

Ahead of trial, three-quarters say Canada-China relationship will not be repaired until Michaels' release

Slight majority now say Canadian athletes, coaches, and fans should boycott 2022 Olympics in Beijing

March 16, 2021 – Amid news from [Chinese state-affiliated media](#) that the trials of detained Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor will begin “soon”, their fellow citizens say Sino-Canadian relations cannot improve until the men are released.

“The Michaels”, as they have come to be known, have been in Chinese detention since December 2018. Now, with talk of a Canadian “reset” on China policy, new public opinion data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds 77 per cent of Canadians of the view that any warming of relations between the two countries is dependent on China setting Spavor and Kovrig free.

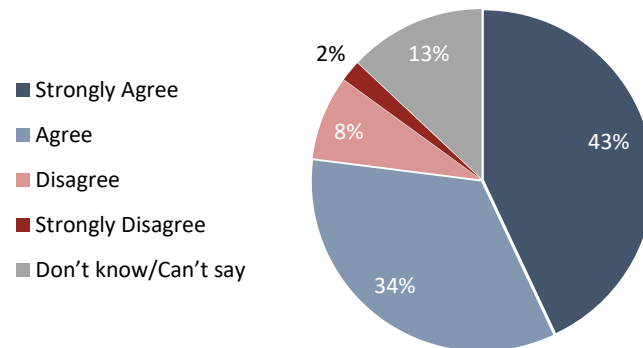
Canadian opinions of the Chinese state remain sour: 14 per cent say they have a favourable view of China (unchanged from last year) while only one-in-ten (11%) would advocate for closer trade ties with the nation.

A slight majority are also in little mood for Beijing's upcoming Olympics. Just over half (56%) say team Canada should sit the 2022 games out.

More Key Findings:

- Three-quarters of Canadians agree that China's treatment of Uighur Muslims in the country should be called a genocide. The House of Commons recently voted to declare it as such.
- Four-in-five Canadians (79%) now say that respect for human rights and the rule of law should supersede trade and investment opportunities in Canada's dealings with China. This is a 17-point increase in the number holding this view since 2019
- Very few Canadians feel that the Chinese government has offered an honest account of what happened during the COVID-19 outbreak. Just nine per cent feel the Chinese leadership have given a fair and accurate depiction of events.

Agree vs Disagree "Unless Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig are released from detention in China, the two countries cannot have a good relationship"



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from February 26 – March 3, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 5,004 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 1.4 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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About ARI

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.

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Sino-Canadian relationship: no improvement without Michaels' release

After more than two years of widely condemned detainment by Chinese authorities, Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor will face their first trial "soon", according to a state-run Chinese newspaper. The two men have reportedly been charged with stealing state secrets. This is the latest development in a diplomatic ordeal that has strained the relationship between Canada and its second largest trading partner since the end of 2018.

Michael Kovrig, a former Canadian diplomat, and Michael Spavor, a businessman based in Beijing, were detained not long after Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's CFO, was arrested in Vancouver at the request of the United States on allegations of sanctions violations in December 2018. The arrest of the two Canadian men is widely viewed as retaliatory and has been described as "baseless". The extradition hearings of Meng, herself, began in January as B.C. courts decide whether or not to transfer her to authorities in the United States.

The dual legal proceedings have created tension and myriad complications in the Sino-Canadian relationship. In 2019, China blocked both Canadian canola oil and pork imports, and Canada has repeatedly postponed a decision to allow Chinese telecom giant Huawei to participate in building its 5G infrastructure.

