

Pigskin Preferences: Canadians follow both the CFL and NFL; but would watch Super Bowl over Grey Cup

One-in-five say they follow each league, with older Canadians preferring the CFL and younger, the NFL

August 31, 2018 – As the Canadian Football League's Labour Day tradition with four games across the country continues this weekend, and as the National Football League season kicks off September 6, a new study from the Angus Reid Institute continues to find generational dynamics are at play in the battle for gridiron supremacy between the CFL and the NFL.

When it comes to Canadians' pigskin preferences, one-in-five say they follow action on both sides of the border.

While each league has the attention of three-in-ten Canadian men and one-in-ten women, it is men over the age of 55 are most likely to prefer the CFL, while male viewers under that age have a preference for American football.

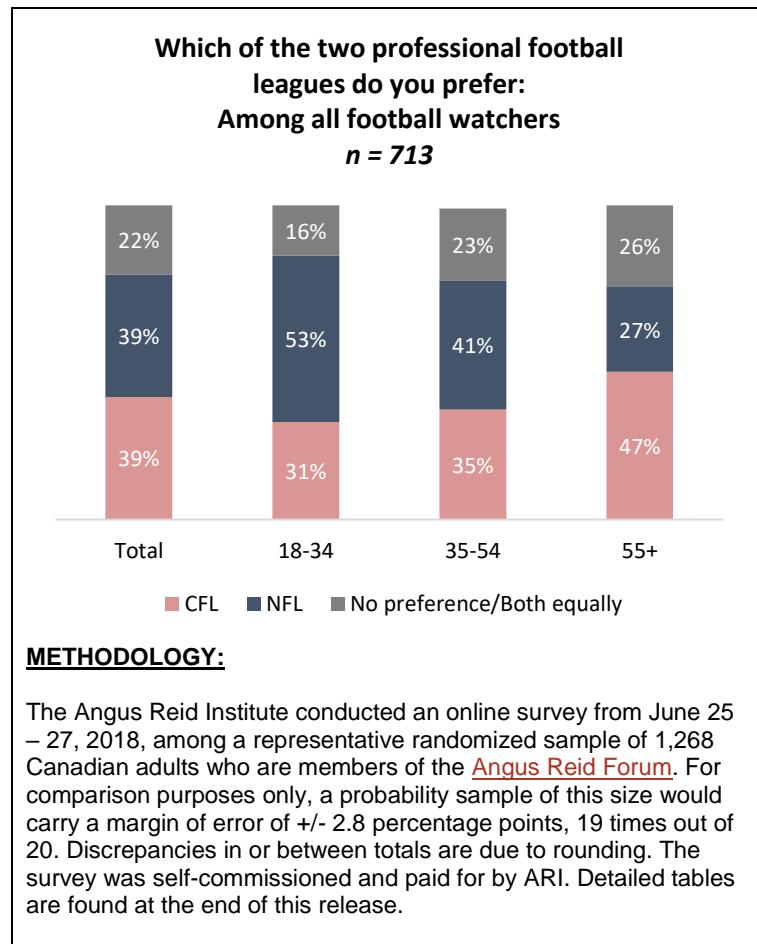
Further, more than half of Canadians (55%) say they would rather watch the NFL spectacle in February over the Canadian clash for the Grey Cup in Edmonton this November.

More Key Findings:

- Saskatchewan residents lead the country by a wide margin in their CFL interest. Half of residents (50%) say they follow Canadian football, more than twice the national average and 22 percentage points higher than second place BC and Alberta (28% respectively)
- Among those who watch the CFL, one-in-three across each age group say it has become more exciting over the past five years, while half say the product is about the same
- Overall, 56 per cent of Canadians show at least some interest in watching football. Among these, 39 per cent prefer the CFL, 39 per cent prefer the NFL and one-in-five (22%) enjoy both equally

