

Credit Check: Canadians say U.S. deserves as much credit for Two Michaels' release as their own country

Favourability of China continues to drop; just one-in-ten Canadians hold favourable views of the country

October 7, 2021 – Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig are adjusting to their lives in Canada after more than 1,000 days in Chinese prison.

Their release happened hours after the U.S. deferred Meng Wanzhou's legal case. Now, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians believe that action by the U.S. helped the Michaels come home as much as any Canadian efforts. Equal numbers are willing to assign credit to Canada (68%) and its southern neighbour (71%) for Spavor and Kovrig's release.

The geopolitical saga began with the arrest of Meng, a senior executive with Chinese telecommunication company Huawei, in Vancouver in 2018. Spavor and Kovrig were arrested separately days later in [apparent retaliation](#) by China.

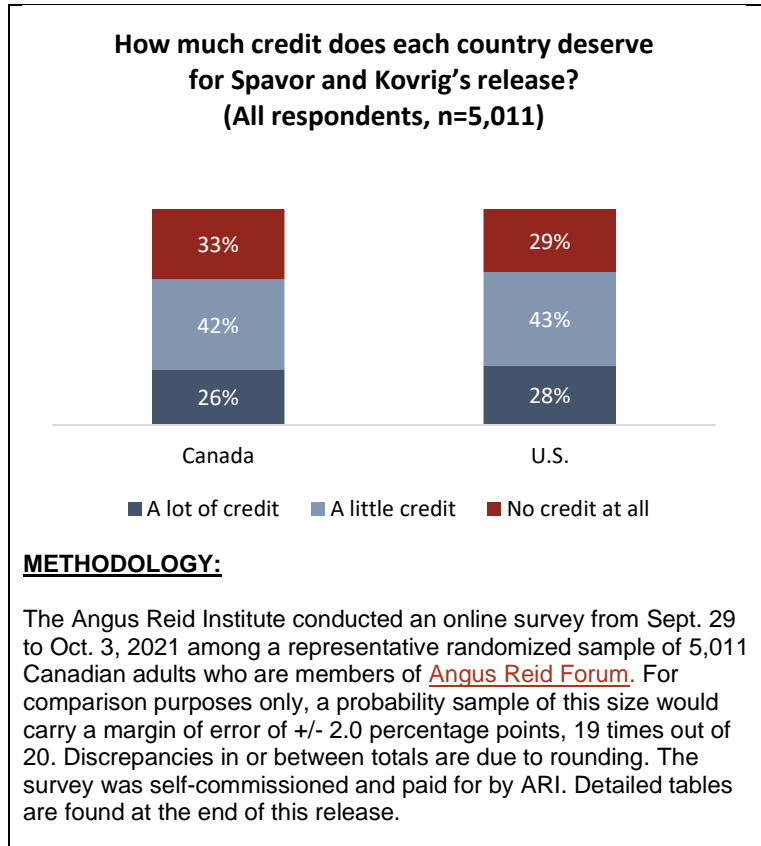
While the U.S. and China won't acknowledge the linkage between Meng's deferred financial fraud case in U.S. courts and the subsequent arrest in China, trial for espionage and release of Spavor and Kovrig, the timing of the events provides more than ample fuel for speculation.

Regardless of who is more responsible for ending the near three-year saga, Canadian opinions of the country that imprisoned Spavor and Kovrig continues to decline. Just one-in-ten Canadians hold a favourable view of China, a decline of four points from earlier this year and the lowest level of favourability since 2005.

Against this backdrop, three-quarters of Canadians (76%) would prefer Canada prioritize the rule of law and human rights in the country's future dealings with China over any trade or investment opportunities.

More Key Findings:

- Three-in-five (58%) Canadians believe Canada should have intervened sooner in the Meng case.
- Half of Canadians (51%) have a very unfavourable view of China.



CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

- Those who believe Canada should prioritize human rights and the rule of law in its relationship with China have increased by 14 percentage points since 2019.

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.*

INDEX

Part One: Who do Canadians credit for the Michaels' release?

Part Two: Favourability of China reaches new low

Part One: Who do Canadians credit for the Michaels' release?

Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were taken into custody by Chinese authorities in December 2018, in [apparent response](#) to the arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou nine days earlier at the Vancouver International Airport. (China [continues to deny](#) any connection between the two arrests.) The Two Michaels were eventually charged with [espionage](#); Meng, meanwhile, was being held by Canadian authorities because she was wanted in the U.S., where she was charged with [financial fraud](#).

