

Freedom of Speech: Canadians support Charlie Hebdo's choice to publish images of Prophet Muhammad

Free speech trumps religious sensitivities, but Canadians split on whether national media should have republished

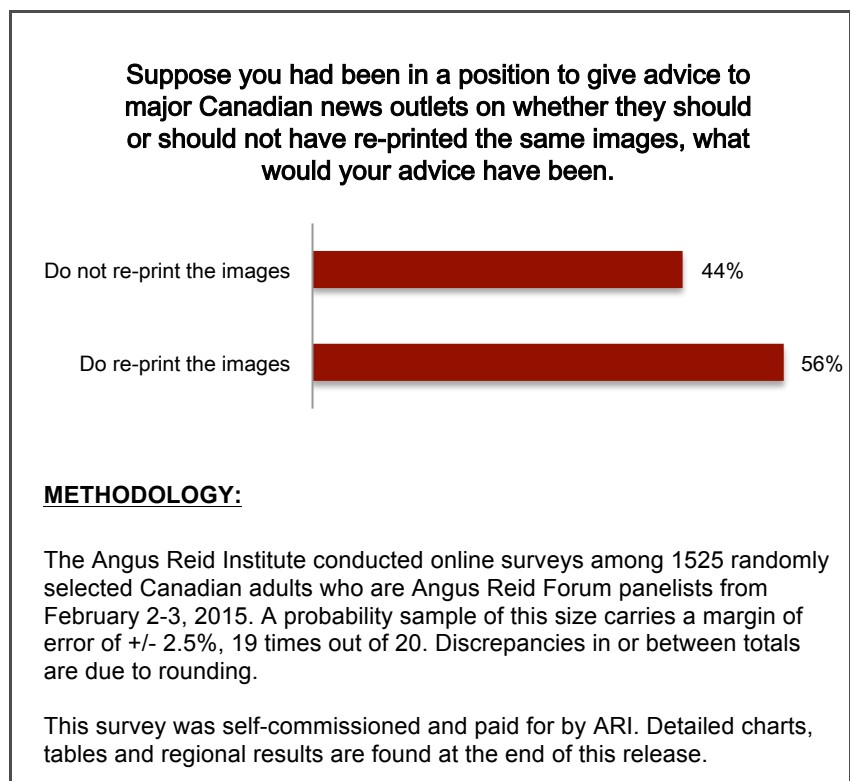
Feb 23, 2015 – The majority of Canadians support the decision by French satire magazine Charlie Hebdo to publish cartoons lampooning Muhammad, but are split on whether Canadian media outlets should or should not have made the same decision.

The latest survey from the Angus Reid Institute of more than 1,500 Canadian adults shows that nationally, seven-in-ten said it was right for Charlie Hebdo to publish cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad.

Publishing the cartoons, which went against Muslim strictures banning images of their prophet, led to the January 7, 2015 attack on the Paris office of the magazine that left 11 people dead. There is also speculation the decision to publish also inspired the February 13th attack on a Copenhagen café that killed two more.

Key Findings:

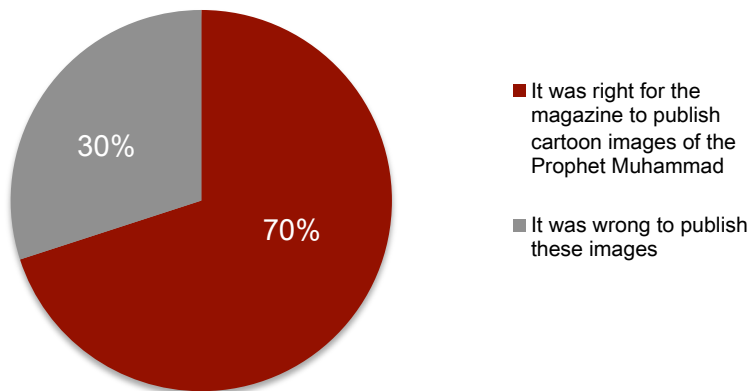
- While 70 per cent agreed with the magazine's decision to publish, three-in-ten said it was the wrong thing to do
- Older men and those following news of the attacks were more likely to support the decision
- Canadians say freedom of speech is more important than respect for religious feelings by a ratio of more than 5:1
- But they are also split (56%-44%) on whether they'd advise Canadian media outlets to republish the images



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Thinking about Charlie Hebdo magazine, which of the following is closest to your view?