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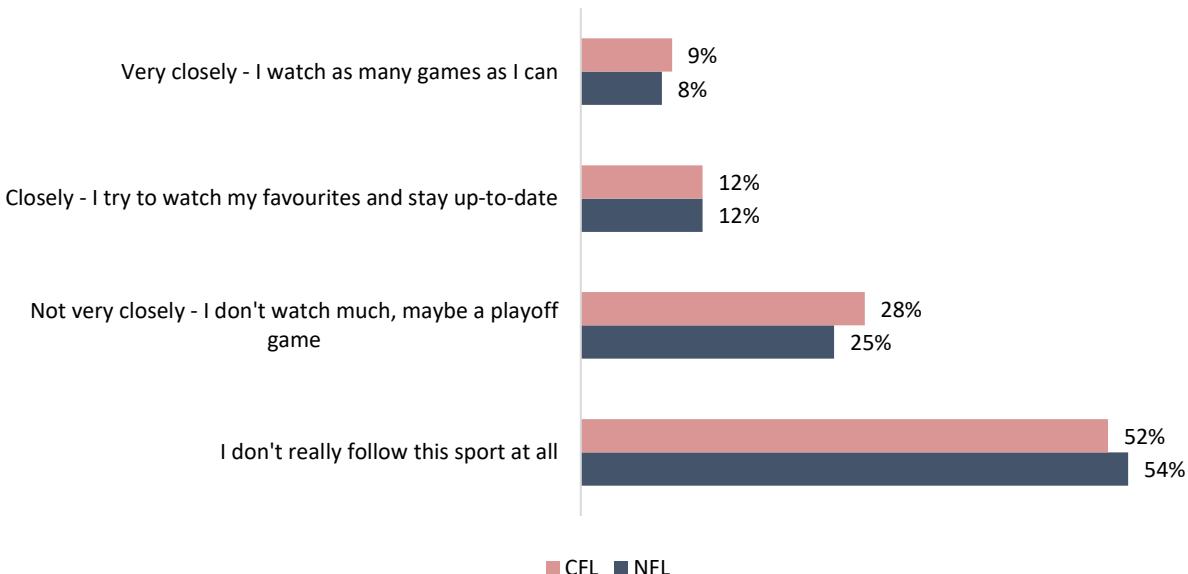
Canadian football: An old man's game?

Canadian football fans have become accustomed to “[should the Canadian Football League be worried](#)” articles over recent decades. The league, with its nine teams spread across the country, has looked for ways to market the game [to younger viewers](#).

Unfortunately, from the CFL’s perspective, new data from the Angus Reid Institute shows that – if anything – recent years have only hardened its base among male viewers 55 and older, while younger viewers continue to lean toward for the National Football League for their gridiron content. While the CFL has the benefit of a season that starts in June – and thus, no competition with the NFL for attention until the first week of September – the later weeks of the season risk being ignored by younger football fans.

At the outset, each league has a similar profile in terms of viewership. About one-in-five Canadians follow each keenly, while one-quarter are less engaged but still in the football universe. Half say they largely ignore both:

How closely do you follow each of these professional sports leagues?
All Canadians, n = 1268