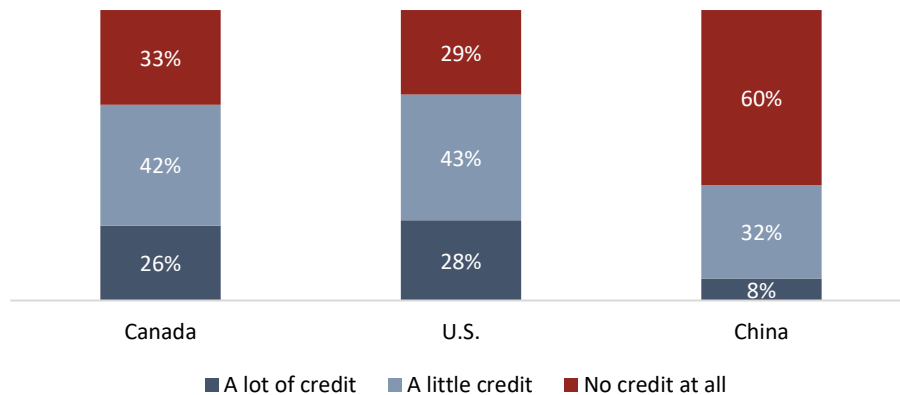
More than 1,000 days later, Kovrig and Spavor were [set free](#) and allowed to return to Canada. Hours earlier, Meng had reached a deferred prosecution agreement with the U.S. government and the Canadian court dropped [her extradition case](#), allowing her to return to China. While China has consistently denied arresting Kovrig and Spavor in response to Meng's own arrest, critics have called the Canadians' detention ["hostage diplomacy."](#)

[Canadian authorities](#) say they had been applying pressure for months to get the two released before Meng's case resolved, but Canadians themselves give about equal credit to their southern neighbour as they do their own government. One-quarter say Canada (26%) and three-in-ten say the U.S. (28%) deserve "a lot of credit" for Spavor and Kovrig's release. One-third say Canada deserves "no credit at all":

CONTACT:

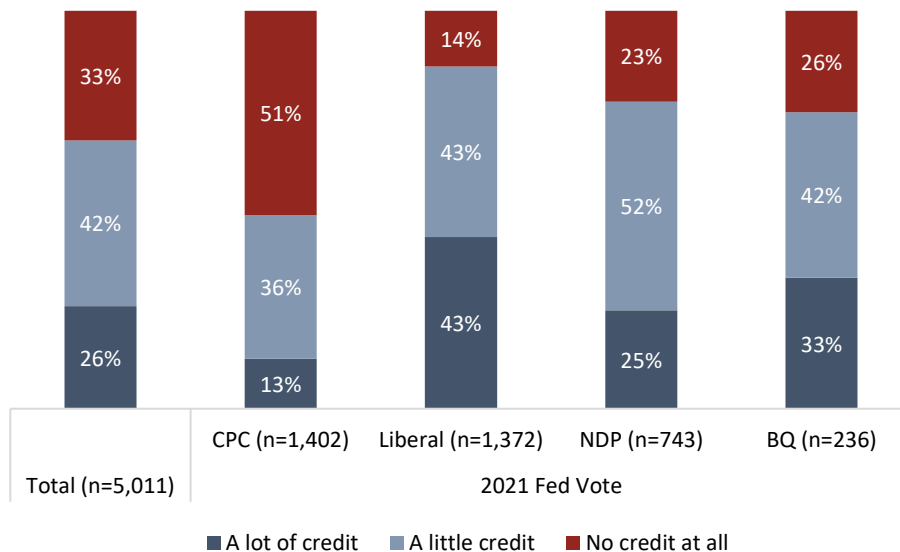
Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

How much credit does each country deserve for Spavor and Kovrig's release? (All respondents, n=5,011)



There are significant political divides over how much praise Canada deserves. Those who voted Conservative in last month's election are much more reluctant to give Canada credit. Half of CPC voters (51%) believe their own country was not responsible for the Michaels' release. Voters for the Liberals are most likely to say Canada deserves "a lot of credit":

