

Tarnished Medals: Four-in-Five Canadians say scandals, corruption taint true spirit of the Olympics

More than half would advise Canadian athletes to stay home amid Zika fears

August 4, 2016 – Doping scandals, health and safety concerns, and allegations of bribery and corruption have dominated the news coverage leading up to this month's Summer Olympic Games in Rio De Janeiro, and a new poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians feeling less-than-enthusiastic about the event and its organizers, perhaps as a result.

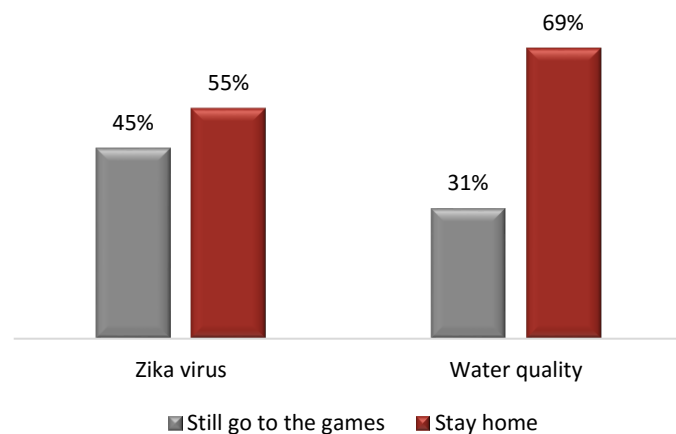
Nearly seven-in-ten Canadians say they would urge an athlete competing in an open-water event off Rio's famously polluted coast to stay home, rather than attend the games. And a majority (55%) would advise athletes in all sports to do the same because of concerns they might contract Zika virus.

In general, Canadians are split on whether the Olympic Games are a worthwhile investment for the host country, and eight-in-ten say the events are more about corporate sponsorships and commercialism than athletic competition.

Key Findings:

- Just over one-in-ten Canadians (13%) say they're "very interested" in the upcoming Summer Olympics in Rio, and interest has dropped compared to previous editions of the games.
- A majority of Canadians say they would want a friend or family member to "stay home" due to the risk of Zika (55% say so) or concerns over the water quality for open water events (69%)
- Among the likely reasons for a decline in interest, 81 per cent of Canadians say the games are now more about corporate sponsors and commercialism than the athletes and competitions

Say you had a friend or a family member who was an Olympic athlete. Given what you know about the risk of Zika and the water quality debate, would you want to see that person...



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from July 26-29, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1516 Canadian adults who are members of the [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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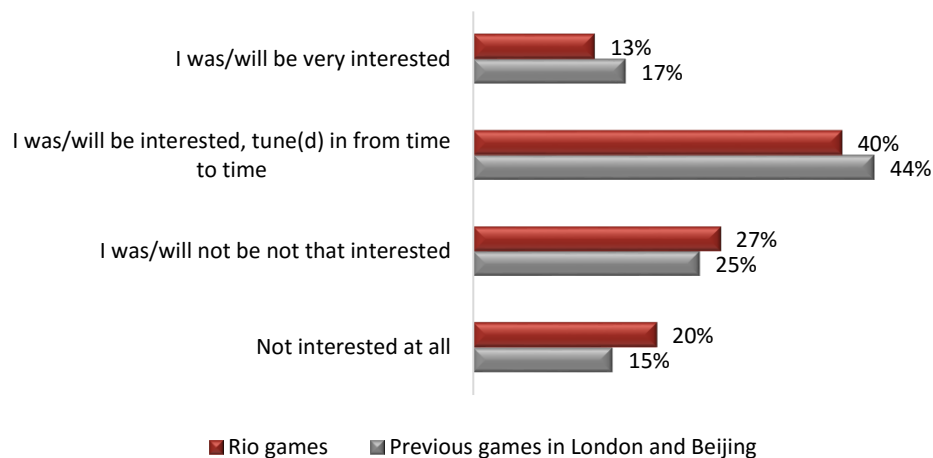
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Part 1: Apathetic about Olympics?

While it is yet to be seen whether the games will capture the world's attention, preliminary responses from Canadians show ambivalence toward the three-week international competition.

Just over half say they'll be paying attention (53%), compared to six-in-ten (60%) who say they followed previous summer games in London (2012) and Beijing (2008):

How closely did you follow previous games vs how interested are you in upcoming games



One possible reason for lower interest in these summer games might be Team Canada's performance. This country is much more competitive at winter games than summer ones. Where Canada finished first in medal count in Vancouver's Winter Olympics in 2010, and third at Sochi in 2014, it finished 35th in the 2012 London summer games.