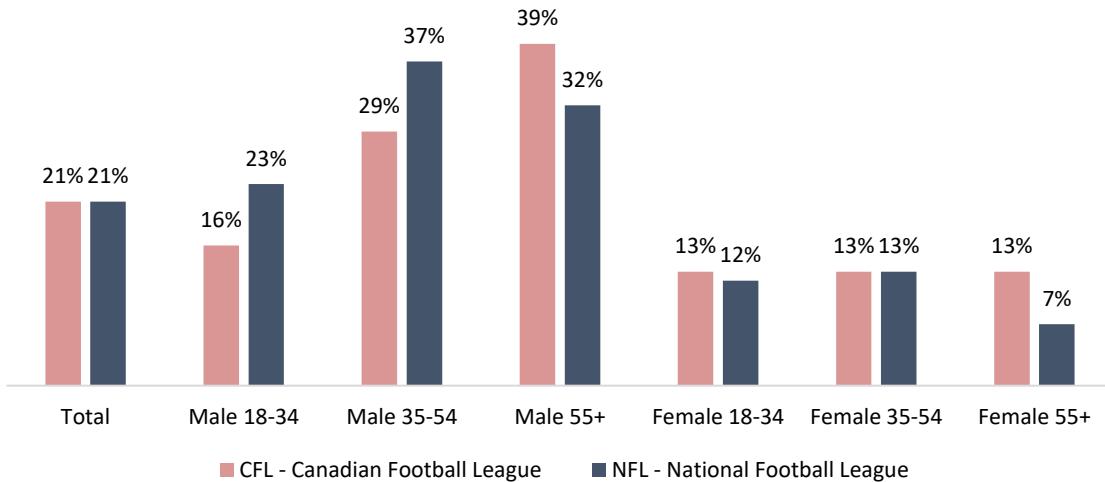


Perhaps unsurprising to most, men carry the lion’s share of football viewing in Canada. Four-in-ten men over the age of 55 (39%) say they follow the CFL. This drops to three-in-ten for those between the ages 35 and 54, and just 16 per cent among Millennials. Meanwhile, those two younger age groups are more likely to follow the NFL than the CFL.

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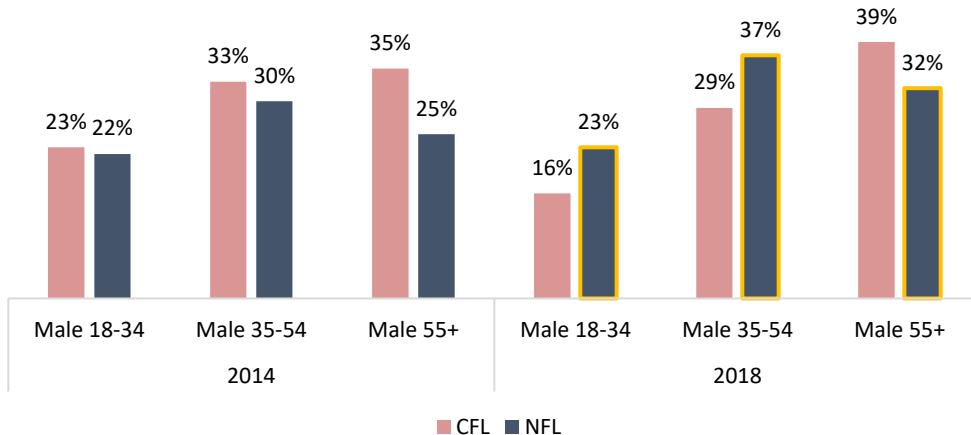
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Percentage of Canadians who follow each league regularly:



While one-in-five Canadians follow each league, it is worth noting a trend. Since the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians about their football favourites in 2014, the proportion of Canadians following the NFL has increased across each age group among men, while the number who say the same of the CFL has shrunk among men under the age of 55:

Percentage of Canadian men who follow CFL vs NFL

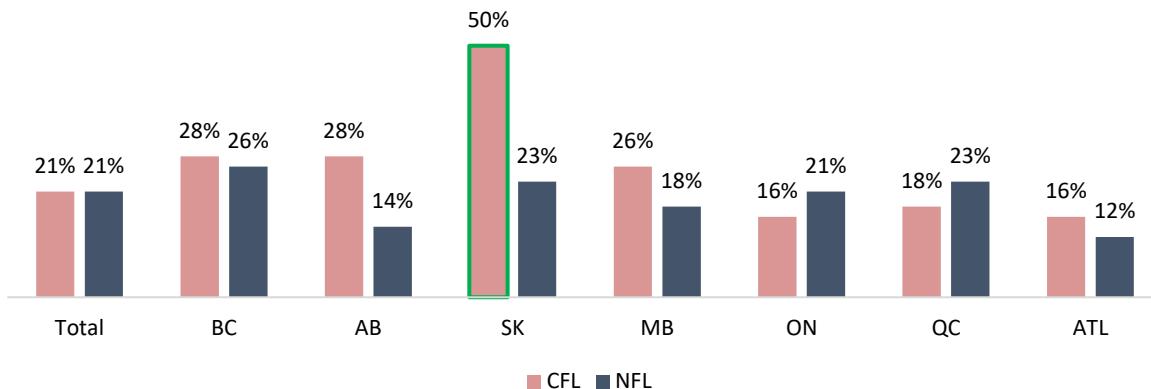


One thing the CFL doesn't have to worry about is the health of the team playing in Regina. Half of Saskatchewan residents – Rider Nation – say they follow the CFL. This is well over double the national average by province:

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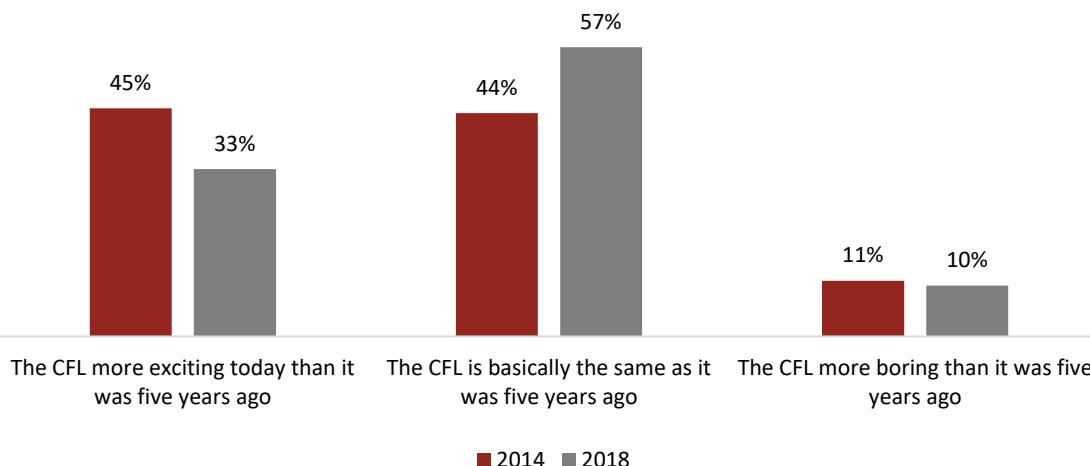
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Percentage of Canadians who follow each football league



Notably for the league, in 2014, close to half of CFL fans said that the league was more exciting than it was in the five years previous. In 2018, one-third of fans (33%) say this, while more than half say the entertainment value has remained basically the same:

Thinking about the Canadian Football League over time would you say: Among CFL watchers, n = 614



Room for both leagues in Canada

The ability for the CFL to thrive long term will certainly depend on its ability to connect with younger fans. In addition to the difficulty the league faces in competing with the NFL for this demographic's attention, it faces arguably greater existential challenges.

The impact of head injuries on players from concussive and sub-concussive impacts, leading to chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), have caused some in the football community to worry about the future of the sport. [Dwindling youth participation](#) numbers lend real evidence to this hypothesis.

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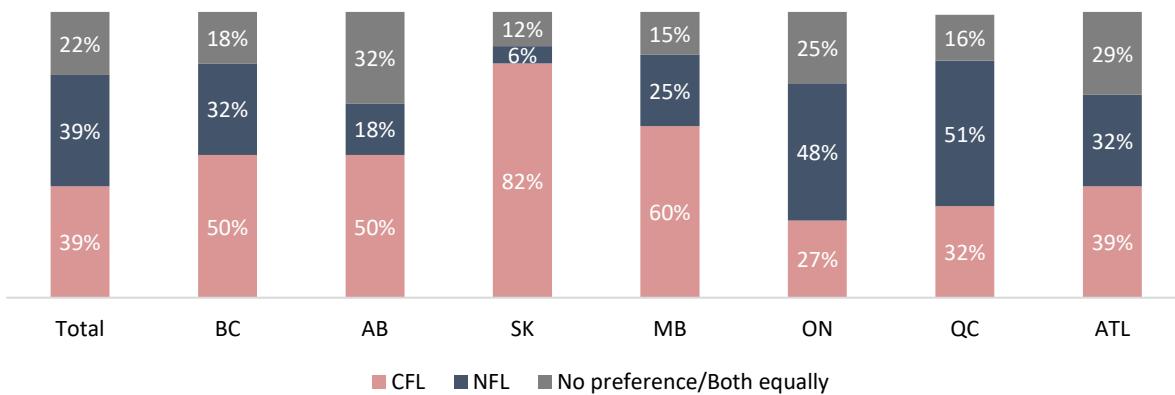
Related: Canadian experiences with concussion and sport

For now, however, Canadian fans have not lost their enthusiasm. The four-year trend shows that the number who watch the game overall, either American or Canadian, has held and even slightly increased.