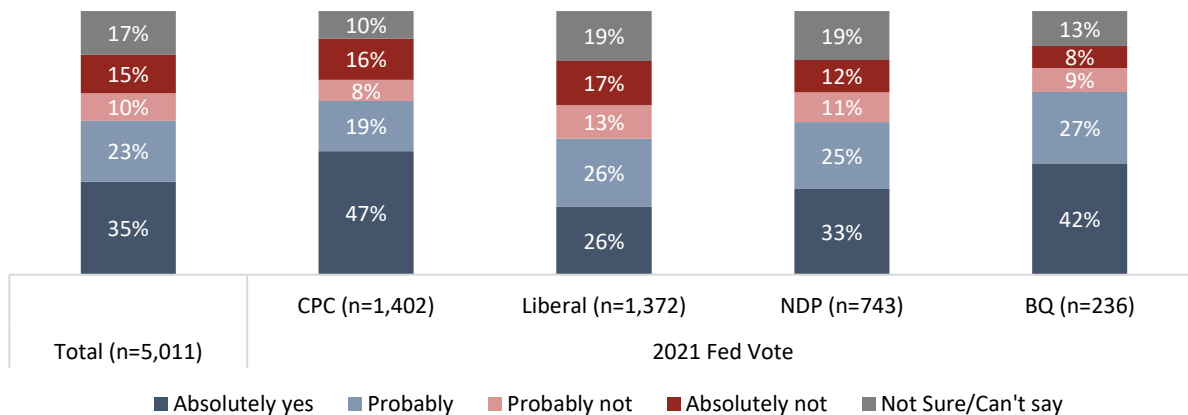
How much credit does Canada deserve for Spavor and Kovrig's release?



Though the U.S. also [denied](#) any linkage between Meng's case and Spavor and Kovrig's release, the Canadians were free to go just hours after the Huawei executive's case was deferred by the U.S. Against this backdrop, three-in-five Canadians (58%) believe Canada should have intervened in Meng's case sooner, including 35 per cent who say the country absolutely should have done so.

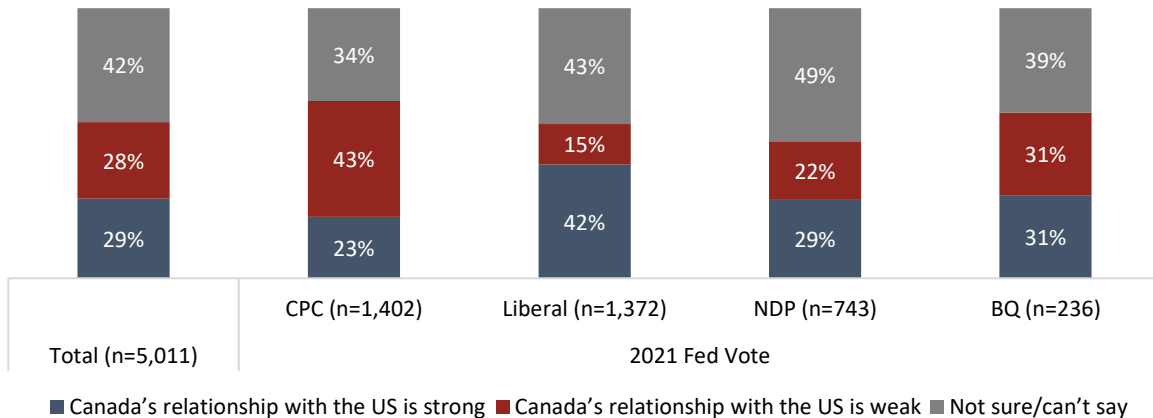
The desire for earlier action is strongest among CPC voters, of whom half (47%) say Canada should have absolutely stepped in earlier. On the other side of the political spectrum, high-profile members of the Liberal universe including parliamentarians and diplomats such as former Liberal foreign affairs minister Lloyd Axworthy [called on the current Trudeau government to step in sooner](#). Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that fully half (52%) of recent Liberal voters also believe the Canadian government should have acted earlier.

Given that Spavor and Kovrig were released within hours of the agreement between the U.S. and Meng, do you believe Canada should have intervened in the Meng case sooner?



