

Better with Biden? President-elect restores hope among Canadians for an improved relationship with U.S.

Nearly one-in-five Canadians say a second Trump term would have been better

November 18, 2020 – In 2016, Canadians fretted about the implications of a Trump presidency on U.S.-Canada relations. Four years later, the prospect of Joe Biden in the White House is restoring hope.

Indeed, three-in-five Canadians (61%) say a change in administration will have a positive effect on the rapport and connectivity of these two long-time allies and trading partners.

This represents five times the number of people who said the same about the incoming Trump administration after his electoral victory.

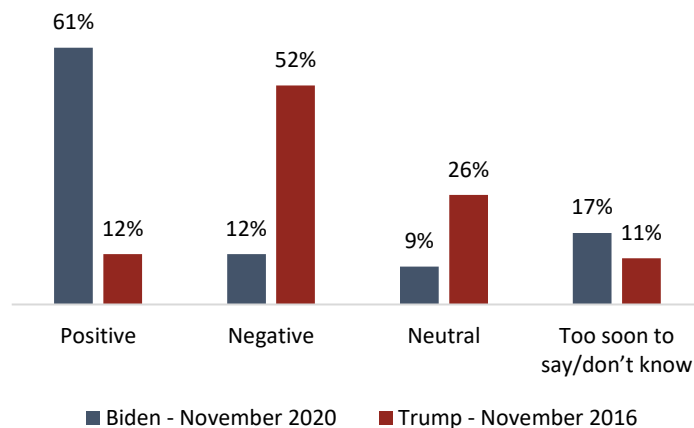
The last four years have had an incredibly damaging impact on Canadian views of the United States overall. Today, just one-third (35%) say they view the U.S. as a valuable friend and ally, compared to 53 per cent in 2016. Canadians are also now half as likely to say that America is a positive player in international affairs (17% vs 35% in 2016).

And while many are hopeful the Biden administration will make progress in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic - half (50%) say this – a significant segment (39%) has little faith. A similar number are equally unsure about Biden's ability to bring the country back together. Nearly half (46%) say America is so divided, it will never fully recover or reunify in a post-Trump era.

More Key Findings:

- Few would like to see the shared border between the two nations opened anytime soon. Indeed, seven-in-ten (68%) say it should be closed until at least March.
- Canadians are overwhelmingly of the opinion that the U.S. election was fair and should not be contested. Three-quarters (75%) say this, though 41 per cent of past Conservative voters disagree.

**What kind of impact, if any, do you believe a Joe Biden presidency will have for the US – Canadian relationship?
Compared to Trump in 2016**



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 12 - 16, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 1,578 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, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

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: Expectations for Biden and impact of Trump

Hope for a reset with a Biden presidency

The past four years have been a challenge for Canadian government officials. Among the issues causing busy days and sleepless nights: [contentious](#) NAFTA renegotiations, [tariffs](#) on Canadians products based on classifying Canada as a national security threat, President Trump calling Prime Minister Trudeau “[very dishonest and weak](#)”, and myriad issues involving Americans seeking asylum at the Canadian border due to the administration’s policies and threats, are notable among them.

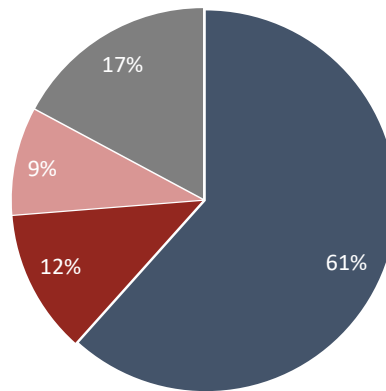
While Canadian officials have been careful for nearly four years to avoid drawing the ire of the President, millions of Canadians no doubt exhaled when Prime Minister Trudeau was the first international leader to call and congratulate President-Elect Joe Biden on his victory.

