

‘Three Amigos’ Summit: Just one-in-four Canadians say NAFTA has been good for their country

Trade, security issues top Canadians’ list of priorities for North American Leaders’ Summit

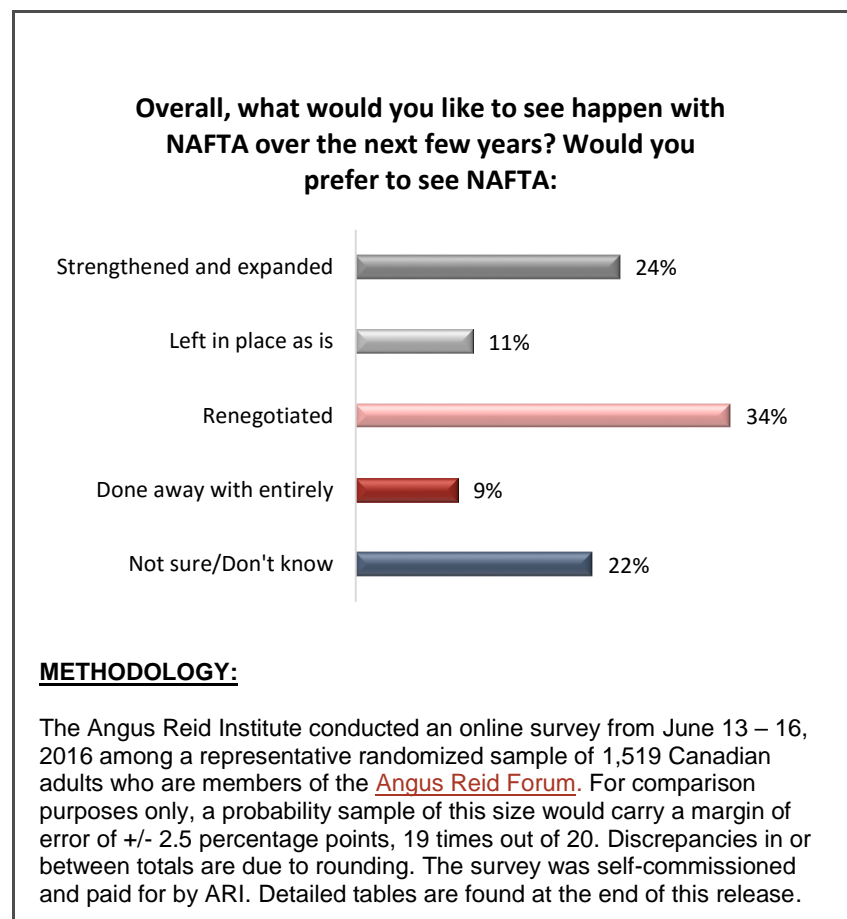
June 27, 2016 – With U.S. President Barack Obama and his Mexican counterpart Enrique Peña Nieto in Ottawa this week for the “Three Amigos” summit, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians are mixed – at best – about the signature trade deal that sealed ties between these nations.

More than two decades after the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), only one-in-four Canadians say the deal has been a net benefit to Canada, while fully one-third want it renegotiated – three times as many as say the pact should be “left as is”.

Despite this lack of enthusiasm about NAFTA, Canadians do hold positive views about both the U.S. and Mexico, and see room for increased cooperation with each country.

Key Findings:

- One-in-four Canadians (25%) say NAFTA has benefitted their country since it was adopted, but roughly the same total (26%) say it has hurt Canada, or hasn’t had an impact either way (22%). The remaining one-in-four (27%) are unsure what the effect has been
- NAFTA and trade issues, as well as security, are Canadians’ top priorities for the upcoming talks. One-in-five (20%) choose each of these as the most important issue for leaders to address



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- Most Canadians (69%) say their country should pursue closer ties with Mexico, and roughly half (49%) say collaborating with that country on mutual economic interests in the U.S. – such as opposition to “buy American” laws – is “a great strategy”