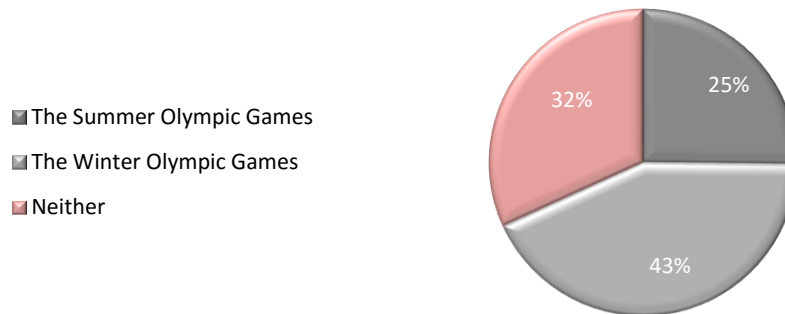
When canvassed in the [lead up to the Vancouver games](#) in 2010, more than four-in-ten (44%) Canadians said they would follow the games closely and watch as much coverage as they could, three times more than the number who say they'll do the same for Rio.

Asked outright which Olympic games they look forward to most, four-in-ten (43%) say winter, while summer, in fact, takes bronze – more respondents actually say “neither” (32%) than choose summer (25%).

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Which of the Olympic games would you say you look forward to more:



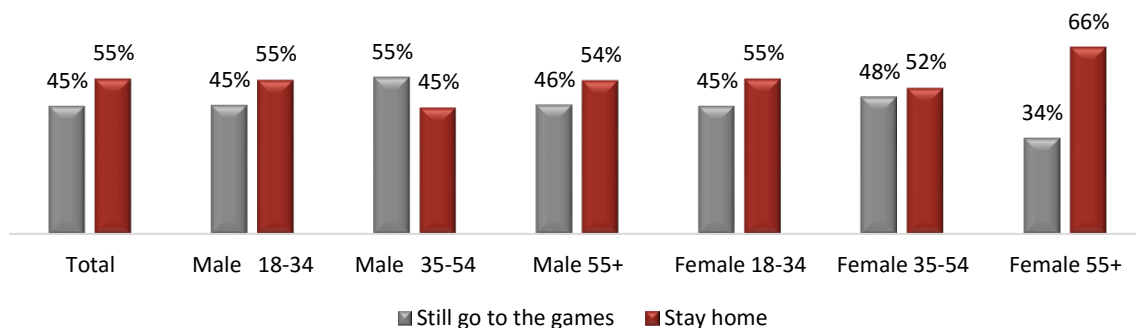
Part 2: Zika Woes

Brazilian Olympic organizers have been faced with serious challenges, the most well-publicized of which is the outbreak of the Zika virus. Concerns over the virus have led a number of athletes, including many of the world's top golfers, tennis players, and basketball players to forego the event.

Some commentators have noted that most of the athletes who won't travel are professionals who don't need the exposure or endorsement opportunities that amateur athletes hope for, but non-athletes also share in their apprehension – a number of NBC staff also refused to travel to Rio.

The Angus Reid Institute asked respondents to consider a personal situation. If a friend or family member of theirs was an Olympic athlete, what would they want that athlete to do? In the case of the Zika virus, Canadians are split, though they lean toward safety. Just over half (55%) say they would like to see that person stay home rather than risk contracting the virus. Notable differences are seen depending on the age and gender of respondents:

Say you had a friend or a family member who was an Olympic athlete. Given what you know about the risk of Zika, would you want to see that person...

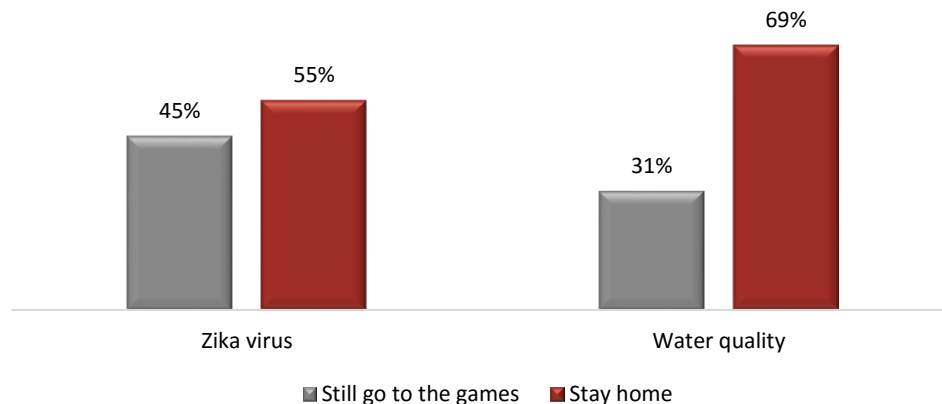


Health concerns are not limited to the mosquito-borne virus. Guanabara Bay, where many of Rio's open water events are taking place, has been described by some as a "[a toxic stew](#)". Officials claim that the areas where events are taking place meet international safety standards, but some health experts have suggested competitors "[keep their mouths closed](#)" while in the water.

