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Canadian views of world leaders: Trump 'arrogant,' Putin 'corrupt,' Merkel 'strong'

Canadians more familiar with leaders of the countries canvassed than they were in 2014

June 5, 2018 – As leaders of the G7 nations meet in Charlevoix, Quebec this week – some will no doubt have to mask their true feelings of the others. Such is the reality of diplomacy. But the Canadian public is free from any such restraint and a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians not holding back on what they really think of those who occupy the world stage.

While – perhaps unsurprisingly -- United States President Donald Trump provokes the most negative views – widely described as "corrupt", "arrogant," and a "liar" – others, such as British Prime Minister Teresa May, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and French President Emmanuel Macron figure much more positively in the Canadian consciousness. Each is most commonly described as "strong", "influential" or "charismatic".

Trump is joined in the Canadian public opinion dog house by another major world leader, Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin, kicked out of what used to be the G8 in 2014, is most commonly described as "corrupt".

At home, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau garners a mix of positive and negative descriptors from the Canadian public that elected him. He is seen as "charismatic" and "compassionate," but also "weak," "arrogant," and "bumbling."

HOW CANADIANS DESCRIBE WORLD LEADERS

JUSTIN TRUDEAU — Charismatic (45%)

DONALD TRUMP — Arrogant (74%)

ANGELA MERKEL — Strong (42%)

VLADIMIR PUTIN — Corrupt (63%)

XI JINPING — Influential (27%)

<u>METHODOLOGY:</u>

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 29 – April 3, 2018, among a representative randomized sample of 1,524 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

More Key Findings:

- Those leaders who were in power in 2014 – including Merkel, Putin, and Chinese leader Xi Jinping – tend to be described in the same terms today as they were then

- Trudeau's mix of positive and negative terms is a slightly better overall assessment than then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper received in 2014. Canadians saw Harper as "secretive,' "arrogant," "dishonest," "strategic" and "boring"

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- More than half of Canadians are unfamiliar with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (64% say they don't know who this is), Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (75%), or Brazilian President Michel Temer (90%)
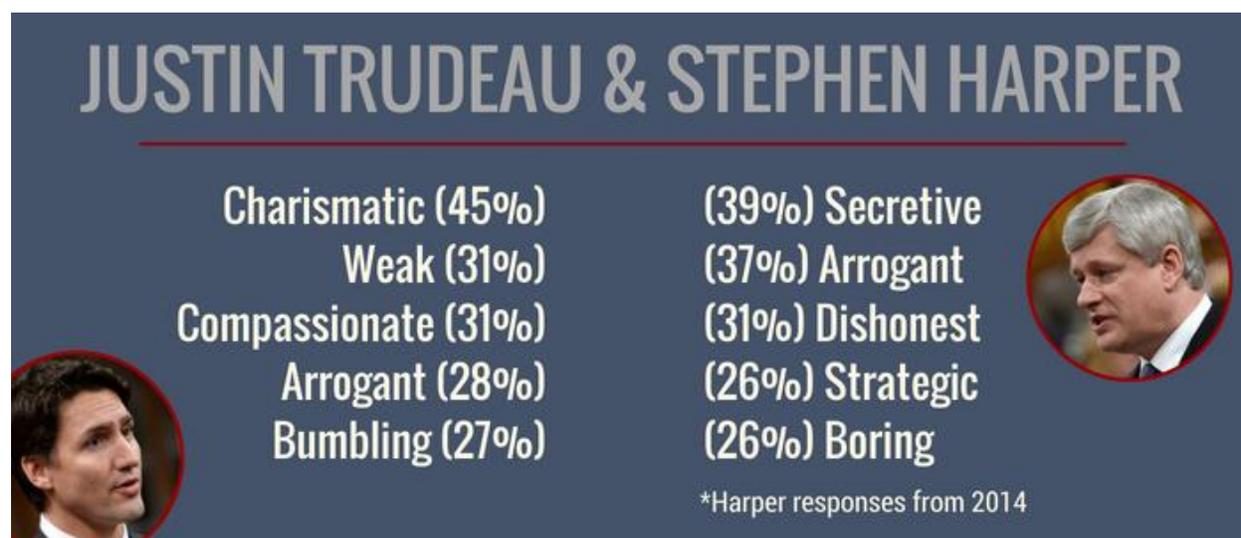
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Then and Now: Comparing Canadian and American leaders

As was the case in 2014, respondents were asked to select up to six words from a list of 24 descriptors to ascribe to the 10 world leaders asked about in the survey. The list of leaders was comprised of the G7 members and four BRIC countries, Brazil, Russia, India and China (missing from this wave is the Prime Minister of Italy, as that country's March election resulted in a hung parliament and uncertainty as to who would assume the head of government role).