After 22 years of NAFTA, no consensus on the deal’s effects

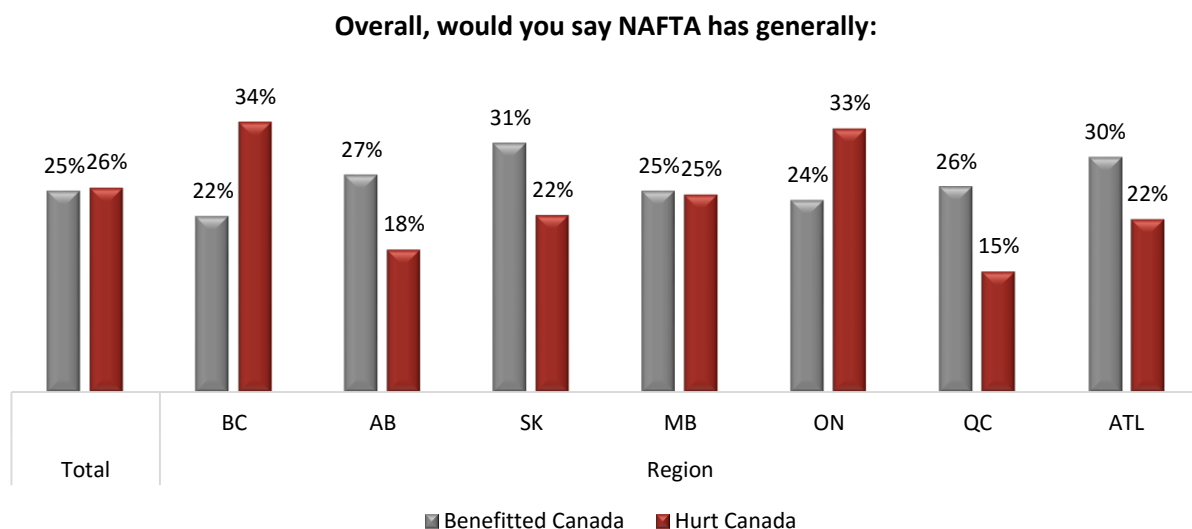
From the beginning, the idea of free trade between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico has been a divisive one. In 1993, as NAFTA negotiations were nearing completion, an Angus Reid poll found a majority (58%) of Canadians opposed to the deal. Fewer than two-in-five (39%) supported it.

Two decades later, Canadians remain divided about the effect the pact has had on their country. An [Angus Reid poll](#) conducted in 2014 found one-in-three (34%) saying NAFTA had benefitted Canada, and roughly the same number saying it had hurt the country (31%) or had no effect either way (35%).

This 2016 poll finds Canadians similarly divided. The largest single group of respondents (27%) say they are “not sure” what the effect has been. Another 22 per cent say the landmark trade deal hasn’t really affected Canada positively or negatively, meaning nearly half of all Canadians take no position on whether NAFTA has benefitted or hurt their nation.

The other half of the population is split down the middle. One-quarter (25%) say the trade deal has benefitted Canada, while almost the same number (26%) say it has hurt the country.

The belief that NAFTA has been a net negative for Canada is strongest in manufacturing-heavy Ontario and in B.C. These are the only two regions where those who say NAFTA has hurt Canada outnumber those who say the deal has benefitted it, as seen in the following graph:

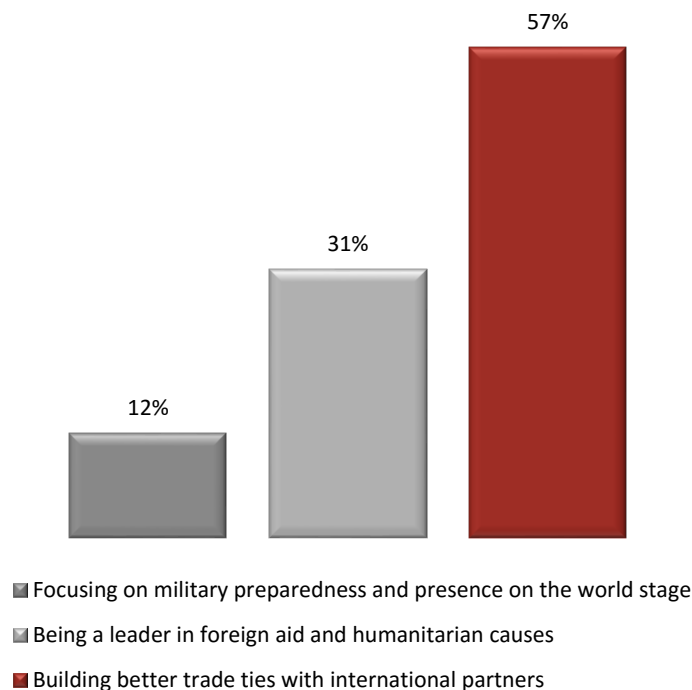


Driving some of the lack of certainty on the effects of the pact – women and younger Canadians. They are noticeably more likely than other demographic groups to say they're "not sure" what effect NAFTA has had. This includes nearly half (48%) of women under 35 ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

A trading nation that sees a raw deal?

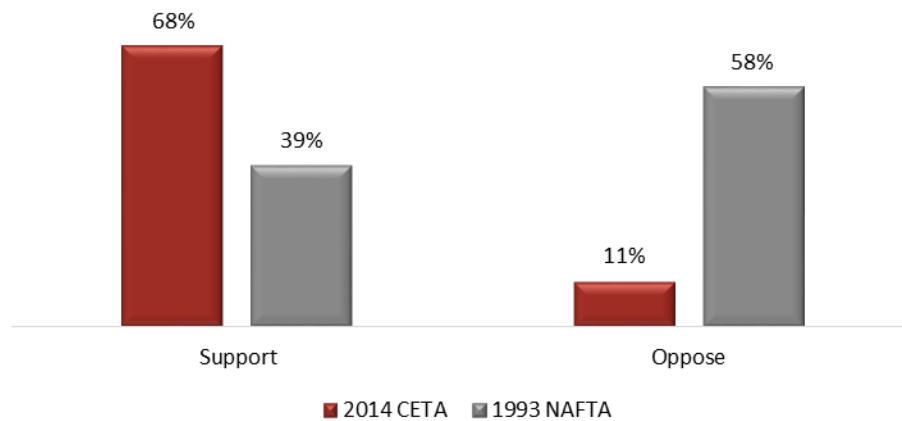
Canadians' relatively tepid feelings toward NAFTA stand in contrast to their overall views on international trade. Asked [during the 2015 election](#) what Canada's top foreign policy priority should be, nearly six-in-ten Canadians (57%) said the nation should focus on building better trade ties with international partners. This was almost double the total who chose any other option:

And all things considered, what should Canada's TOP priority be when it comes to foreign affairs?



This national tendency to support trade pacts – at least conceptually – is further demonstrated in opinion on trade deals negotiated post-NAFTA. In 2014, for example, views on the Canada-EU Trade Agreement (CETA) were dramatically different from what they had been on the North American deal:

Canadians on free trade agreements 1993 vs. 2014



In a similar vein, Canadians have consistently been more likely to support the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) than to oppose it [in recent ARI polling](#) – though the predominant opinion on that deal remains “not sure.”

Clearly, one could make the argument that Canadians view themselves as belonging to a trading nation. Indeed, the government of the day [favours free trade agreements](#).

And yet, when it comes to NAFTA, millions of Canadians are eager to see the deal renegotiated.

In 2010, [an Angus Reid survey](#) asking a slightly differently worded question found that 58 per cent of Canadians believed NAFTA had been a “net positive for their nation’s economy” (though respondents were considerably less bullish on the effect of the treaty on Canadian workers). Despite this widespread satisfaction, however, some 44 per cent of respondents said they would favour Canada renegotiating the terms of its participation the deal.