The implications of the Two Michaels' case on the relationship between Canada and China, and [Huawei's business dealings](#) here, remain to be seen, but Canadians are split as to what Meng's deferral means for Canada's relationship with the U.S. As many people say the two country's relationship is strong (29%) as those who say it's weak (28%), while most aren't sure. Liberal voters have rosiest view of the Canada-U.S. relationship, while a plurality of CPC voters believe the relationship is poor:

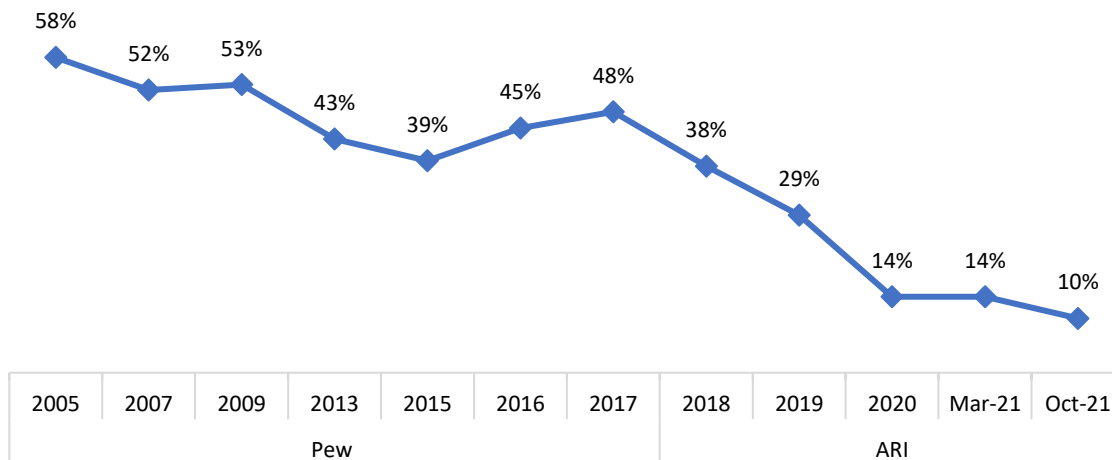
In your opinion, is the plea deal between Meng and the US government a sign that:



Part Two: Favourability of China reaches new low

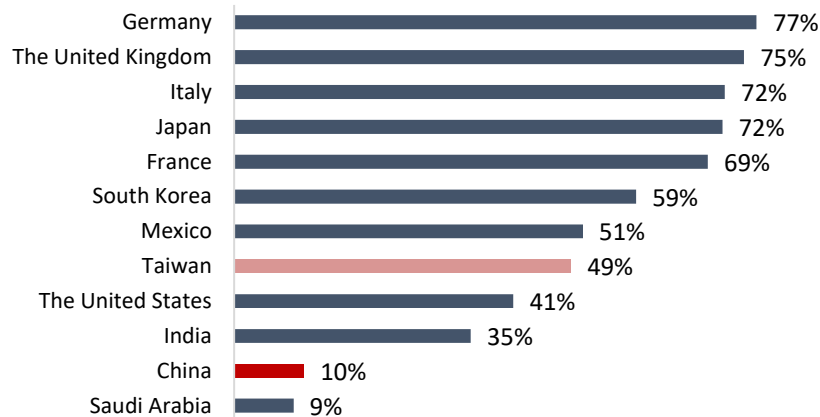
Canadian opinions of China continue to decline. Only one-in-ten (10%) say they currently have a favourable or very favourable view of the country:

Canadians who hold a favourable view of China



Canadian perceptions of China have diminished precipitously in the last three years. Before the Michaels' detention, two-in-five (38%) respondents reported a favourable view of China. The public also appears to draw a sharp distinction between China and Taiwan, the independent country that China wants to annex. Half (49%) of Canadians hold a favourable view of Taiwan.

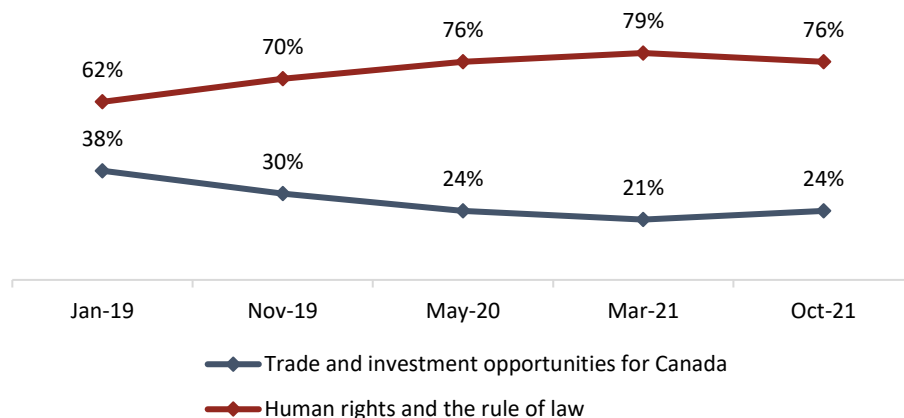
**Overall, would you say you have a favourable or unfavourable view of each of the following countries?
(Total favourable shown, all respondents n=5,011)**



Before the Michaels-Meng saga, Canada and China were discussing a free trade agreement. Initiated in 2016, the talks were abandoned last year as Spavor and Kovrig remained in prison. Now it appears that Ottawa is considering new measures to counter potential economic threats to Canada’s national security, including imposing requirements for foreign investments and takeovers – both longstanding concerns in Canada’s trading relationship with China.

