

Three-in-five Canadians want less trade with China, but many express concern about the economic costs of taking a stand

Three-quarters of Canadians believe there's nothing Canada can do to change China's behaviour

January 10, 2022 – As the upcoming Winter Olympics in Beijing intensifies the international spotlight on China, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds many worrying about the economic costs of standing up to the world's second largest economy.

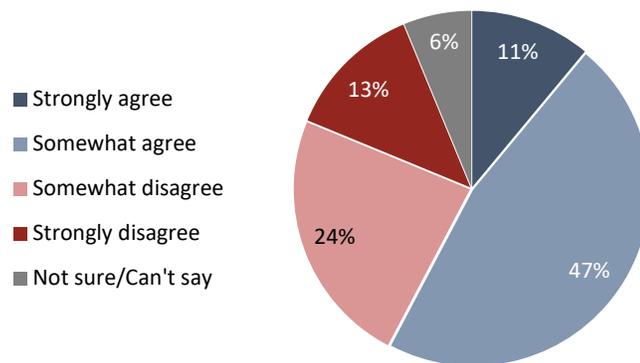
Canada will not be sending delegates to the Winter Olympics in February, the first time since 1980 that the country has undertaken a diplomatic boycott. While half of Canadians [supported the move in November](#), three-in-five (58%) worry such diplomatic actions will come with negative consequences to Canada's economy. There are signs that the diplomatic boycott may be the beginning of a new era in the Sino-Canadian relationship as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau brings in deputy minister of National Defence [Jody Thomas](#) as his new national security adviser. Thomas, the former commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, has been described as "[hawkish](#)" on China.

As of 2020, China represented over \$100 billion worth of trade into and out of Canada. Even so, a majority of Canadians prefer their country would deal with China less. Three-in-five (61%) say they want Canada to trade less with China, while one-quarter (24%) say the country is as good a trade partner as any.

Of Canadians who want their country to deal with China less, three-in-ten (28%) believe it's possible to do so without negatively affecting Canada's economy at all. A further three-in-five (60%) believe Canada could reduce its reliance on China for trade with a minor economic impact.

Still, many wonder if diplomatic actions taken by Canada would make any difference at all. Three-quarters (73%) believe it's unrealistic that anything Canada does will change China's behaviour. Past Conservative voters are the most likely believe Canada is powerless to affect China (79%) while past Liberal (25%) and NDP voters (24%) are the most likely to disagree.

**Agreement - I'm worried about the economic consequences of standing up to China
(All respondents, n=2,005)**



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Nov. 26-29, 2021, among a representative randomized sample of 2,005 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 +/- 2 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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More Key Findings:

- Those in Quebec are the most likely (30%) to call China as good a trade partner as any other country. Meanwhile, British Columbians are the most likely (68%) to prefer Canada trade with China less.
- A majority (54%) of those who say we should prioritize human rights when dealing with China worry over the costs to Canada's economy if Canada were to get in China's way.
- Conservative voters are the most likely of any party's supporters to say Canada should prioritize trade over human rights in its dealings with China (28%), but also the most likely to wish Canada would trade with China less (69%).
- One-in-five (21%) of those who worry of the economic consequences of standing up to China say it's impossible to cut trade ties with the country without a significant cost to Canada's economy.

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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- **Most believe Canada could cut trade with China without affecting economy**

Part One: Three-quarters want Canada to prioritize human rights, rule of law in dealings with China

In February, Beijing will become the first city to host a Winter Olympics after previously hosting a Summer Games. Much has changed in the 14 years since the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Then [half of Canadians](#) held a favourable view of China, a number that has plummeted to [16 per cent in polling late last year](#) by ARI.