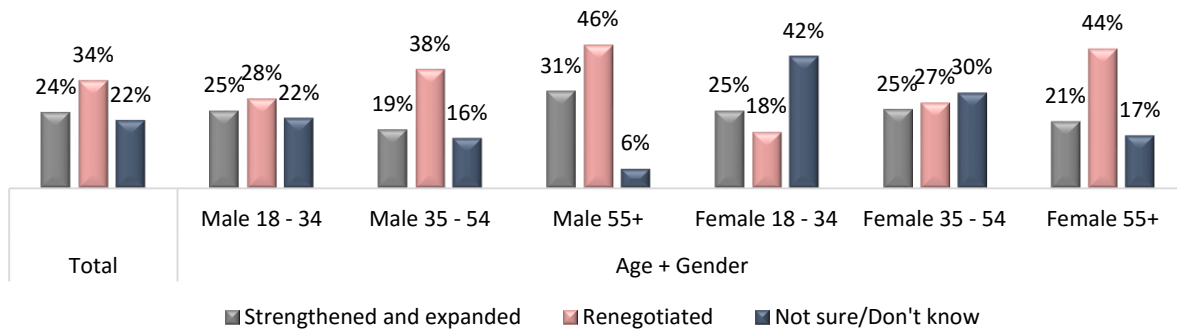
Today, when asked a differently worded question about what should be done with NAFTA in the coming years, the largest number (34%) say the deal should be renegotiated, as seen in the first graph of this report.

Canadians 55 and older are most likely to favour renegotiation. Indeed, 46 per cent of men in the 55+ age group choose this option, as do 44 per cent of women the same age. By contrast – once again – young Canadians are more likely to say “not sure” (see the following graph and [comprehensive tables](#) for greater detail).

These responses follow a similar pattern to that seen in the U.K. referendum on European Union membership, in which older people [voted overwhelmingly to leave the E.U.](#) and younger voters preferred to remain. This raises the questions: Are older people around the world rejecting the closer legal and

economic ties that membership in multi-country zones and agreements bring? And, if so, what legacy does this leave the younger generation?

Overall, what would you like to see happen with NAFTA over the next few years? Would you prefer to see NAFTA:

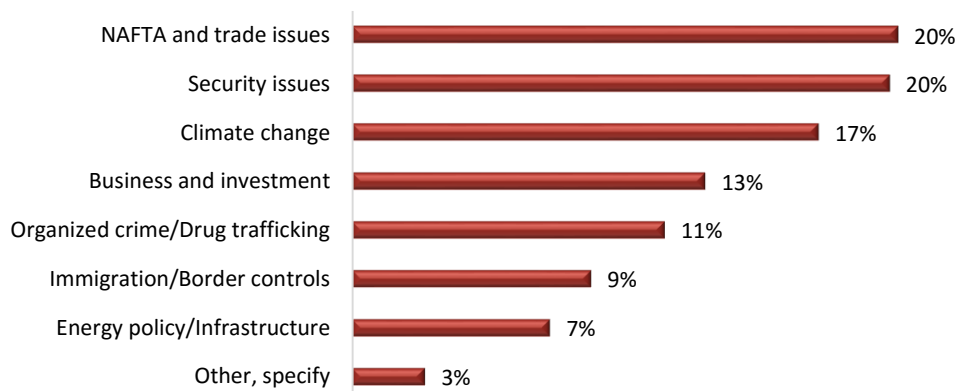


Notably, just nine per cent of Canadians would scrap the treaty entirely. So while the Canadian public is ambivalent about NAFTA, as it is enacted today – it appears some form of free trade with Mexico and the United States is still desirable to most Canadians.

Top Priorities for Summit

Given Canadians' ambivalence toward NAFTA and willingness to see it renegotiated, it should come as no surprise that the agreement – and trade issues more broadly – tops the list of priorities Canadians have for the coming leaders' summit, along with security issues:

Thinking about the upcoming meeting between these three North American leaders, which of the following issues do you think should be the top priority topic of discussion?



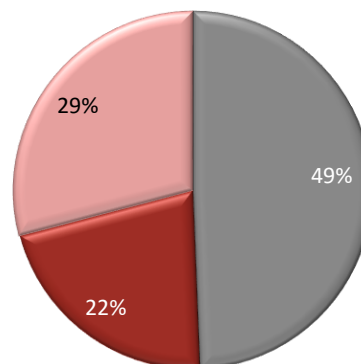
But where doubts exist regarding NAFTA itself – Canadians express much more willingness to pursue stronger economic ties with Mexico – especially on issues where the nations north and south of the United States see opportunities to stand up to their bigger common neighbour.