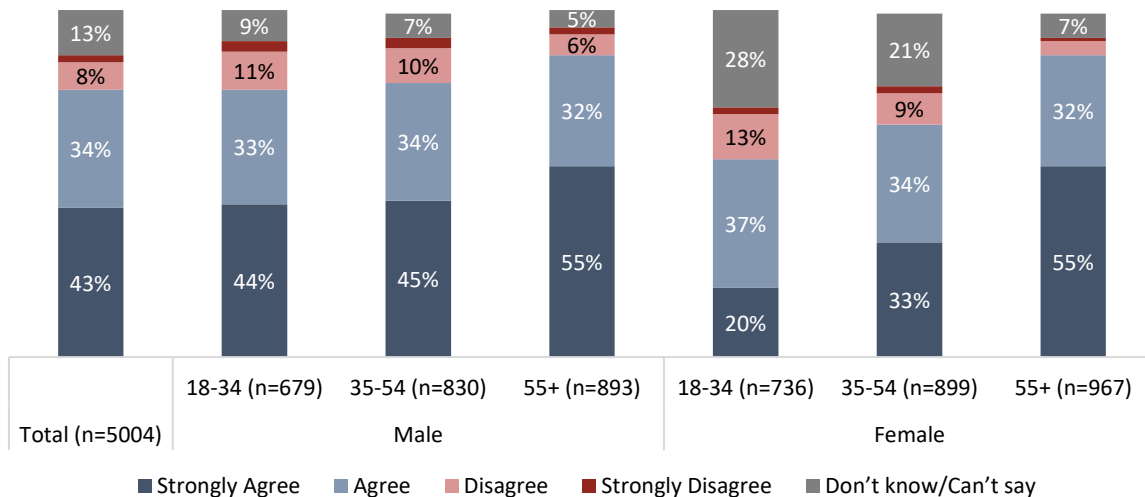
Canadians are overwhelmingly of the view that Canada and China cannot break this diplomatic impasse without Kovrig and Spavor both being released. Three-quarters (77%) say that until this happens the relationship will be strained. Few disagree, while 13 per cent are unsure.

Canadians 55 years of age and older are particularly stern in their assessments, with more than half strongly agreeing that the two Michaels need to come home before a cooperative connection can once again be firmly established.

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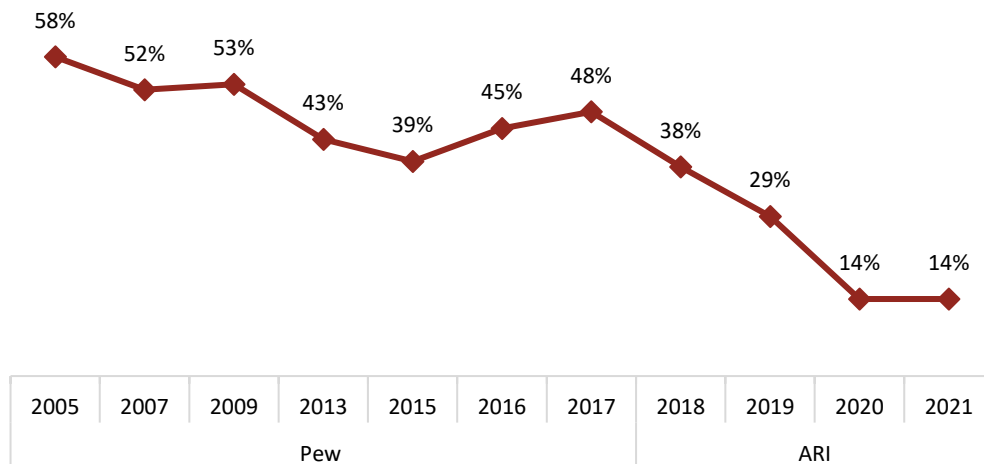
Agree vs. Disagree:
"Unless Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig are released from detention in China, the two countries cannot have a good relationship"



Opinions of China continue to hover at record low

Amid this strife and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, opinions of China have plummeted. Canadians overwhelmingly say that China's version of events surrounding the outbreak is untruthful ([see detailed tables](#)) and for the second year in a row, just 14 per cent say they view that nation favourably. This represents a 34-point drop compared to 2017 when half (48%) viewed China in a positive light:

Canadians who hold a favourable view of China



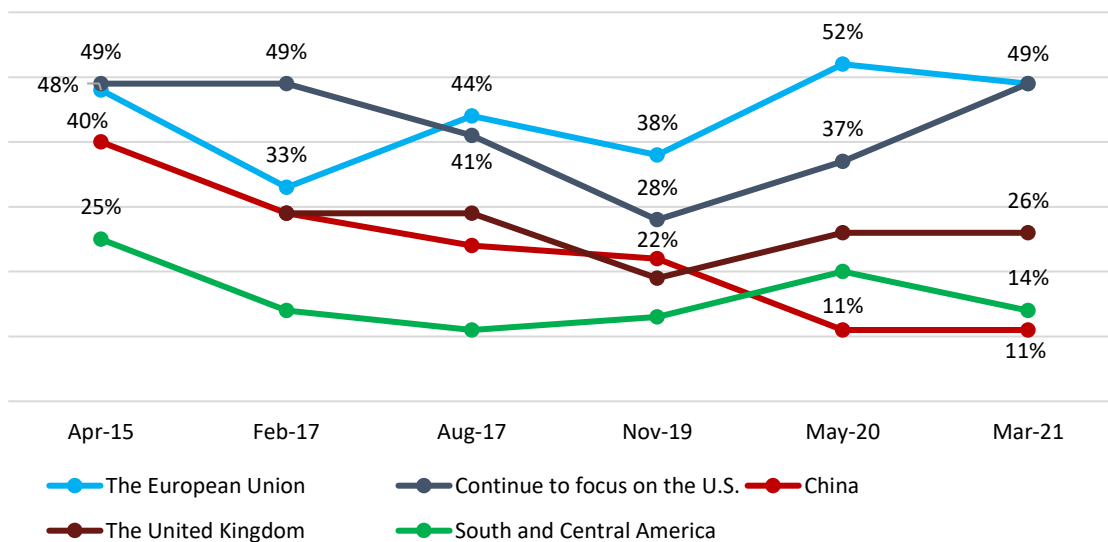
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Few want to improve trade with China, US priority surges post-Trump

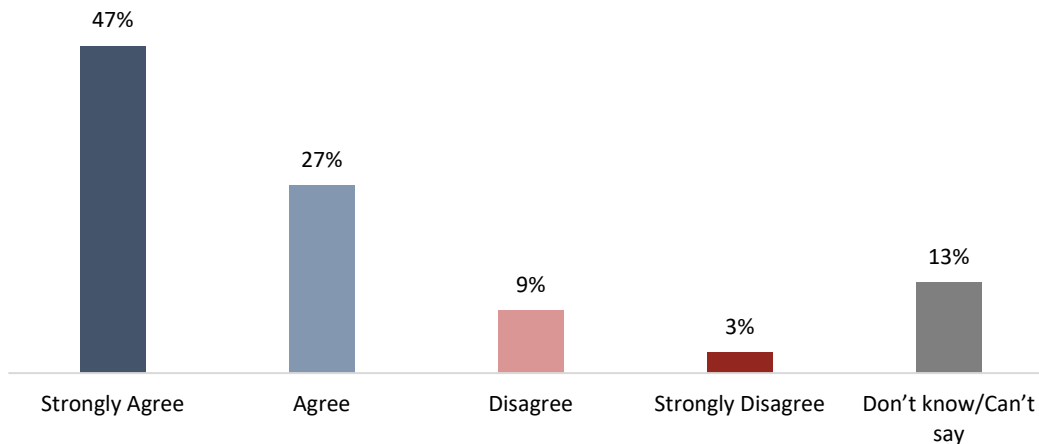
After four years of challenging engagements with the Trump administration in the United States, the departure of an unpopular president has given Canadians renewed enthusiasm for economic cooperation with that nation. Half of Canadians now say that this country should pursue increased trade ties with the United States (49%) and the European Union (49%) while just 11 per cent say that they would like to see economic cooperation with China as an area of focus. Just six years ago 40 per cent of Canadians said China should be a priority:

As we look to the future, with which of the following countries or regions do you think Canada should try to develop closer trade ties? (Select up to two)



Further, Canadians are skeptical of allowing Chinese participation in sensitive industries like telecommunications and finance. Three-quarters say they would prohibit Chinese companies from investing in these industries:

Agree vs. Disagree:
**"Canada should prohibit Chinese investment in sensitive industries
 such as finance and telecommunications"**



Desire to prioritize human rights over trade with China at a new high

Another aspect of the downward trend in public opinion of China is the perception of the state as a human rights abuser.