If the Prime Minister and his team are indeed looking forward to working with the new administration, it reflects the broad opinions of the population. Three-in-five Canadians say having Joe Biden at the helm will be positive for the relationship between Canada and its most important ally; just 12 per cent feel the opposite:

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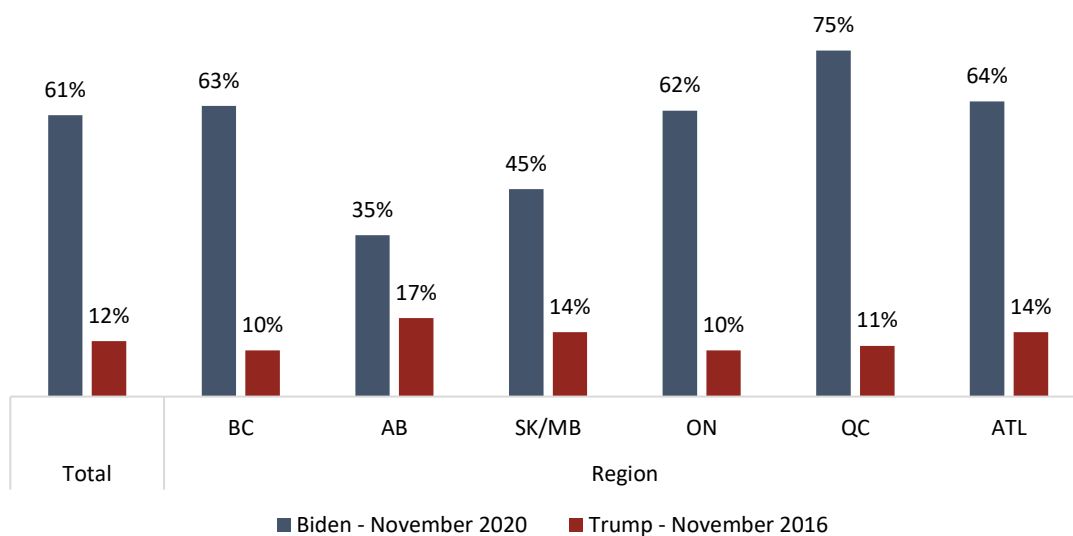


■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Too soon to say/don't know

Canadians five times more optimistic than in 2016

The contrast in public opinion at the beginning of Biden's term compared to Trump's is glaring. When the outgoing president won the 2016 election just 12 per cent of Canadians felt it was going to be a positive change for Canada. Even in Alberta, where more people than in any other province or territory were likely to have supported Trump throughout his time in office, residents are twice as likely to feel Biden will be a positive force for Canada-U.S. relations than they were about the outgoing president four years ago:

Percentage who feel/felt each would have a positive impact on the Canada/US relationship



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Those who voted for the Conservative Party in the 2019 federal election are either divided or more inclined to wait and see on this question. Those who supported every other major political party feel overwhelmingly optimistic about the change:

What kind of impact, if any, do you believe a Joe Biden presidency will have for the US – Canadian relationship?					
	Total (n=1,578)	2019 Federal Vote			
		CPC (n=477)	Liberal (n=452)	NDP (n=219)	Bloc (n=103)
Positive	61%	32%	88%	77%	74%
Negative	12%	32%	0%	1%	3%
Neutral	9%	13%	6%	11%	3%
Too soon to say/don't know	17%	24%	6%	11%	19%