This is perhaps most notably underscored on so-called “[buy American](#)” laws periodically proposed in the U.S. Congress. Rules such as these seek to limit U.S. government agencies to purchasing products made in the United States and prohibit them from buying foreign goods, even from NAFTA countries.

In such cases, Canada and Mexico have in the past [attempted to negotiate exemptions for themselves](#) separately. When asked, however, half of Canadian respondents (49%) say they would like to see the two countries look for opportunities to team-up and take on the U.S. together:

What is your overall view about greater Canada/Mexico co-operation on these types of mutual economic interests in the U.S.? Would you say this is:

- A great strategy - we should seek out other such opportunities
- Not worthwhile - we still wouldn't have enough clout against the U.S.
- Not sure/Don't know



Closer ties, but only so close:

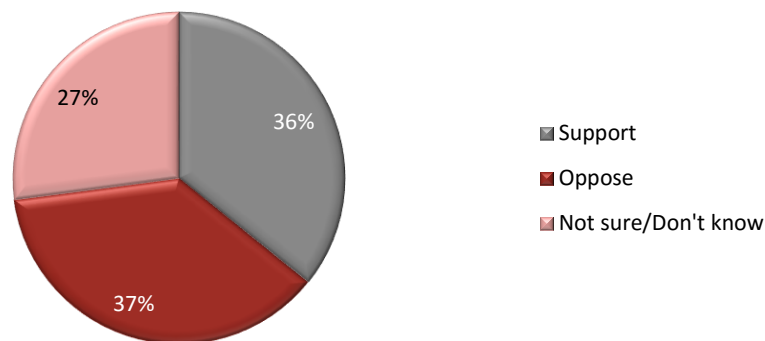
While there is notable support for closer ties with Mexico if they bring economic advantage – the same cannot be said for closer ties on a key security, border and immigration issues – namely – the requirement of Mexican visitors to Canada to obtain visas.

Since 2009, Mexicans have been required to apply for one in advance of their trips. This requirement was put in place amid rising numbers of asylum claims from Mexicans, and has been [a source of tension between the two countries](#) ever since.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau first committed to [lifted the visa requirement](#) shortly after the October 2015 federal election – and now, [media reports indicate](#) restrictions may be lifted by the end of the year.

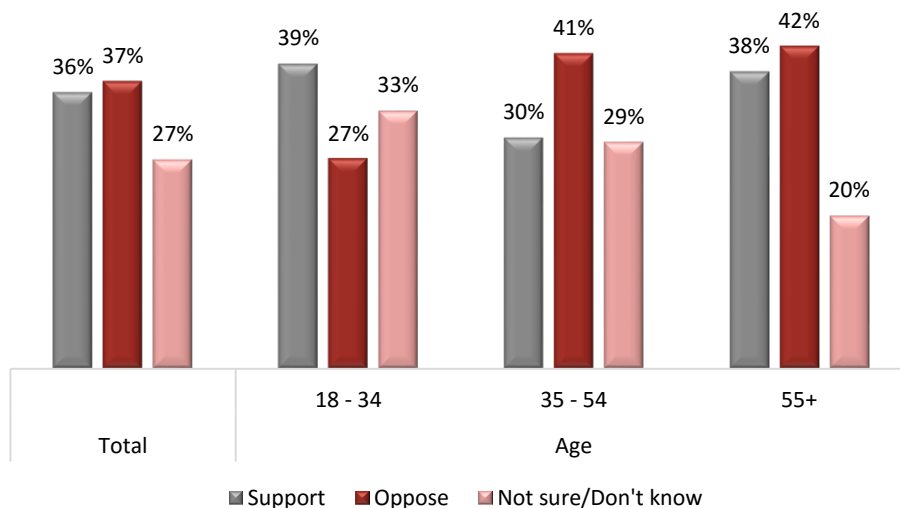
Asked whether they support or oppose lifting the visa requirement, Canadians are fairly evenly divided, with slightly more than one-in-three taking each position and one-quarter uncertain:

Do you support or oppose Canada removing the visa requirement for Mexicans?