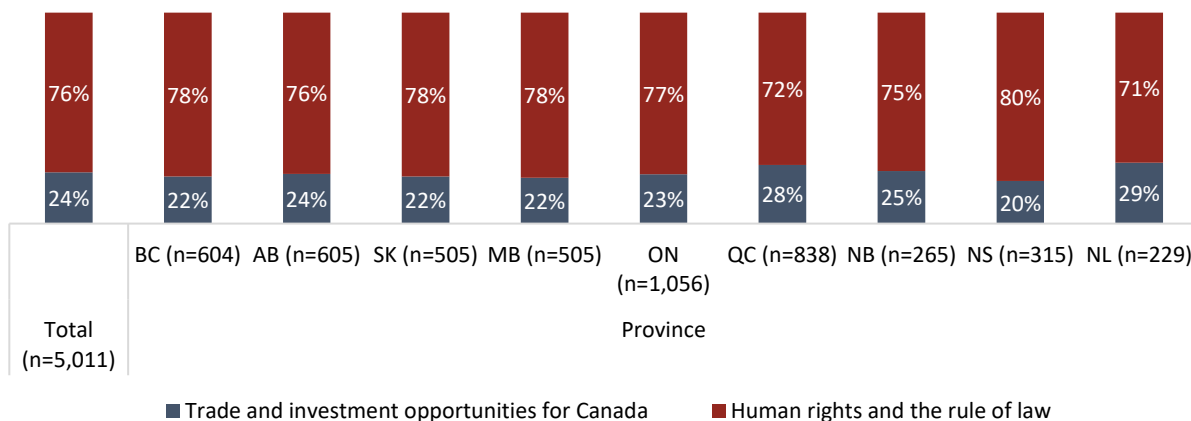
Economics are a secondary consideration for most Canadians when it comes to China. Only one-quarter (24%) say trade and investment opportunities should be Canada’s top priority when it comes to dealing with the world’s second largest economy. Instead, three-quarters (76%) say human rights and the rule of law should be more important. That represents a 14-point increase from the percentage of Canadians who said that in January 2019, one month into Spavor and Kovrig’s imprisonment.

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



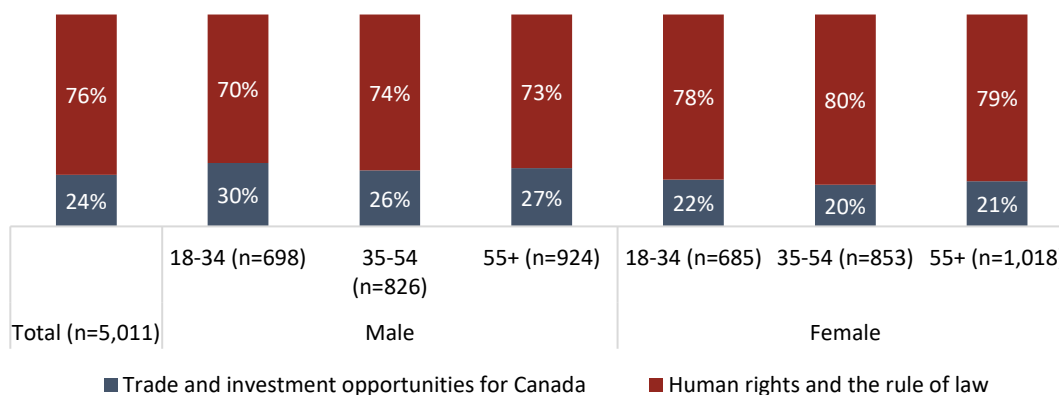
While at least seven-in-ten of people from every province believe human rights should supersede trade considerations when Canada deals with China, those in Quebec (28%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (29%) are more willing to let trade trump the rule of law:

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



Demographically, opinions vary slightly. Men prioritize trade with China at a higher rate than women, but at least seven-in-ten of every demographic believe human rights should be Canada's first consideration:

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



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