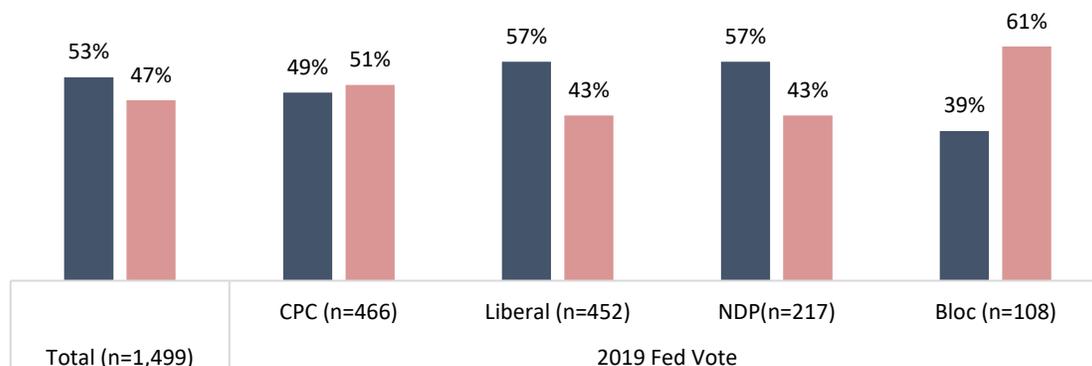
The justice minister, for example, has the capacity to [end the extradition process](#) under Canada's Extradition Act. But in June, then-Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland said that such a move would set a [dangerous precedent](#) with respect to Canada honouring its extradition treaty with the United States:

What do you think the Canadian government's overall approach should be regarding the Meng situation? (All respondents, n=1,499)



Most Liberal voters appear satisfied with the current approach, and they are joined by the same number of NDP supporters:

What do you think the Canadian government's overall approach should be regarding the Meng situation?



- Continue to treat it as a legal matter and leave it with the courts to decide, no matter the consequences to Canada-China relations
- Apply political pressure to get Meng out of the Canadian system somehow, in hopes of resolving these tensions with China

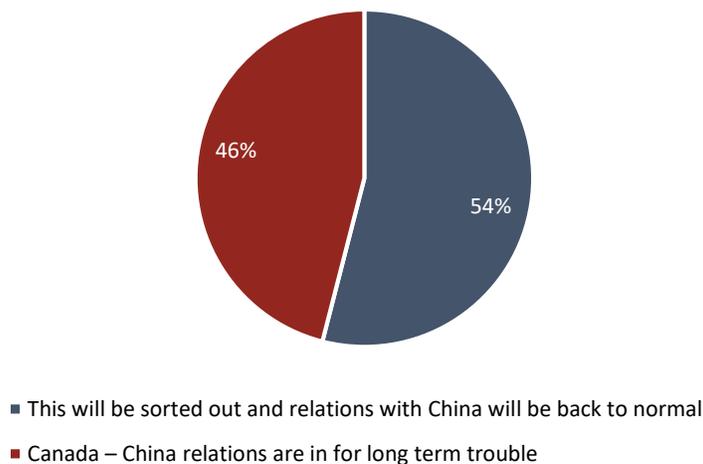
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Canadians divided over whether the relationship can be fixed

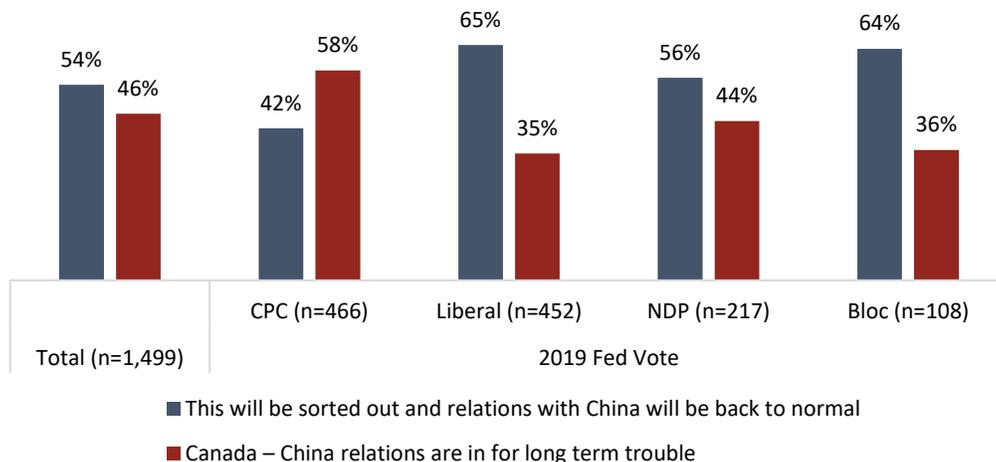
The future of Canada’s relationship with China remains uncertain. As China’s new ambassador to Canada expresses hope that Trudeau’s new cabinet will help repair Canada-Chinese relations, Foreign Affairs Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne is re-evaluating the relationship and seeking a new framework “where the interests of Canada stand out”. Canadians themselves are near equally divided on what the future holds:

Looking ahead to the future, what do you expect to happen with the Canada – China relationship? (All respondents, n=1,499)



Conservative supporters are more likely to fear long term troubles for Canada-China relations, perhaps reflective of the larger disapproval voiced by the Conservative caucus, which has urged the Liberal government to take a tougher stance against China, including examining retaliatory tariffs.