For Canadian Prime Minister Justine Trudeau, "charismatic" and "weak" are the most-used descriptors.
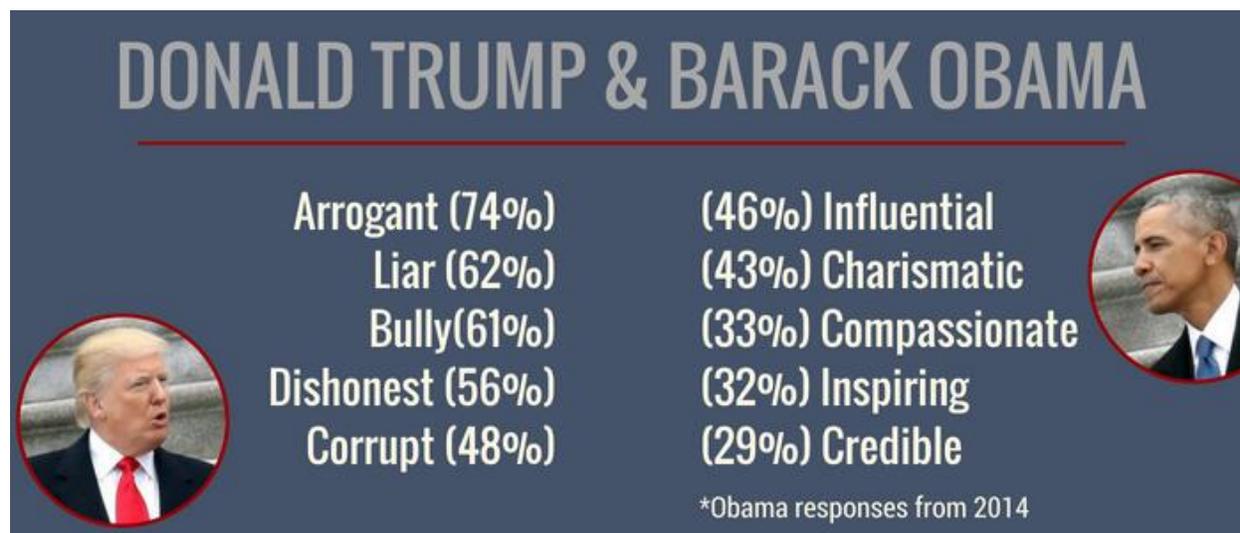

JUSTIN TRUDEAU & STEPHEN HARPER

Charismatic (45%)   (39%) Secretive
Weak (31%)   (37%) Arrogant
Compassionate (31%)   (31%) Dishonest
Arrogant (28%)   (26%) Strategic
Bumbling (27%)   (26%) Boring

*Harper responses from 2014

Related: 'Charismatic' and 'Modern' or 'Arrogant' and 'Flaky'? Canadians weigh in on the Trudeau Brand

The widespread perception of Trudeau as charismatic stands in contrast to how Canadians viewed his predecessor. When provided with the same list of words to describe Stephen Harper in 2014, Canadians chose three negative words – "secretive," "arrogant," and "dishonest" – with higher frequency than they chose the most popular positive one ("strategic").

Even more dramatic than the differences in how Canadians have perceived their current and past Prime Ministers are the differences in how they have perceived the current and past U.S. Presidents. In 2014, the words most used to describe Barack Obama were all positive. Today, Canadians describe his successor Donald Trump in overwhelmingly negative terms:

DONALD TRUMP & BARACK OBAMA

Arrogant (74%)   (46%) Influential
Liar (62%)   (43%) Charismatic
Bully (61%)   (33%) Compassionate
Dishonest (56%)   (32%) Inspiring
Corrupt (48%)   (29%) Credible

*Obama responses from 2014

The widespread description of Trump in negative terms follows a pattern observed in previous ARI polling about the president. Canadians overwhelmingly hold negative views about his performance, and have done so since he took office.

Related: Fire, fury… and failure? Canadians increasingly negative, pessimistic about rest of Trump term

Views of Putin, Merkel largely unchanged

As was the case in 2014, the vast majority of Canadians are aware of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and they don't have a favourable view of him.