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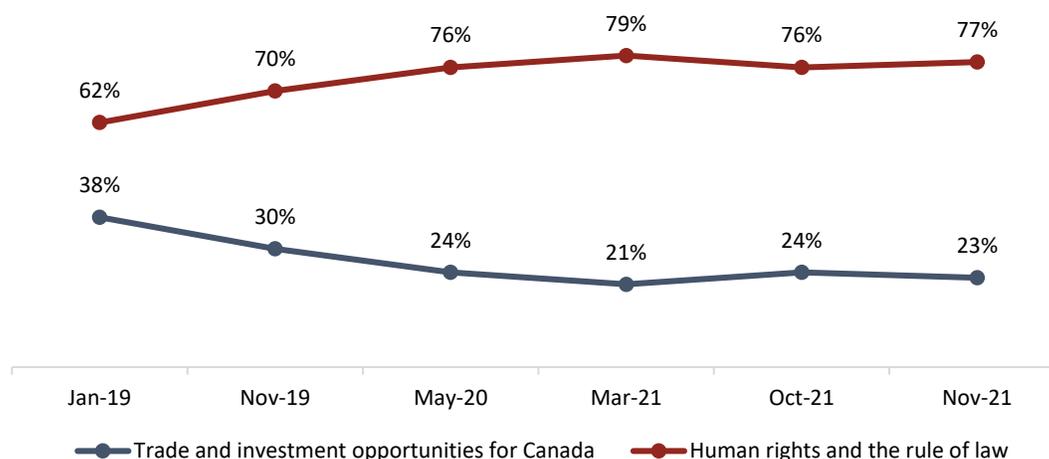
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Related: [53% of Canadians would not send diplomats to 2022 Olympic Games; two-in-five would keep athletes home](#)

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, too, appears to be shifting his stance on the Middle Kingdom. Last year, he announced Canada would follow the lead of the U.K., U.S. and Australia and not send delegates to the February Olympics. Then he appointed deputy minister of National Defence [Jody Thomas](#) to be his new national security adviser. Thomas has been described as [“hawkish”](#) on China and spoke in the past of the [“threat” China poses to Canada’s interests in the Arctic](#), as well as deploying the navy in the South China Sea to [counter Beijing’s claims to the key transport artery](#).

As Canadians impression of China has declined, the number of Canadians who would prioritize moral issues and concerns in the two country’s relationship has increased. This notably against the backdrop of increased scrutiny of Chinese treatment of the Uyghur population in the western Xinjiang province – treatment which was [officially labelled a genocide by the Canadian parliament](#) last year. Three quarters (77%) say Canada should prioritize human rights and the rule of law in its dealing with China:

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

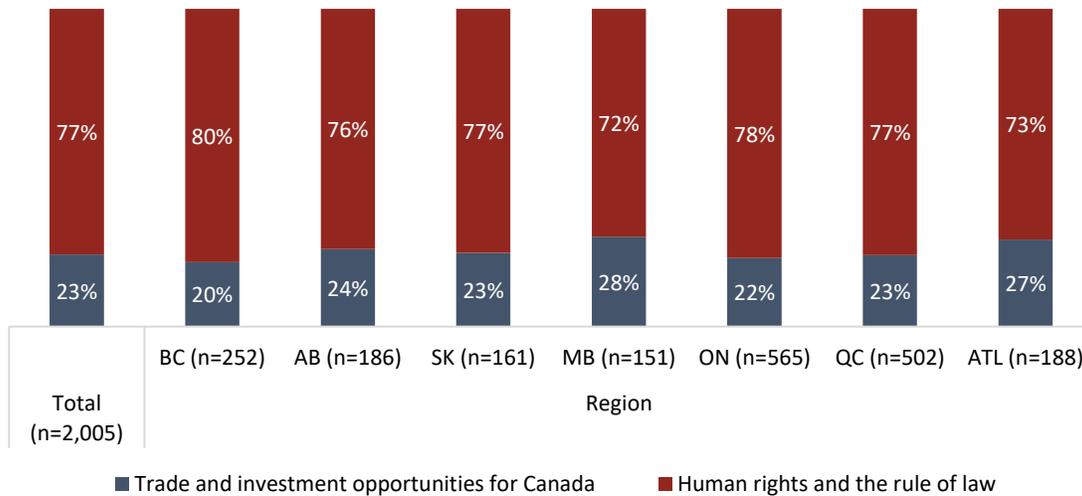


There is slight variation in opinion across Canada by region and by gender. While Manitoba and Atlantic Canada are more likely to prioritize trade, seven-in-ten in every region still prioritize human rights over economic concerns:

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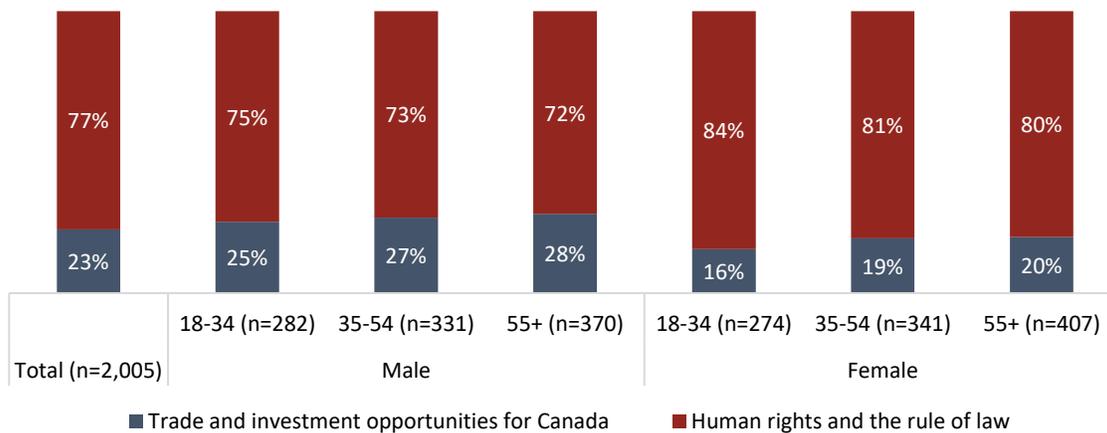
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Thinking about Canada’s overall relationship with China, what should be more important to Canada:



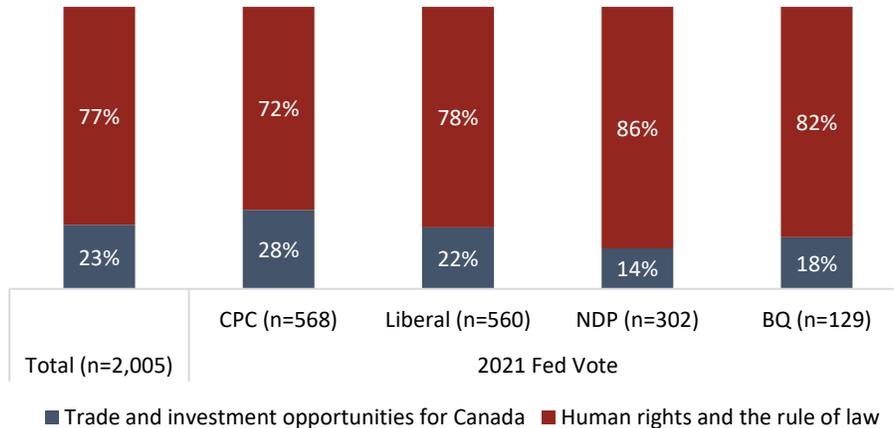
Women believe human rights should be the primary concern at a higher rate than men, but at least seven-in-ten of men of all ages want human rights at the forefront of the relationship as well:

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



A majority across the political spectrum would choose to emphasize human rights and the rule of law over trade and investment opportunities, with 86 per cent of NDP partisans preferring the former to the latter. Although the Conservative party [introduced the bill which labelled China’s treatment of the Uyghur minority as genocide](#), CPC supporters are the most likely to say they would emphasize trade and investment priorities at three-in-ten (28%):

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



Majority want Canada to trade with China less

China is the second largest economy in the world by GDP, [according to the World Bank](#). Canada exported \$25 billion worth of goods to China in 2020 and imported \$77 billion, which taken together makes the country Canada’s [second largest trading partner](#). Those totals represent five per cent of Canada’s total exports and 14 per cent of total imports last year.