Opinions of U.S. have worsened significantly over past four years

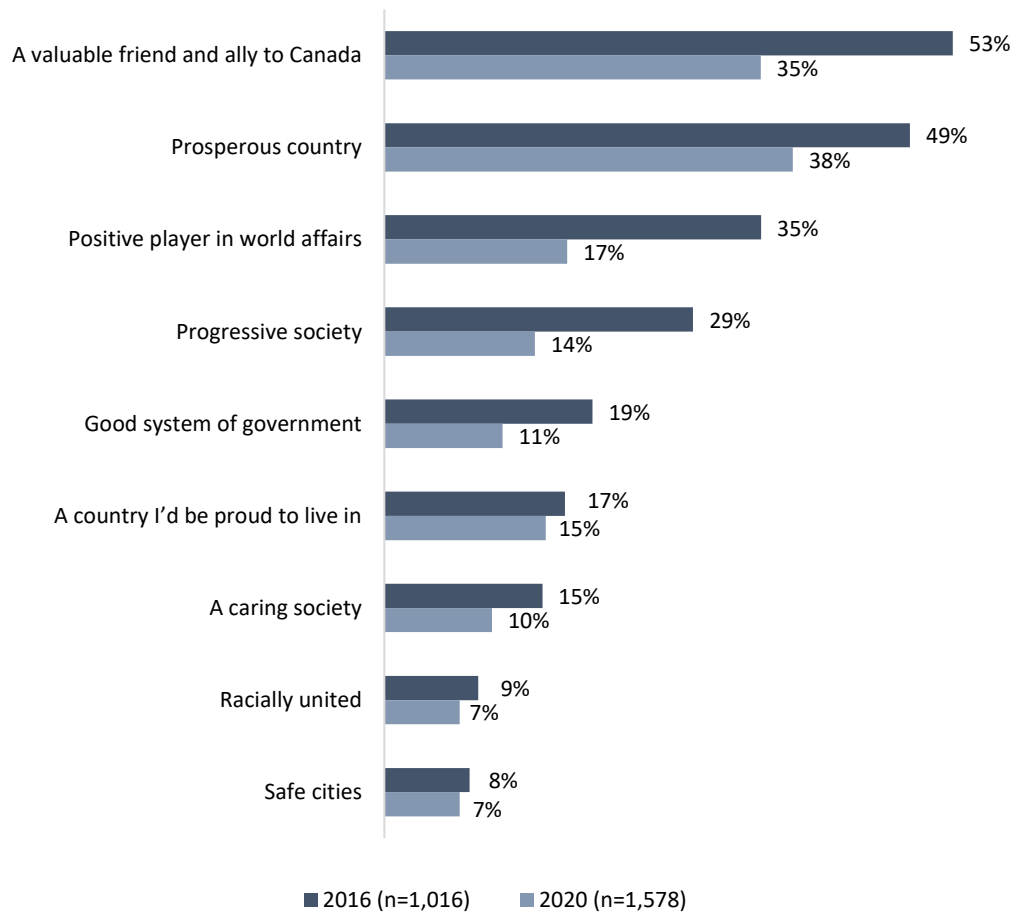
With a deeply unpopular leader as the face of the nation, it is perhaps unsurprising that Canadians have grown more critical of the United States. Comparing data against responses to the same questions asked in 2016, views of American society have deteriorated on a number of fronts, including:

- An 18-point drop in the percentage of Canadians who see the United States as a valuable friend and ally, from 53 per cent in 2016 to 35 per cent in 2020
- A halving of the number of Canadians that see the U.S. as a positive player in world affairs, from 35 per cent to 17 per cent
- A halving of the number of Canadians that see the U.S. as being a progressive society (29% to 14%) and having a good system of government (19% to 11%) over the four year period.

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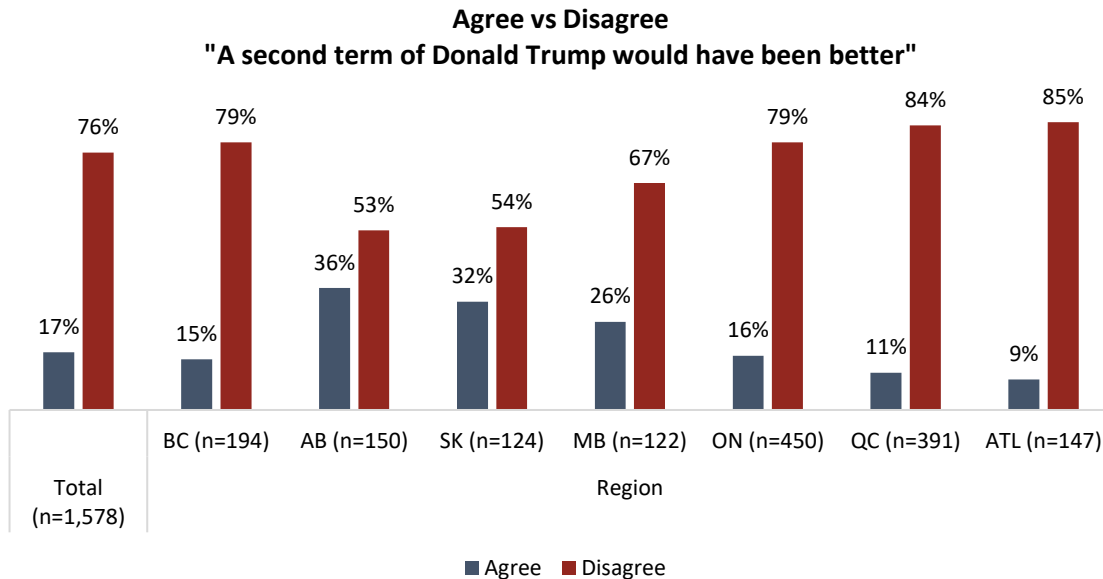
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Percentage who think these phrases describe the United States and American society (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale)