Today, the top five words Canadians use to describe Russia's president are the same as they were four years ago, though they are mentioned with different frequency. In 2014, "arrogant" was the most common descriptor for Putin, chosen by 54 per cent of Canadians. In 2018, the top term for Putin is "corrupt," which nearly two-thirds of Canadians (63%) say applies to the Russian leader.
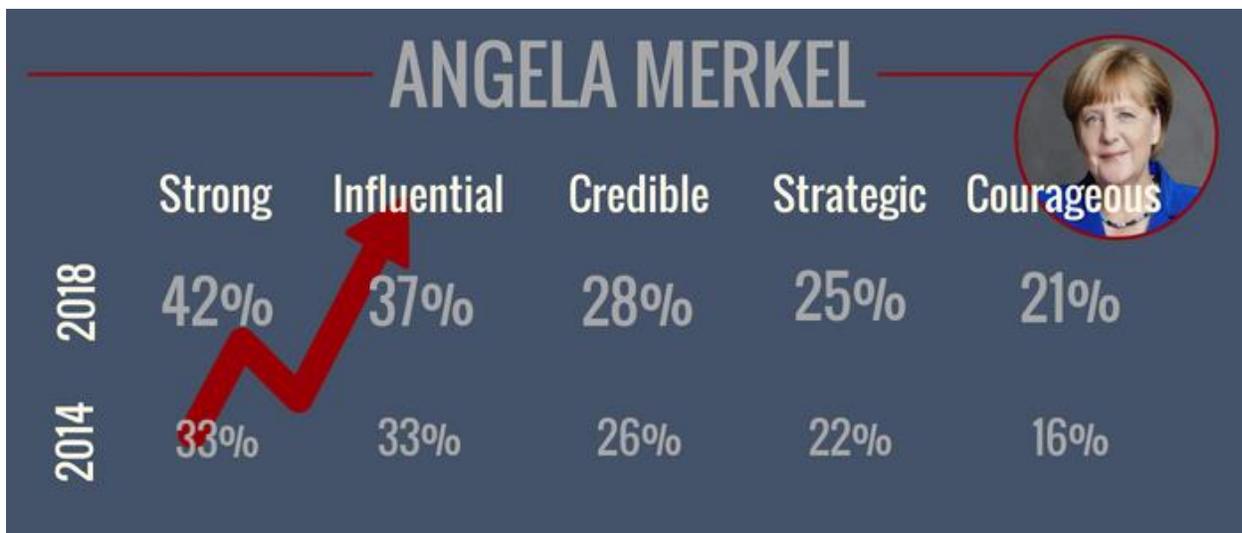
VLADIMIR PUTIN

Corrupt
63% of Canadians now say Putin is corrupt, up from 52% in 2014

Arrogant ▲ **Bully** ▲ **Secretive** ▼ **Dishonest** ▲

Putin is one of several world leaders included in the 2014 sounding who are still in office today. He is joined in this distinction by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Like Putin, Merkel remains familiar to the majority of Canadians, and the words they use to describe her are unchanged – though the percentage of Canadians identifying her as "strong" has risen by 10 percentage points:

ANGELA MERKEL

	Strong	Influential	Credible	Strategic	Courageous
2018	42%	37%	28%	25%	21%
2014	33%	33%	26%	22%	16%

Most are familiar with Xi, May, and Macron

Alongside Putin and Merkel, Chinese President Xi Jinping was in office during the first wave of this survey four years ago. He holds the distinction of being the world leader with whom Canadians' familiarity has increased the most since 2014. Back then, fewer than four-in-ten (39%) said they knew who the Chinese leader was. Today, a full majority (55%) are familiar with Xi.

This number is likely to increase even further in the future, since Xi was reappointed as president earlier this year, and with no term limit, meaning the 65-year-old is likely to be China's leader for many years to come.

Canadians describe Xi in mixed terms. Perhaps reflecting the size and economic strength of the country he leads, the most-used descriptor for Xi is "influential," chosen by 28 per cent of respondents. Xi is also viewed as "strong" and "strategic," but also "secretive" and "corrupt." These words are the same ones used to describe him in 2014, when considerably fewer Canadians felt they knew enough to pick terms to describe the Chinese president:

2014	Xi Jinping	2018
61%	Do not know this leader	45%
13%	Influential	27%
14%	Secretive	24%
11%	Strategic	24%
9%	Strong	23%
11%	Corrupt	18%

British Prime Minister Theresa May and French President Emmanuel Macron are considerably less controversial figures in the eyes of the Canadian public. Most are familiar with both of them (69% say they know whom May is, and 56% know of Macron), and the words they choose for each tend to be positive ones, as seen in the graphics that follow:

THERESA MAY

Strong (21%)

Credible (20%)

Influential (20%)

Strategic (16%)

Courageous (16%)

The unknowns: Abe, Modi, and Temer

The three remaining leaders are unknown to most Canadians. The percentage saying they are familiar with Shinzo Abe has increased slightly since 2014, when nearly seven-in-ten (69%) were unaware of the Japanese PM.

The same cannot be said for Narendra Modi. The Indian Prime Minister is still unknown to three-quarters of Canadians, just as he was in 2014. This is perhaps more surprising in 2018 than it was four years ago. Since then, Modi had his first state visit to Canada in 2015, and visited with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a headline grabbing trip by the Canadian leader earlier this year.

Brazilian President Michel Temer, who took office in August 2016 after the impeachment of his predecessor Dilma Rousseff, is even less well-known. Nine-in-ten Canadians say they are unsure who he is:

*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.*

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, click here.

For detailed tables from the 2014 release, click here.

Click here for the questionnaire used in this survey