Among younger Canadians (those ages 18 – 34), opposition to lifting the visa requirement is considerably lower than among other age groups. As seen in the following graph, this difference is partially the result of higher uncertainty among this age group:

Do you support or oppose Canada removing the visa requirement for Mexicans?



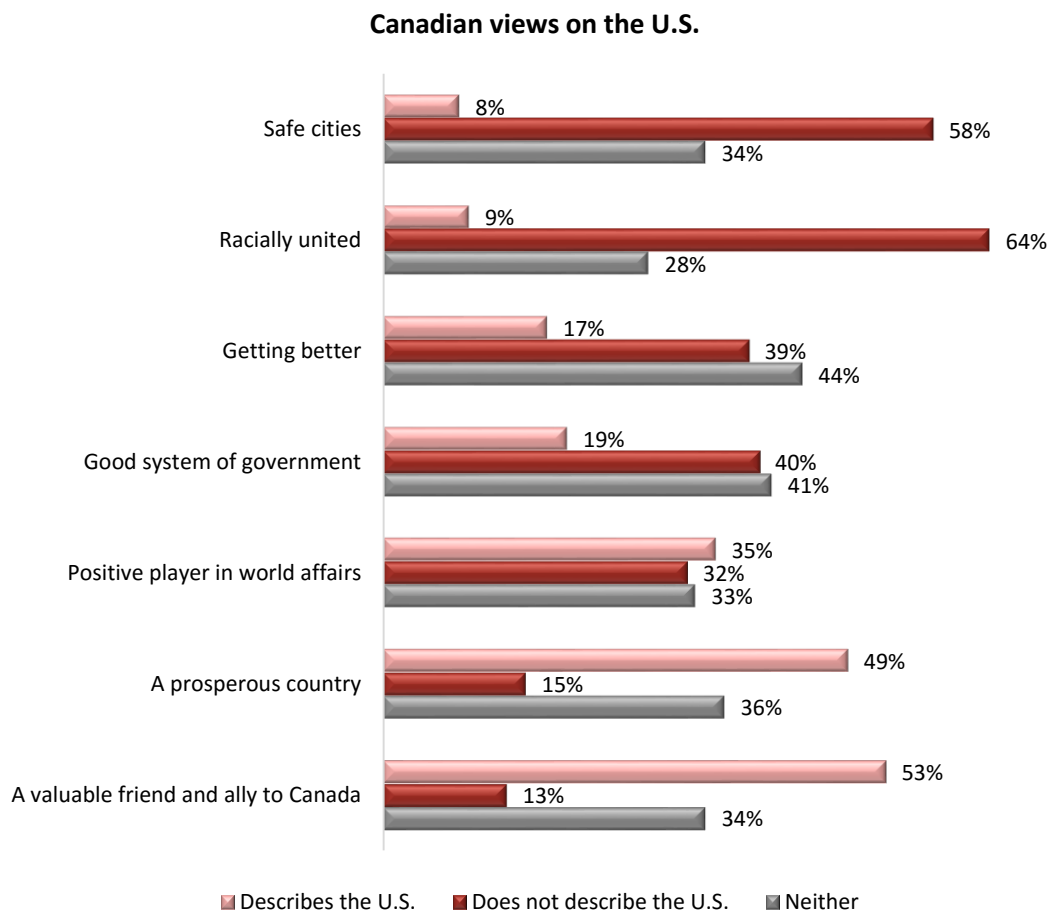
Canadians views of the U.S. and Mexico

When it comes to Canada’s relationships with other countries, there are two categories: The United States and everyone else.

The U.S. is the destination for [74 per cent of Canada's exports](#), and Canadians are [more than 20 times as likely](#) to visit the U.S. as they are to visit any other international destination.