The government had originally planned to spend \$4 billion USD to treat roughly 80 per cent of the sewage flowing into Guanabara Bay, but financial woes have hindered efforts and reports are that [just \\$170 million](#) were ultimately spent.

When presented with the same situation – where a friend or family member has hypothetically qualified for the Rio games, but in this case for an open-water event – seven-in-ten (69%) say they would like to see that person stay home rather than face the polluted waters – 14 percentage points higher than those who said they would advise that person to stay home to avoid Zika ([see comprehensive tables](#)):

Say you had a friend or a family member who was an Olympic athlete. Given what you know about the risk of Zika and the water quality debate, would you want to see that person...



Part 3: The Russian Doping Scandal

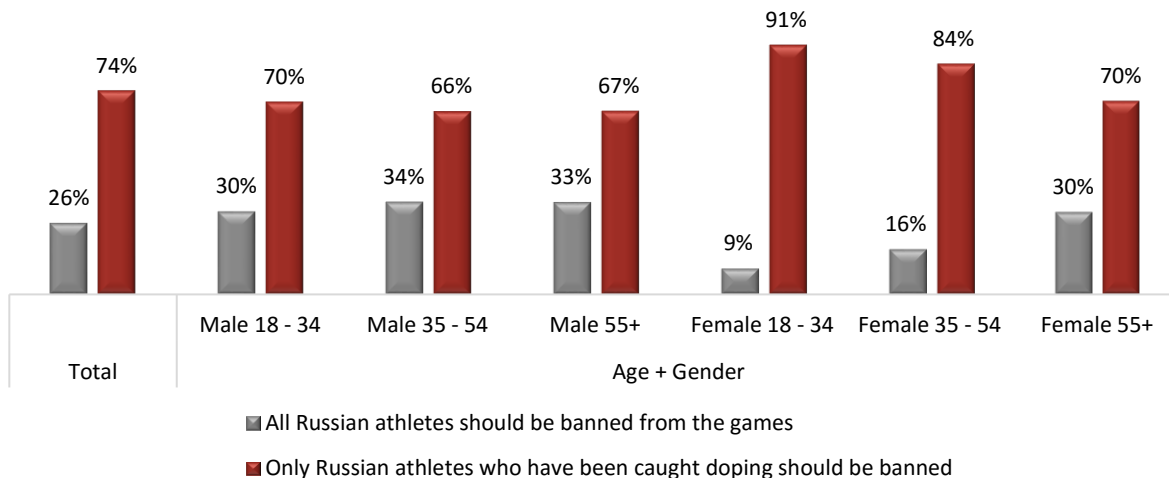
If the Rio games aren't marred by the Zika virus or the water pollution, they may be marred in the public consciousness by the need of some national teams to be swifter, higher and stronger at all costs.

In 2014, [whistleblowers revealed](#) a "culture" of state-sponsored doping in Russia. The allegations led to an [independent investigation](#), which concluded in November 2015 that inaction on Russian doping had "sabotaged" the London 2012 Summer Olympics, and that doping was likely not limited to Team Russia.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) called for a total ban on Russian athletes competing in the 2016 games, but the International Olympic Committee (IOC) [decided not to issue one](#), instead opting to allow each Olympic sport's international federation to determine whether to ban Russian athletes, and which individuals to ban.

Asked whether they favoured a total ban on Russian athletes competing in Rio, three-quarters of Canadians (74%) say they do not, preferring to ban only those athletes who have been caught doping.

Which of the following statements comes closer to your own opinion about how this issue should be handled?



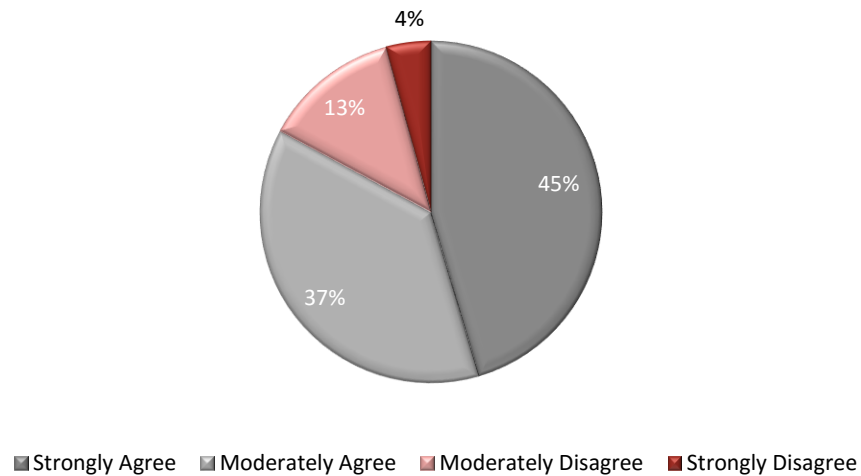
As to their own athletes, nearly eight-in-ten Canadians (79%) agree with the statement “I believe that Canadian Olympians don’t cheat in competition – they play by the rules.” ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Part 4: Corruption, Commercialism, and Sport