Looking ahead to the future, what do you expect to happen with the Canada – China relationship? (All respondents, n=1,499)



Part Three: The question of Chinese investment and Huawei

As Canada navigates the diplomatic crisis surrounding Meng’s arrest, it is also trying to balance opposing views on whether to ban Chinese telecom giant Huawei from supplying equipment for the country’s 5G cellular networks.

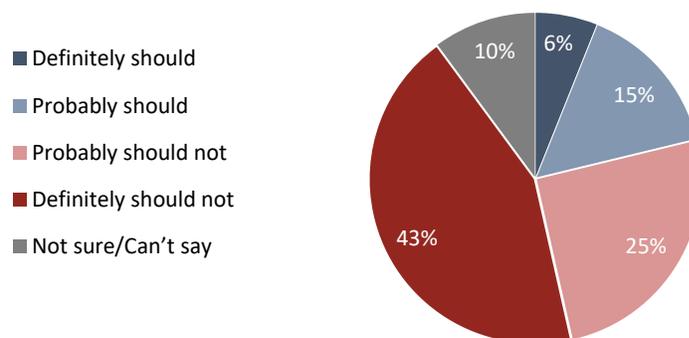
5G, or fifth-generation cellular wireless, promises faster mobile internet with wider coverage and more stable connections. Intelligence and cybersecurity officials in the United States and Australia have warned that allowing Huawei to build cellular networks would pose a security threat to Canada and jeopardize its participation in the decades-long intelligence-sharing arrangement, the Five Eyes.

Earlier this year, the Trudeau government postponed the decision until after the October federal election.

Most say Huawei shouldn’t be part of 5G infrastructure

With respect to Huawei’s involvement in building Canada’s future 5G mobile networks, seven-in-ten Canadians overall (69%) say the federal government should prohibit Huawei from supplying 5G technology to the country:

Do you think the federal government should or should not allow Chinese telecom company Huawei to be involved in building Canada’s 5G mobile networks?
(All respondents, n=1,499)

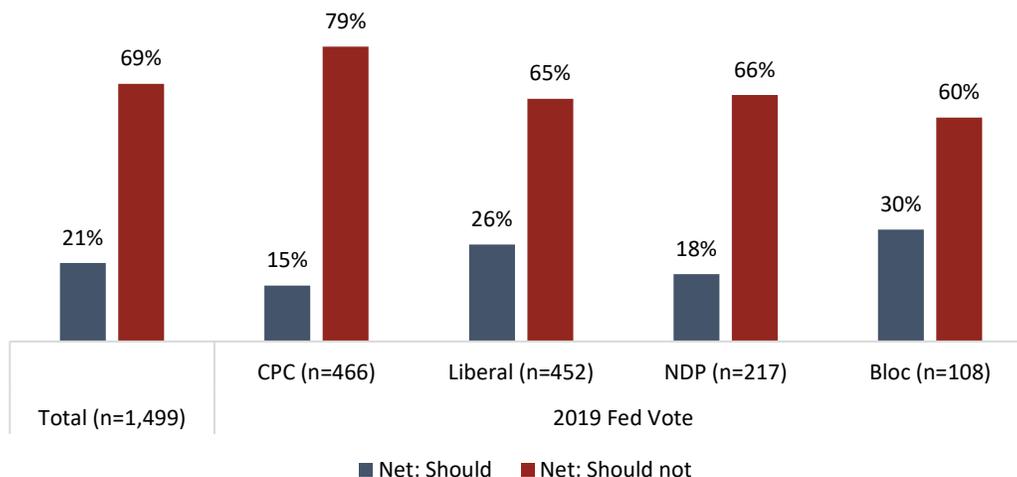


Canadians are relatively united in this view, with two-thirds of supporters of each major federal party saying that Canada should not allow Huawei to be involved in 5G network production:

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Do you think the federal government should or should not allow Chinese telecom company Huawei to be involved in building Canada's 5G mobile networks?