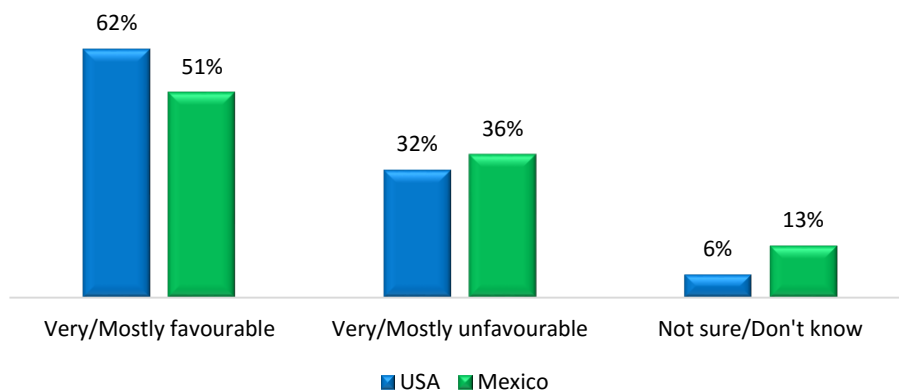
Given the scale of the relationship between the two countries, it’s little wonder that Canadians are roughly twice as likely to have a favourable impression of their southern neighbour as an unfavourable one.

This, despite the fact that fewer than one-in-five Canadians (17%) said the U.S. is a country they’d be “proud to live in” and expressed negative opinions about many other elements of American society in [a recent ARI survey on cross-border views](#):



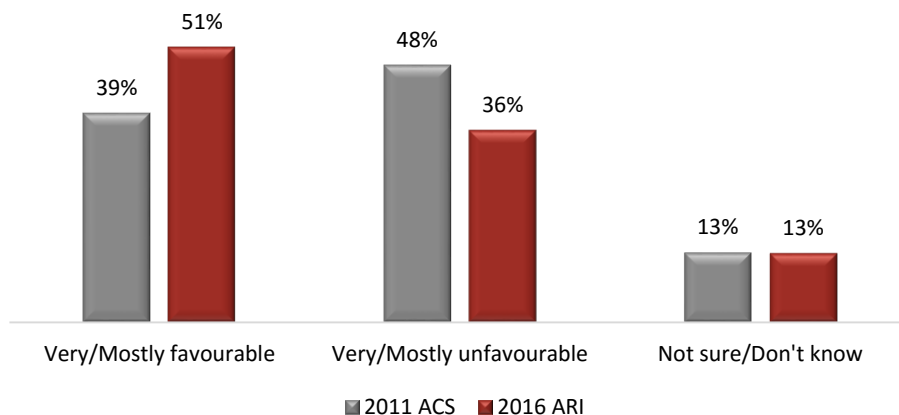
As seen in the following graph, respondents are less sure of their opinions on Mexico – itself a significant trading and tourism partner for Canada, though one that receives only a fraction of the Canadian business the U.S. does.

When you think about each of the following countries, would you say your overall opinion is:



While Canadians are more ambivalent about Mexico than they are about the United States, the fact that half of respondents express a favourable view of the former represents a notable increase from 2011, when a poll conducted by the Association for Canadian Studies for the [Canadian Foundation for the Americas](#) found fewer (39%) said the same.