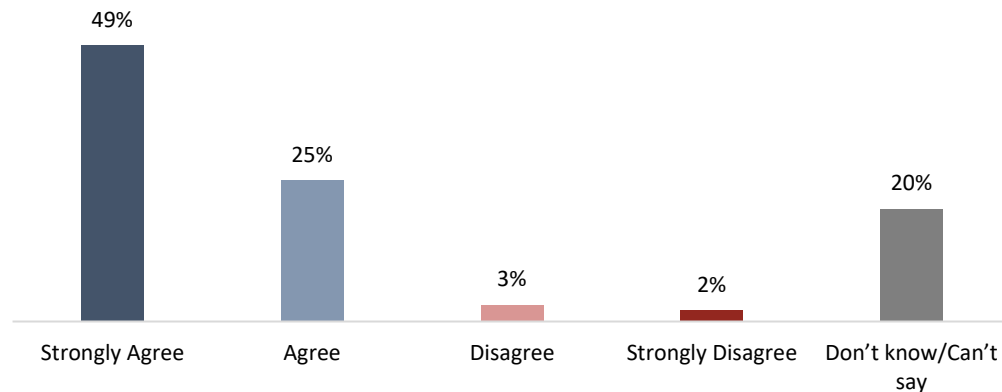
The most extreme example of this is the ongoing situation with the Uighur Muslim population within that country. Reports began emerging in 2014 that Chinese authorities had begun implementing a policy of detaining members of this minority ethnic group. Reports of abuse and forced sterilization have been refuted by the Chinese government which says that the network of camps is necessary to prevent religious extremism. The United States declared these actions a genocide in January and have since been joined by Canada and the Netherlands in this opinion.

While one-in-five Canadians (20%) say they do not know enough about this issue to say, the rest are near-unanimously in agreement that the situation amounts to a genocide:

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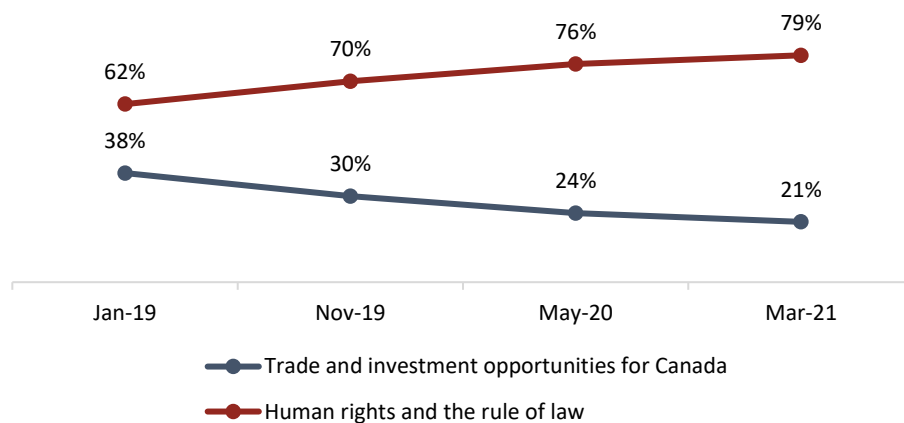
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**Agree vs. Disagree:
"China's actions towards the Uighur minority in their country
should be defined as genocide"**



Alongside this view is another increase in the percentage of Canadians saying that Canada should prioritize human rights and the rule of law in its relationship with China more than trade and investment opportunities.

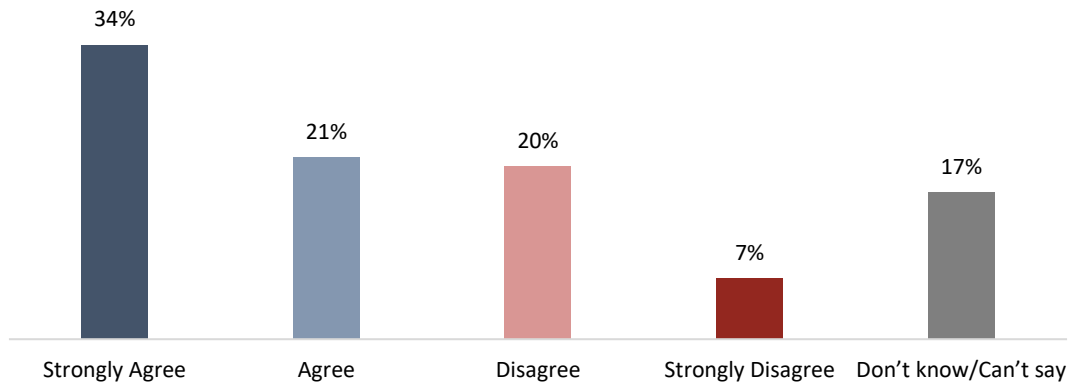
**Thinking about Canada's overall relationship with China,
what should be more important to Canada:**