While these first questions have focused on whether or not they watch each league individually, those who watch either form of football were then asked which league they prefer, or whether they like both equally. Exactly 39 per cent choose the NFL and CFL, respectively, while one-in-five would be happy if either game was on.

Regional variances are pronounced. Ontario and Quebec football fans are much more likely to prefer the NFL, while the prairies lean massively in the other direction:

Thinking about football, which of these two professional leagues do you prefer?
Among all football watchers, n = 713

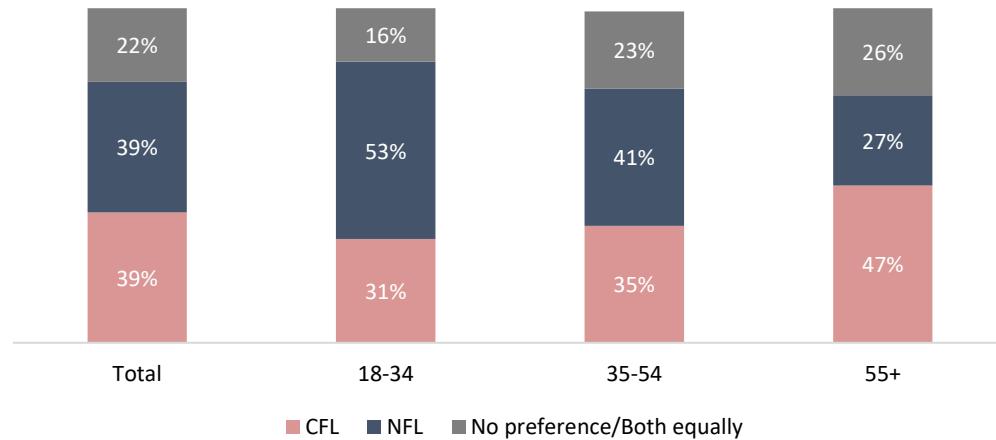


Here, the generational story is perhaps most pronounced. Half of football fans under age 35 prefer the NFL (53%) while half of football fans 55 and over prefer the CFL (47%). The questions for the CFL then appear to be: Will the next generation grow into the league? And how can it best draw them to it?

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Which of the two professional football leagues do you prefer:
Among all football watchers, n = 713



Younger fans would watch the Super Bowl, older fans, the Grey Cup

Each league provides quite a spectacle when it comes to the championship celebration. Both the CFL and NFL have numerous interested cities vying to host their final game, and each has a week of events leading up to game itself.

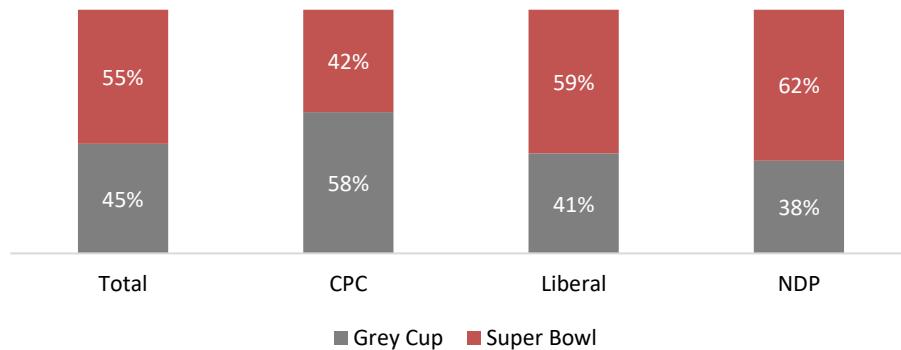
While the Super Bowl is unquestionably the bigger event, that doesn't mean all Canadians would rather watch that game rather than the battle for Canadian supremacy in Edmonton this November. In fact, 45 per cent of Canadians say they would rather watch the Grey Cup than the Super Bowl.