Did Charlie Hebdo make the right decision?

As already noted, the majority (70%) of Canadians stand behind Charlie Hebdo magazine's decision to publish the cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad. In Quebec, support for the magazine's rises to nearly four out of five (78%), followed by Alberta (73%) and British Columbia (69%). Atlantic Canada residents were the least supportive (59%) although it is still the majority view.

Men were more inclined than women (75% versus 65%) to believe it was acceptable to print the cartoons, with support strongest (72%) in the 35-54 age group. The more that people knew about the attack, the more they agreed that the magazine was right to publish its cartoons — 74 per cent in favour among those who knew "a lot" compared to 65 per cent among those who said they knew "a little".

Support for Charlie Hebdo also crossed federal party lines in Canada. Three-quarters (74%) of people who voted for the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) in the last federal election, along with 65 per cent of past Liberal Party of Canada voters and 74 per cent of those who voted for the New Democrats agreed with Charlie Hebdo's editorial policy on publishing images of Muhammad.

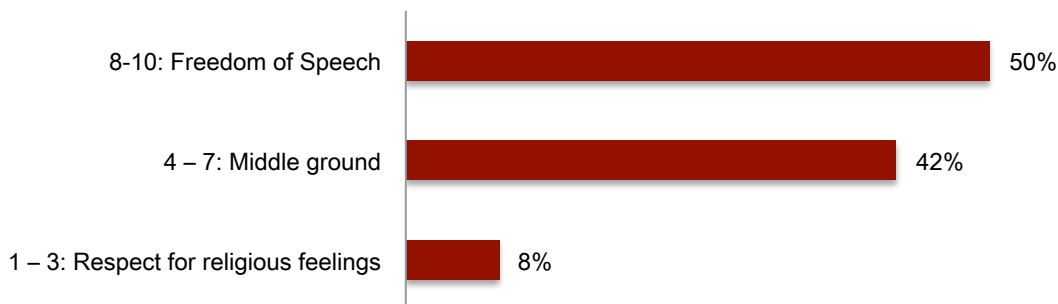
Freedom of Speech or Respect for Religious Sensitivities?

Canadians were also unequivocal in their opinion that freedom of speech trumps respect for religious sensitivities. Respondents were asked to indicate on a ten point scale, where 1-3 represented greater importance for "respect for religious feelings" and 8-10 represented greater importance for "freedom of speech". The results can be seen in the chart below:

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More than five times as many respondents (50%) said freedom of speech should be the overriding consideration than those who said religious sensitivity should dominate (8%). Two-in-five (42%) chose opted for a more centrist approach, saying media should tread the middle ground between religious sensitivities and freedom of speech.

Should the images should have been shown by Canadian media outlets?

In spite of hardened opinions among Canadians on the decision of Charlie Hebdo editors to publish the forbidden images and on the primacy of freedom of speech, the key question of whether they would have advised news outlets in this country to show or re-publish the images reveals a curious dichotomy: Canadians are split on the issue.

Although the offending cartoons were freely available on social media, the majority of Canadian news outlets chose not to run them. Those decisions put news outlets at odds with just over half (56%) of respondents, saying they would have advised editors to re-publish the Charlie Hebdo images. Two-in-five (44%) however say they would have advised decision makers in newsrooms *not* to re-print or show the cartoons.

Again, gender was a key opinion driver: among men, two-thirds (65%) would have advised showing the cartoons, compared to less than half (47%) of women.

By province, Albertans (63%) were most willing to see them re-published, followed by Quebec (58%), Ontario (55%), and B.C. (54%). In Atlantic Canada, opinion was evenly split, with 51 per cent saying they'd have encouraged reprinting, and 49 per cent saying the opposite.

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The survey found that although university graduates agreed (74%) with Charlie Hebdo's decision to publish cartoons lampooning Muhammad, they were significantly less willing to make that decision themselves. Fifty-six per cent would advise news outlets to re-publish them.