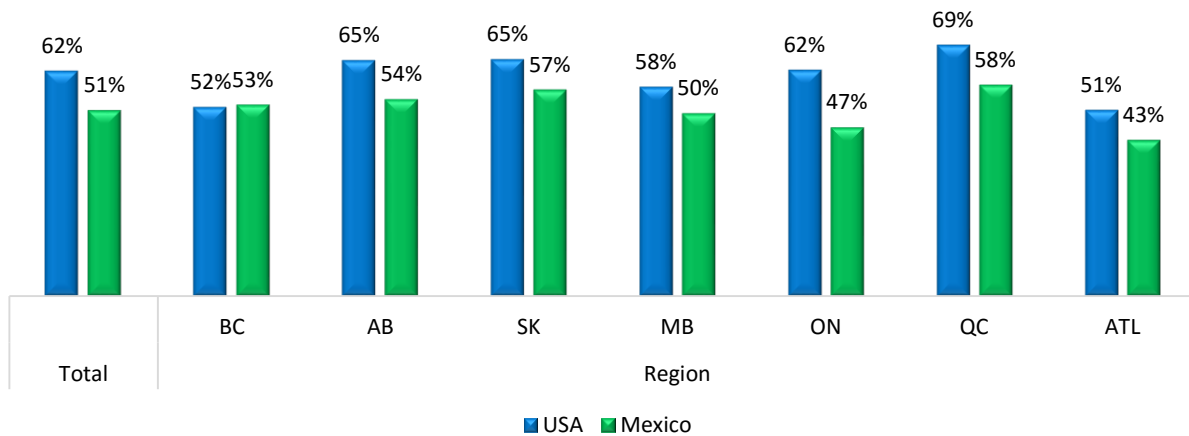
Canadian views of Mexico, 2011 vs. 2016:



Quebec residents are most likely to have a favourable opinion of each of Canada's NAFTA neighbours, but it is British Columbians whose opinions of each of the two countries are most consistent.

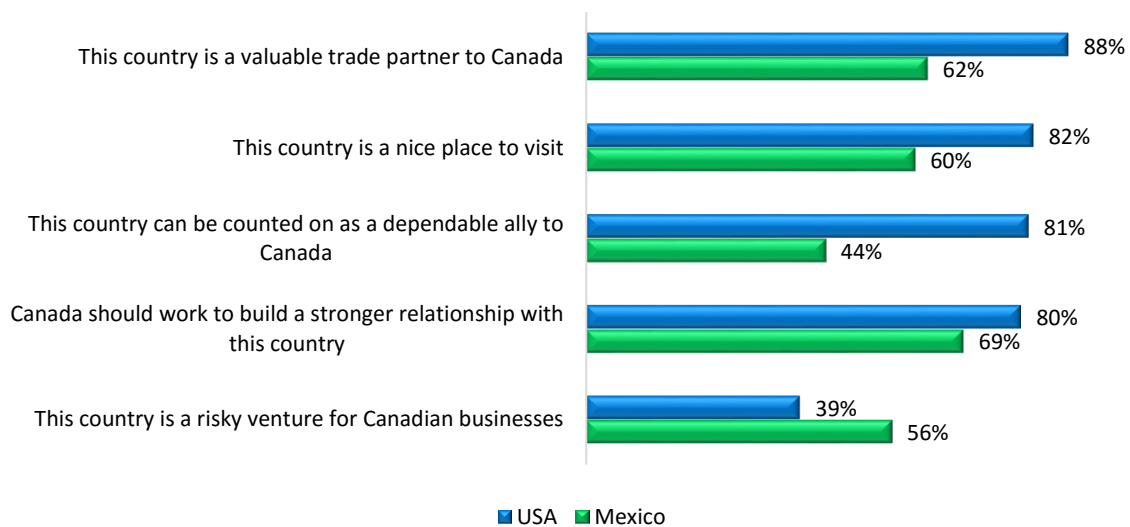
While most regions are more likely to say they have a favourable view of the U.S. than to say so of Mexico, B.C. residents are equally favourable toward each country:

Percentage saying they have a favourable opinion of each country:



Asked to weigh in on specific statements about each of these two countries, Canadians again feel more positively about the United States than Mexico:

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about the United States/Mexico (those saying "agree")



These responses highlight a Canadian public conflicted about their country's relationship to North America's second-most-populous nation.

On one hand, almost seven-in-ten Canadians (69%) would like to see their country strengthen its relationship with Mexico. On the other, a majority (56%) see Mexico as risky for Canadian businesses, and fewer than half of respondents (44%) believe the country can be counted on as an ally.

Taken together with previously discussed findings on economic cooperation and visa requirements, these views suggest Canadians harbour both a desire to enhance Canada's ties to Mexico and a wariness of that nation. Letting go of the latter may go a long way toward achieving the former.

*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.*

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