More than half say Canada should boycott Olympics in Beijing

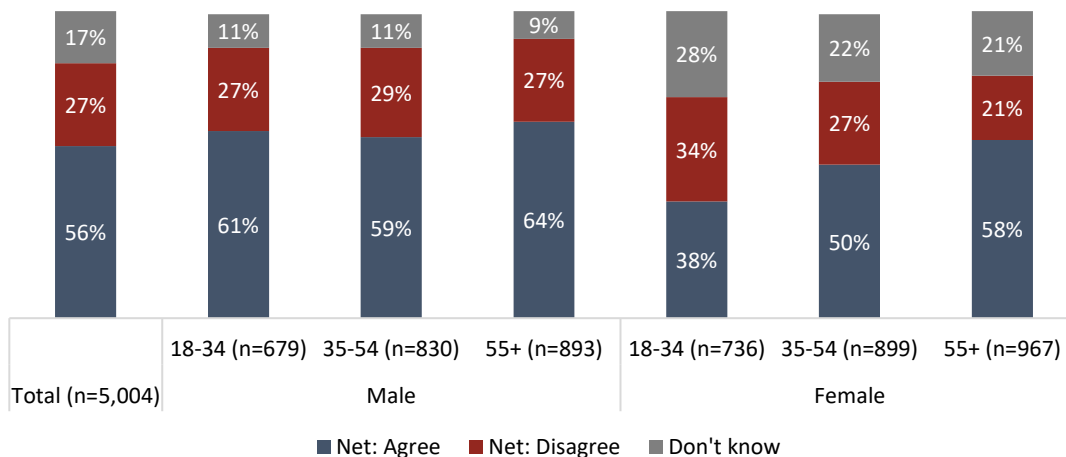
With so many contentious issues swirling and diminishing the Sino-Canadian relationship, more than half of Canadians (55%) are now of the opinion that Canada should boycott next years Olympic games. One-quarter (27%) disagree and would still send athletes to compete:

**Agree vs. Disagree:
"Canadians (athletes, coaches, fans etc.) should boycott the 2022
Olympics in Beijing"**



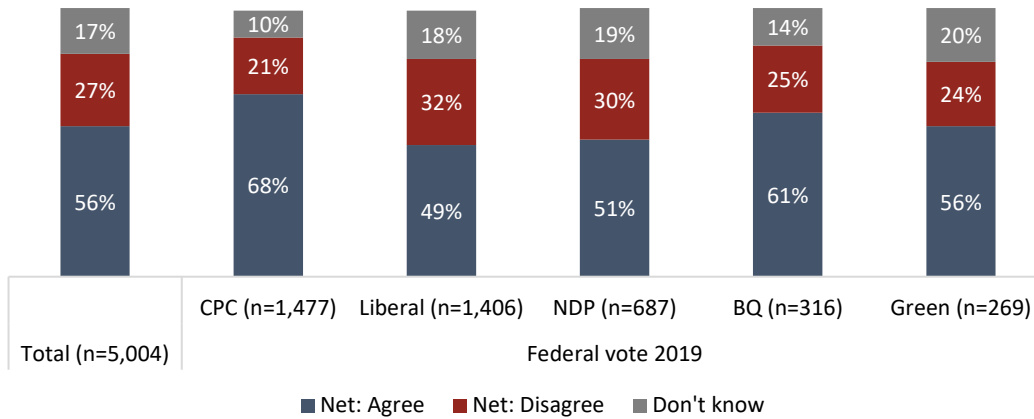
Opinions regarding Canada's participation in the Olympics are stronger among men, who are more likely than women across all age groups to say that athletes, coaches, and fans should pull out of the event. While women of all ages are more likely to agree with this than disagree, they're also more likely to say they're not sure what the best path is:

**Agree vs Disagree
"Canadians (athletes, coaches, fans etc.) should boycott the 2022
Olympics in Beijing"**



Past Conservative voters are most ardently in favour of skipping the Olympics. Among this group, two-thirds (68%) say Canada should not take part, while half of past Liberal and NDP voters agree:

Agree vs Disagree
"Canadians (athletes, coaches, fans etc.) should boycott the 2022 Olympics in Beijing"



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