One-in-five wanted a two term Trump

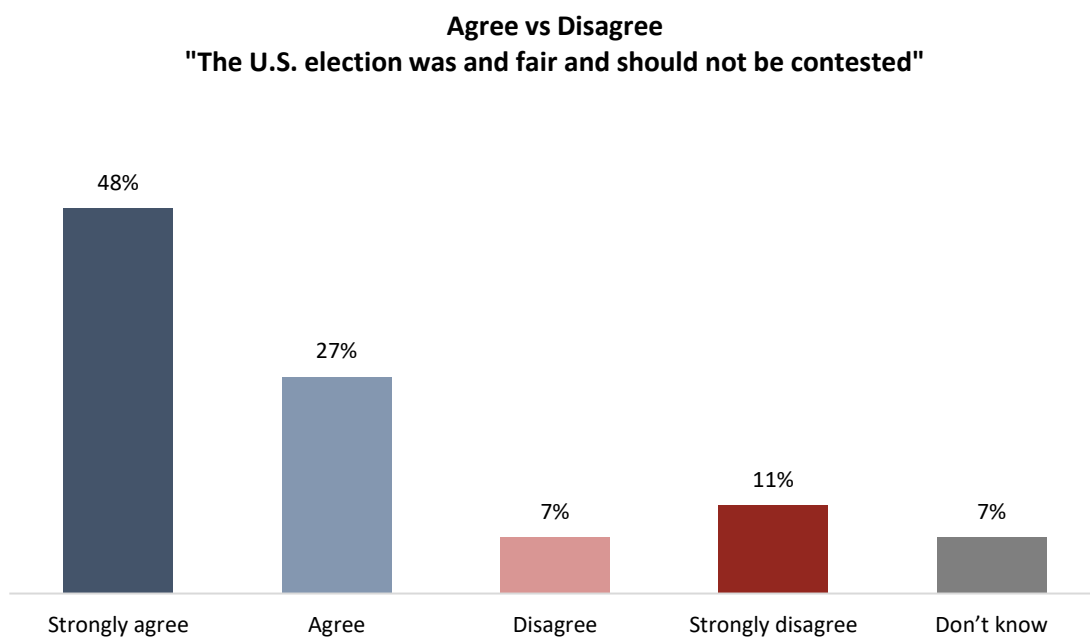
Nonetheless, President Trump maintains the support of just under one-in-five Canadians. This 17 per cent say they would have preferred to have him stay in power for another four years. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba residents are most likely to hold these views, though a majority in each province still disagree:



Part Two: Views of the US election

Was it fair?