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Value of Canadian goods trade in 2020 by partner (Source: Government of Canada)		
Country	Value (\$B)	% of Total Trade
Exports		
Total	523	100%
United States	383	73%
China	25	5%
United Kingdom	20	4%
Japan	13	2%
Germany	6	1%
Mexico	6	1%
Netherlands	5	1%
South Korea	5	1%
Other Countries	60	11%
Imports		
	543	100%
United States	265	49%
China	77	14%
Mexico	30	6%
German	17	3%
Japan	14	3%
South Korea	10	2%
Italy	9	2%
Vietnam	8	1%
Other Countries	113	21%

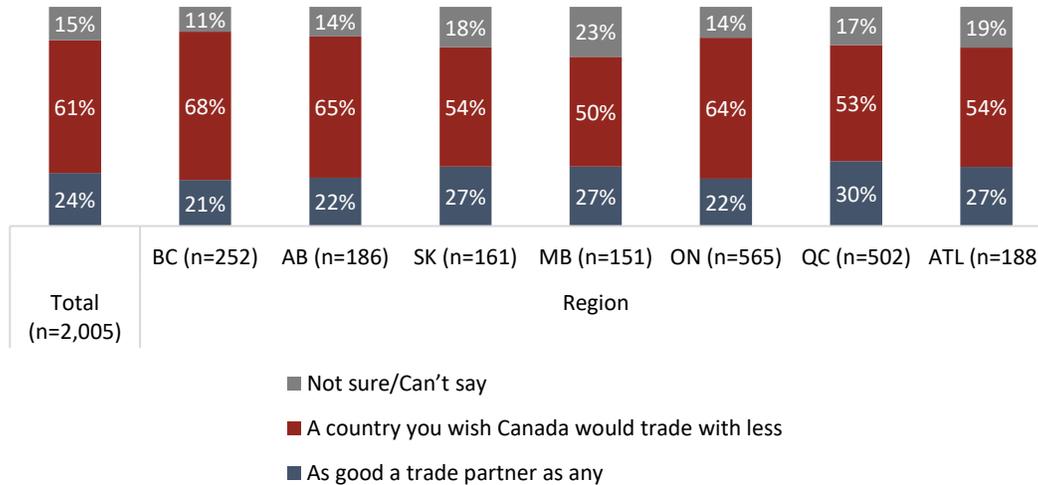
A majority of Canadians would prefer to see Canada take its business elsewhere. Three-in-five (61%) say they would prefer if Canada would reduce its trade with China, contrasted by the one-quarter (24%) who say the country is as good a trade partner as any.

That sentiment is fairly consistent across the country, though those in Quebec (30%) and Manitoba (27%) are the most likely to say China as good a trading partner as any for Canada. In B.C., the province closest geographically to China, seven-in-ten wish Canada would exchange fewer goods across the Pacific with the world's second largest economy:

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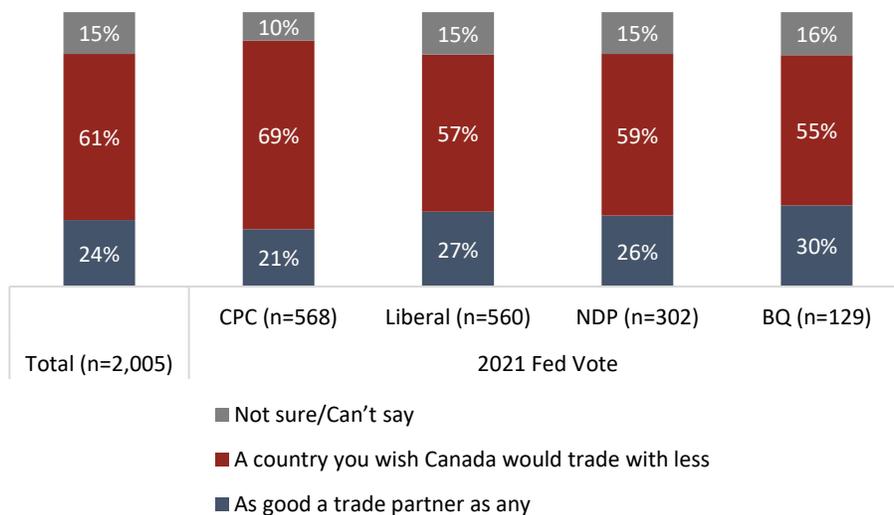
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When you specifically think about China as a trade partner for Canada, would you say China is...



Across party lines, a majority of all partisans would prefer Canada to trade less with China as well. That desire is strongest among those who voted for the CPC in the last federal election. This despite CPC voters also being the most likely to prioritize trade over human rights as noted above.

When you specifically think about China as a trade partner for Canada, would you say China is...

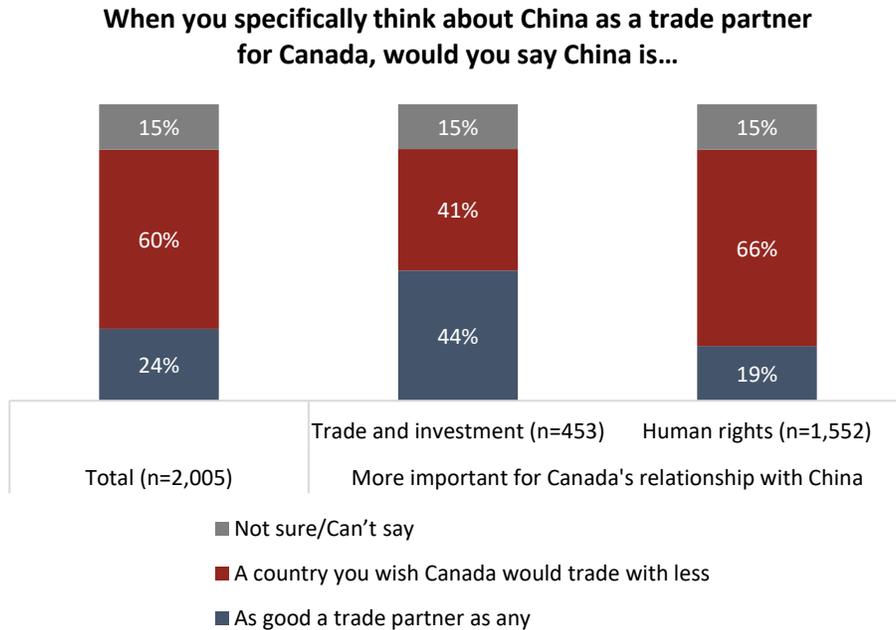


That contradiction holds for those who say trade and investment should be Canada's priority in its relationship with China. While two-in-five (44%) who prioritize economic concerns call the country as good