Allegations of corruption against Olympic organizers are [hardly new](#), but the seeming ubiquity of such charges leading up to Rio appears to be wearing on the Canadian public. [Nearly every games in recent history](#) has seen allegations of bribery levelled at the IOC, and French police are [currently investigating](#) corruption in the bidding process for both Rio and the upcoming 2020 summer games in Tokyo.

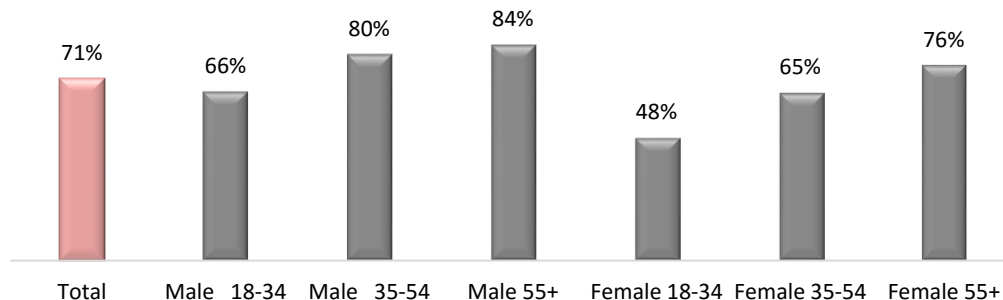
Asked whether ongoing scandals have diminished what the games are really supposed to be about – an unequivocal 83 per cent of Canadians agree with the statement, with 45 per cent doing so “strongly”:

Ongoing scandals have diminished what the games is really supposed to be about, the athletes:



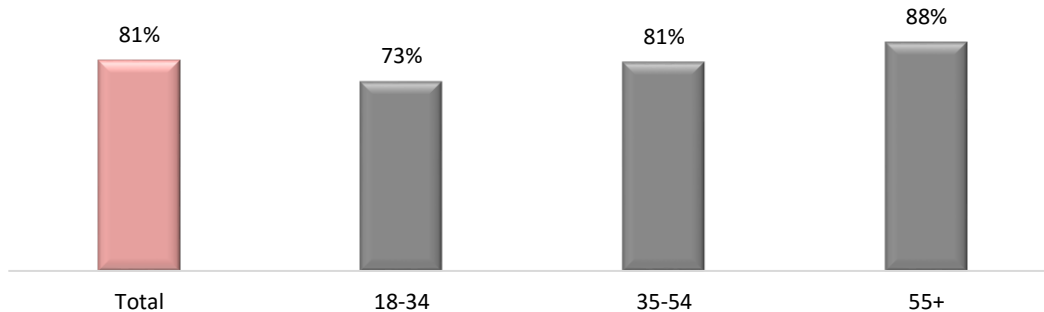
Beyond the games themselves, Canadians take a particularly dim view of the Olympic Movement. Fully seven-in-ten (71%) say the IOC is a corrupt organization:

The International Olympic Committee is a corrupt organization
Percentage who Agree shown:



Further reflecting Canadians' generally gloomy outlook on the Olympics and their organizers, roughly eight-in-ten (81%) say the games "have become more about corporate sponsorships and commercialism than the athletes and competitions themselves," ([see comprehensive tables](#)):

The Olympics have become more about corporate sponsorships and commercialism than the athletes and competitions themselves
Percentage who Agree shown:



Whether accurate or not, the public perception that corporate sponsorships and general commercialism are the driving force behind the Olympics is not difficult to understand. The IOC is, after all, an organization that accepts \$25 million to \$50 million USD annually from sponsors such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's.

And that's to say nothing of the massive sums of money the IOC receives for Olympic broadcast rights, including nearly \$8 billion USD for American rights and almost \$1.5 billion USD for European rights. In Canada, CBC purchased the rights to the Sochi and Rio games, but did not disclose the bid cost.

Whatever the cost to secure the broadcast, the CBC will be hoping for Canadian athletes to shine and draw viewers. After all, the stories, the drama and the athletes are what it's (supposed to be) all about.

*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](#).