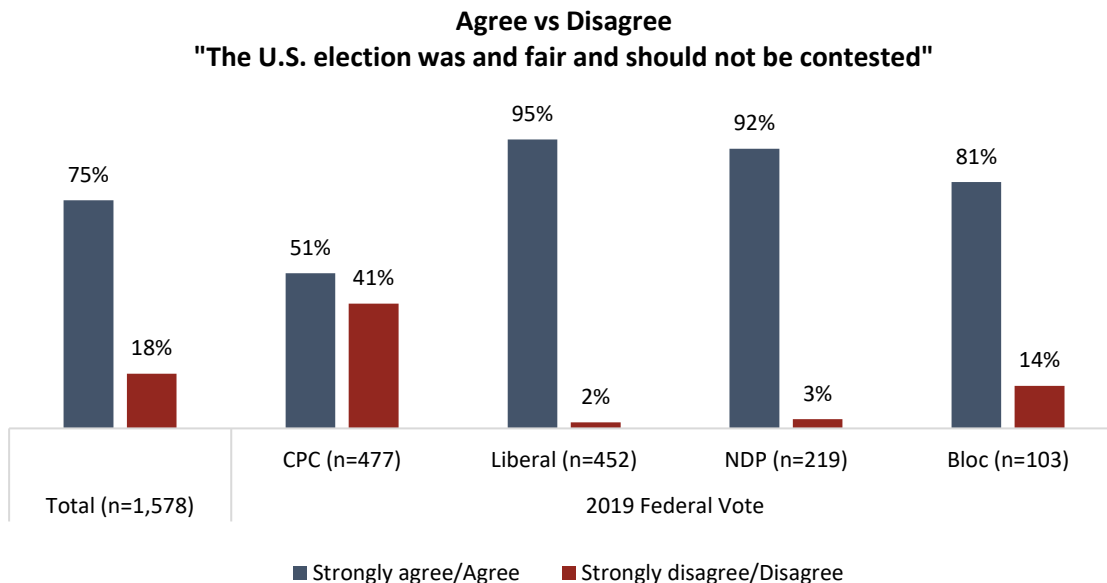
Two weeks have passed since election night and President Trump continues to resist concession. He and his legal team have continued to levy allegations of voter fraud in states Trump lost, though nearly every case brought thus far has been thrown out for insufficient evidence. For their part, Canadians largely feel both the process and results were fair and should not be contested.



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A majority in every region of the country holds this view, though it does drop to just 56 per cent in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. This is likely owing to the propensity of residents to have voted for the Conservative Party in 2019. This group in particular is most skeptical of the results, with 41 per cent saying the election was unfair:



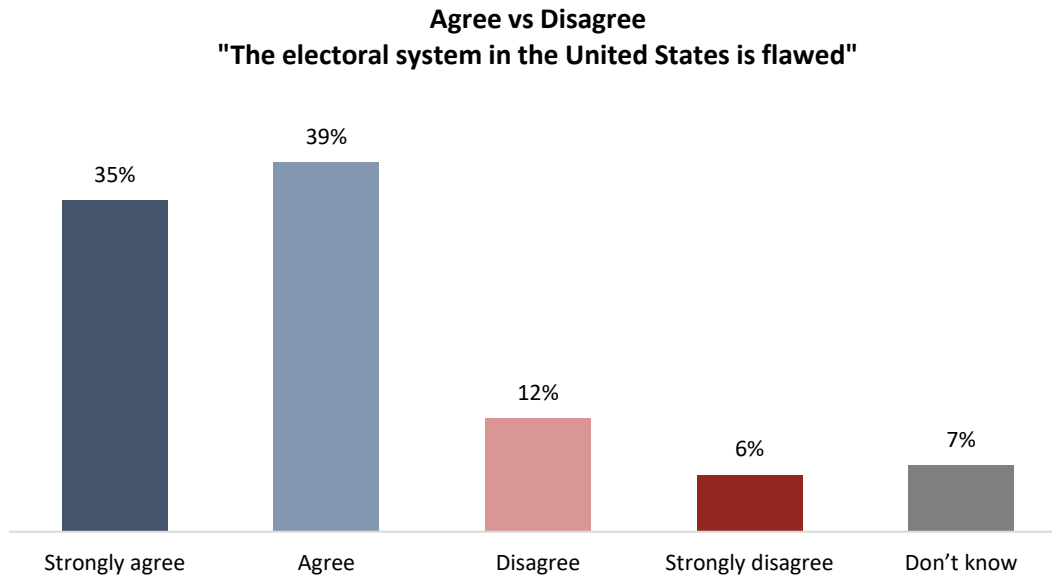
Canadians critical of electoral college

While they're overwhelmingly likely to say that the election result should not be challenged, many Canadians take issue with the electoral system used to decide it. The electoral college is comprised of 538 electors across the country who cast official state votes for the president. Many have criticized the system in recent years, as it is possible to win the popular vote nationally but lose the electoral college. Proponents say, however, that it prevents the most populous states like New York and California from deciding the outcome.