The same age and regional trends are at play in responses to this question, so here is a slightly different angle: Past Conservative voters lean toward the Grey Cup, while six-in-ten Liberal and NDP supporters prefer the Super Bowl. This, likely a product of the heavy CFL support among Albertan and Saskatchewanian football fans:

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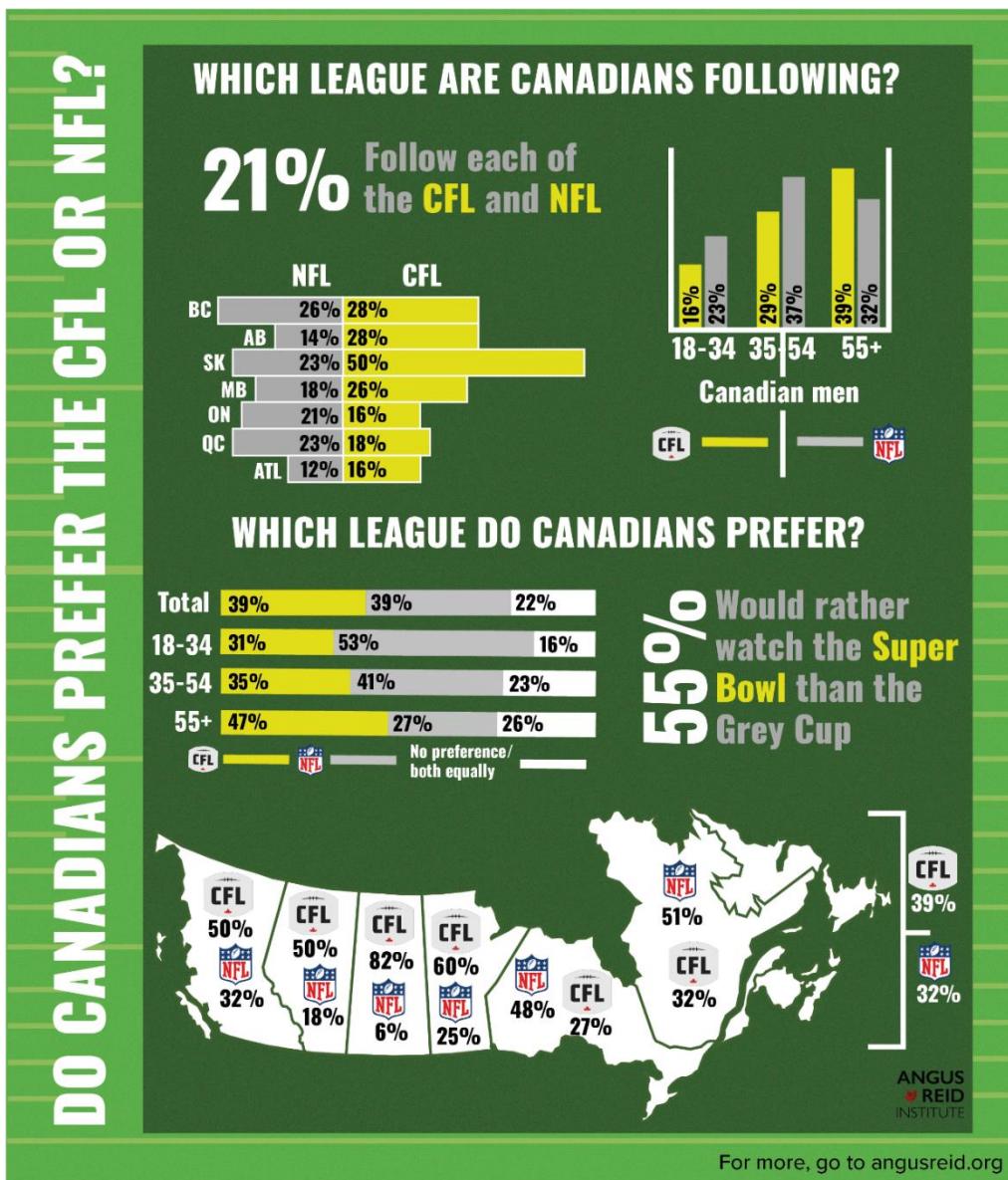
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Which game would you watch, if you could only choose one?
Among all football watchers, n = 713
By 2015 Federal Vote



While the Super Bowl's expensive commercials and the halftime show are a big draw for many Canadians, it's worth noting that three artists have played both the Grey Cup and Super Bowl halftime shows – Shania Twain, Black Eyed Peas, and Lenny Kravitz.

For a visual summary of this report, please view the infographic below.



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](#).

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