Awareness:

Nationally, nearly six out of ten Canadians (57%) had heard or read "a lot" about the attack, which sparked several weeks of worldwide media coverage, protests and fierce debates about freedom of speech. Only five per cent of Canadians were unaware that the attack had taken place.

By province, Quebecers were the best informed with 76 per cent saying they read or heard a lot about what had happened in Paris and only three per cent stating that they knew nothing about it.

Residents of Atlantic Canada were the least informed, with 42 per cent saying they'd read or heard a lot, and 46 per cent saying they knew just "a little" or nothing at all (12%).

Among men, two-thirds (64%) described themselves as well informed about the events; 50 per cent of women described themselves the same way. Awareness of the attack increased with age: the best informed (70 per cent) were people aged 55 and up. But even among adults aged 18-34 only 10 per cent were unaware of what had happened.

Knowing about the attack also made Canadians more inclined to want to see Canadian media show the cartoons: 60 per cent of people who knew "a lot" about the massacre would advise a reprint compared to 51 per cent who knew "a little" and 41 per cent who knew "nothing."

*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 organization 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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How much, if anything, have you read or heard about the attack in Paris, France on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo?

	Total (1525)	Region						
		BC (205)	AB (151)	SK (104)	MB (98)	ON (507)	PQ (359)	ATL (101)
A lot	57%	52%	43%	39%	50%	55%	76%	42%
A little	38%	45%	50%	51%	48%	40%	21%	46%
Nothing at all	5%	4%	7%	11%	2%	5%	3%	12%

How much, if anything, have you read or heard about the attack in Paris, France on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo?

	Total (1525)	Gender		Age		
		Men (742)	Women (783)	18 – 34 (428)	35 – 54 (567)	55+ (530)
A lot	57%	64%	50%	45%	54%	70%
A little	38%	33%	43%	46%	41%	28%
Nothing at all	5%	3%	7%	10%	5%	2%

Thinking about Charlie Hebdo magazine, which of the following is closest to your view?

	Total (1525)	Region						
		BC (205)	AB (151)	SK (104)	MB (98)	ON (507)	PQ (359)	ATL (101)
It was right for the magazine to publish cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad	70%	69%	73%	64%	60%	68%	78%	59%
It was wrong to publish these images	30%	31%	27%	36%	40%	32%	22%	41%

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It was wrong to publish these images	30%	25%	35%	33%	28%	31%

Thinking about Charlie Hebdo magazine, which of the following is closest to your view?				
	Total (1525)	How much have you heard about the attack?		
		A lot (862)	A little (580)	Nothing* (83)
It was right for the magazine to publish cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad	70%	74%	65%	61%
It was wrong to publish these images	30%	26%	35%	39%

**Note the small sample size*

Thinking about Charlie Hebdo magazine, which of the following is closest to your view?				
	Total (1525)	Federal Vote Last		
		CPC (440)	Liberal Party (236)	NDP (362)
It was right for the magazine to publish cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad	70%	74%	65%	74%
It was wrong to publish these images	30%	26%	35%	26%

Thinking about Charlie Hebdo magazine, which of the following is closest to your view?				
	Total (1525)	Education		
		High School/Less (424)	College/Tech School (417)	University + (373)
It was right for the magazine to publish cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad	70%	65%	72%	74%
It was wrong to publish these images	30%	35%	28%	26%

Suppose you had been in a position to give advice to major Canadian news outlets on whether they should or should not have republished the same images, what would your advice have been.								
	Total (1525)	Region						
		BC (205)	AB (151)	SK (104)	MB (98)	ON (507)	PQ (359)	ATL (101)
Do republish the images	56%	54%	63%	51%	52%	55%	58%	49%
Do not republish the images	44%	46%	37%	49%	48%	45%	42%	51%

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	Total (1525)	Region						
		BC (205)	AB (151)	SK (104)	MB (98)	ON (507)	PQ (359)	ATL (101)
1 – 3: Respect for religious feelings	8%	6%	7%	10%	13%	9%	7%	8%
4 – 7: Middle ground	42%	45%	44%	41%	45%	41%	38%	48%
8-10: Freedom of Speech	50%	48%	48%	49%	41%	50%	55%	44%

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