Three-quarters of Canadians feel that the system is flawed, and this opinion is held at a majority level across all regional and party lines ([see detailed tables](#)).

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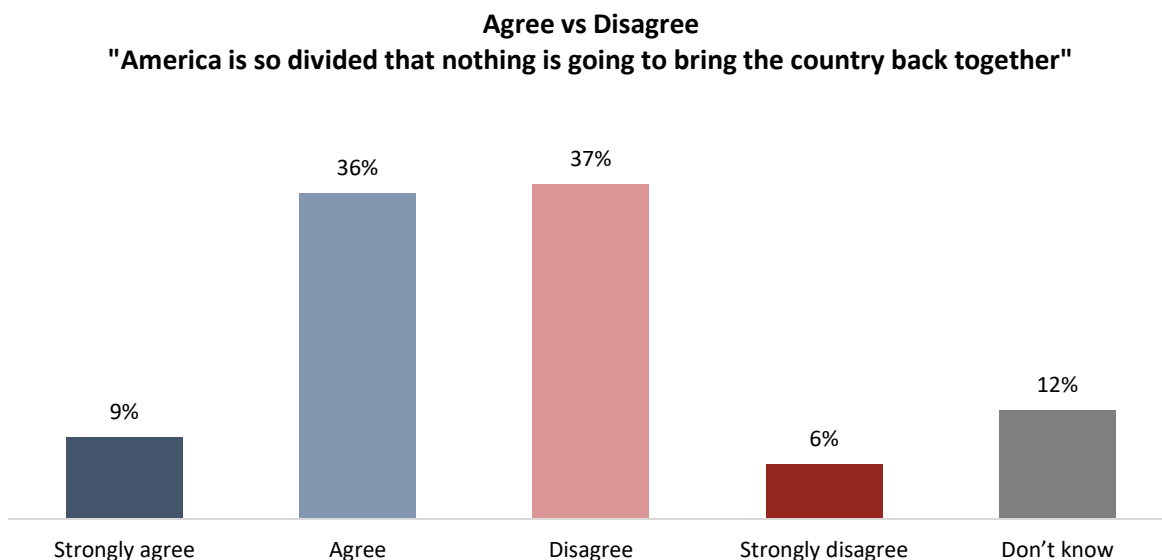


Part Three: What next?

Canadians unsure Biden can unify the country

Half of voters supported Joe Biden (51%), while 47 per cent supported Donald Trump. Each candidate received more than 70 million votes from Americans who are in some ways more divided than ever. Hate crimes are at a 10-year high and hate-motivated killings in 2019 reached the highest level since recording began in the 1990s.

While Joe Biden has presented himself as a president who will seek to unify the country, Canadians are unsure that he will be able to accomplish this task. Nearly half (46%) feel the country is too divided and nothing is going to bring it back together, while 42 per cent disagree and hope for unity:

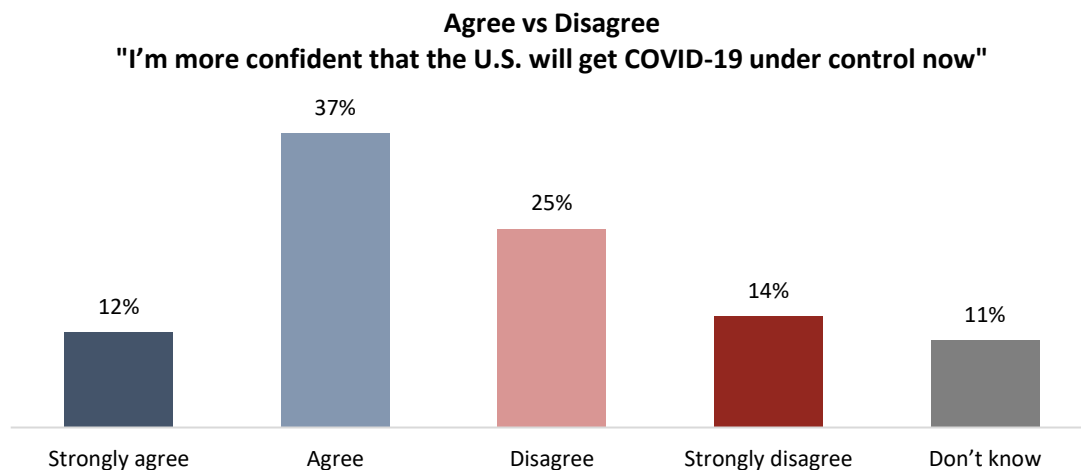


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Half are more confident that COVID-19 can be controlled now in U.S.