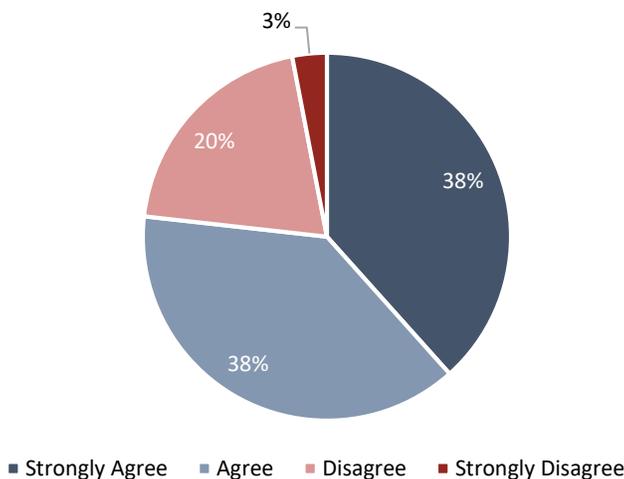


Three-quarters support restrictions on Chinese investment in “sensitive industries”

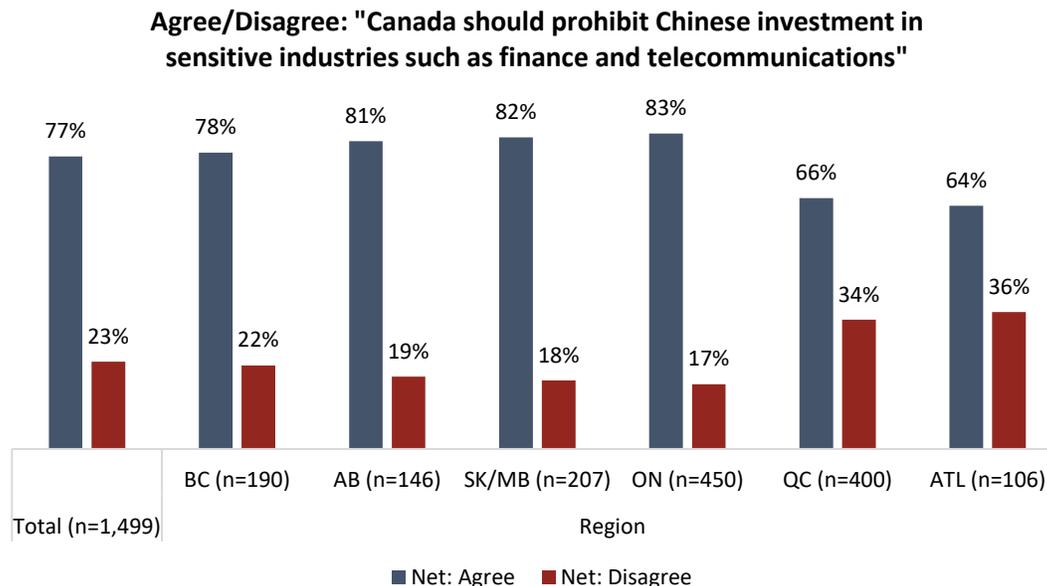
While Huawei’s potential 5G technology has dominated news coverage, it is worth noting that the company is just one of many Chinese companies seeking to further expand into foreign markets. Over the last few years, there has been a [global backlash against Chinese investment](#), with a number of countries blocking high-profile deals on account of national security concerns.

Asked whether Canada should prohibit Chinese investment in sensitive industries in general, three-quarters of Canadians (77%) express support for such measures:

Agree/Disagree: "Canada should prohibit Chinese investment in sensitive industries such as finance and telecommunications"



Although a majority in each province support a ban against Chinese investment in sectors such as telecommunications and finance, the gap is narrower in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, where one-third of residents think Canada should not enact such measures:



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Note on Methodology: The ARI Engagement Index

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 Engagement 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 engagement 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 engagement and scores lower than 50 representing below-average engagement.

On this particular topic of Canada-China relations, roughly three-in-ten (27%) say they are "following it in the news and discussing it with friends and family." Another 41 per cent are "seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation." One-in-four (24%) are "just scanning the headlines," and just eight per cent haven't seen or heard anything about this story.

Responses on this topic equate to a score of 58 on the ARI Engagement Index, which is the fourth-highest score recorded so far in 2019.

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As we look to the future, with which of the following countries or regions do you think Canada should try to develop closer trade ties? (Select up to two)					
	July 2014	April 2015	February 2017	August 2017	November 2019
The European Union	37%	48%	33%	44%	38%
The United States	36%	49%	49%	41%	28%*
China	34%	40%	29%	24%	22%
The United Kingdom (added Feb. 2017)	-	-	29%	29%	19%
South and Central America	16%	25%	14%	11%	13%
India	18%	20%	10%	13%	13%
Southeast Asia	12%	14%	8%	6%	10%
Other (specify)	5%	3%	4%	4%	4%

* Wording change in 2019 to the “The United States” from “Continue to focus on the US” in previous questionnaires.

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