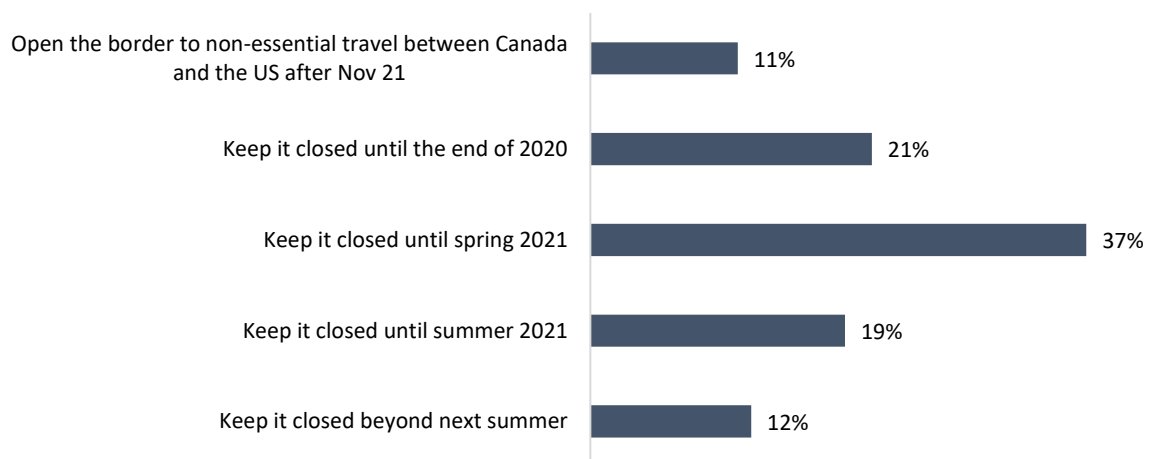
The legacy of the Trump administration will be filled with references to impeachment, fake news and America First policies. But likely the biggest legacy will be one of failure around his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States, with just four per cent of the world's population, is home to roughly 19 per cent of deaths [related to the virus](#). Canadians are encouraged, though still skeptical that COVID-19 will be brought under control south of the border. Half (50%) say they are more confident now that it will be managed, while 39 per cent disagree:



Few have any interest in opening the border soon

While both nations struggle to get the COVID-19 pandemic under control, there is very little desire among those north of the 49th parallel to open up the border any time soon. The two countries have been extending the border closure incrementally, but seven-in-ten Canadians would prefer to see it remain closed to discretionary travel until at least March of next year:

The Canada-US border closure is currently set to expire on November 21. After November 21, what should the governments of Canada and the U.S. do?*



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**See questionnaire for full question text*

Some are more anxious than others to open up non-essential travel between Canada and the United States. One-in-five Albertans would open the border next week. On the other end of the spectrum, Atlantic Canadians, in a four-province bubble of their own, are most likely to say the border should be closed until at least next summer:

The Canada-US border closure is currently set to expire on November 21. After November 21, what should the governments of Canada and the U.S. do?							
	Total (n=1,578)	Region					
		BC (n=194)	AB (n=150)	SK/MB (n=246)	ON (n=450)	QC (n=391)	ATL (n=147)
Open the border to non-essential travel between Canada and the US after Nov 21	11%	10%	21%	13%	9%	11%	4%
Keep it closed until the end of 2020	21%	19%	21%	24%	18%	28%	12%
Keep it closed until spring 2021	37%	38%	29%	37%	39%	38%	38%
Keep it closed until summer 2021	19%	19%	19%	15%	23%	13%	27%
Keep it closed beyond next summer	12%	14%	9%	10%	12%	11%	20%

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

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