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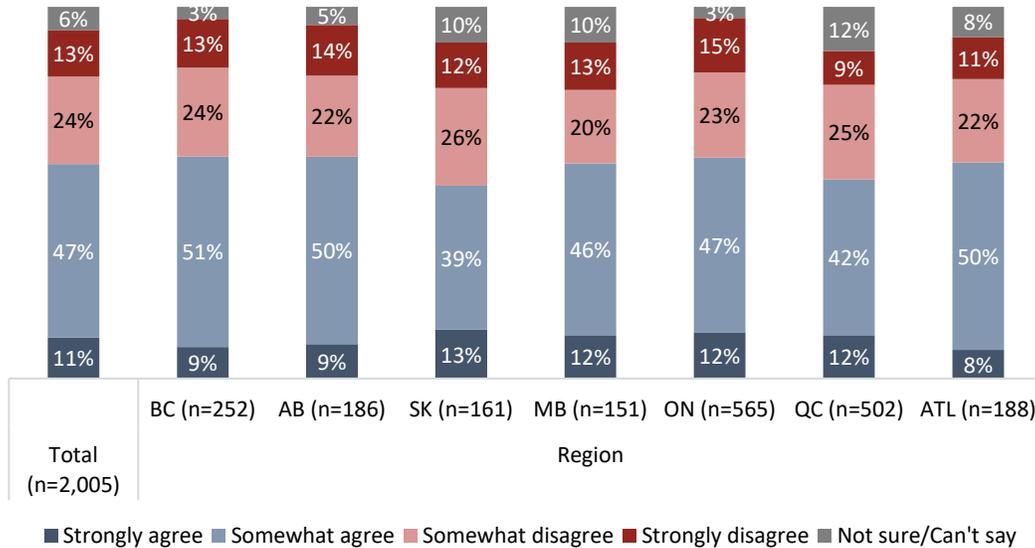
a trade partner as any – twice the rate of those who would prioritize human rights – nearly as many (41%) say they wish Canada would trade with China less:



Majority worried about consequences of standing up to China

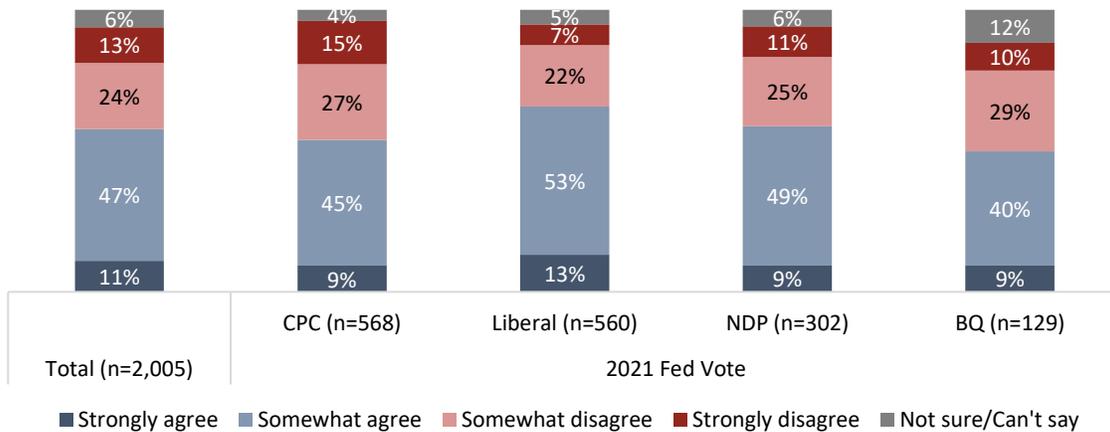
Though many Canadians would prioritize human rights and the rule of law in the country's interactions with China, there is also concern over the economic consequences of taking a stand. Three-in-five (58%) say they worry of the economic ramifications of getting in China's way. The concern is lowest in Saskatchewan, where half (52%) still fret over the economic backlash:

Agreement - I'm worried about the economic consequences of standing up to China



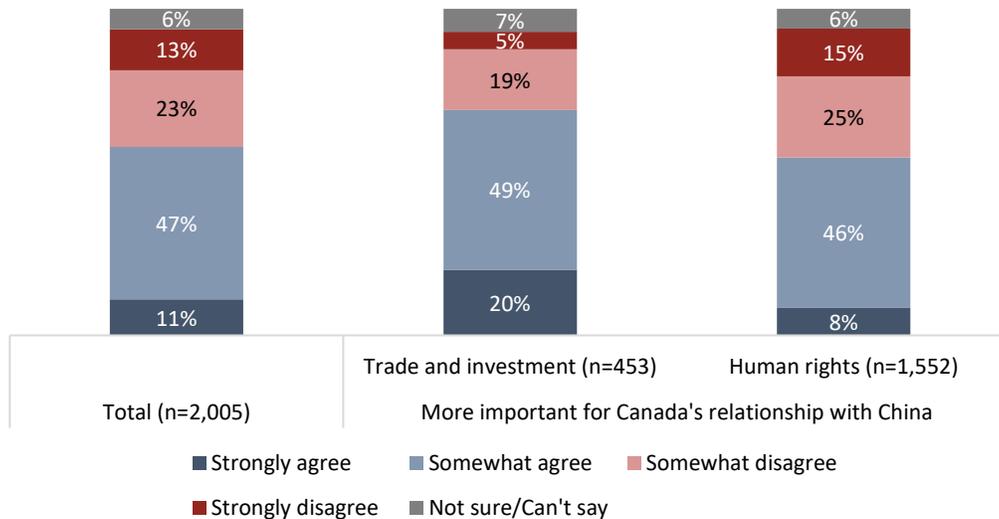
At least half of all groups of party supporters worry of the cost to Canada's economy of standing up to China, but Bloc voters (50%) find themselves the least concerned. In contrast, two-thirds (66%) of Liberal voters worry any action taken against China will have an economic price:

Agreement - I'm worried about the economic consequences of standing up to China



A majority (54%) of those who believe human rights should be Canada's priority when dealing with China say they worry that standing up to China will have economic repercussions, a number that is even higher among those who prioritize trade and investment:

Agreement - I'm worried about the economic consequences of standing up to China



Three-quarters believe Canada can't change China's behaviour

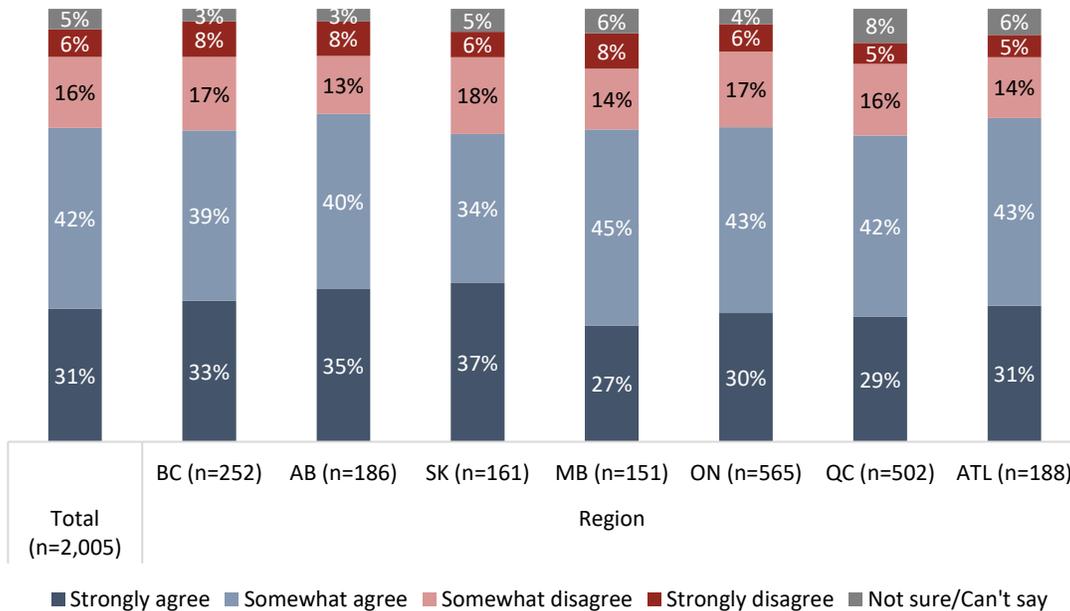
There appears to be another concern for Canadians: would anything Canada does actually make China change course? Three-quarters (73%) say it's unrealistic that actions taken by Canada could affect China's behaviour.

Similar numbers across each region of Canada believe the same, though those in B.C. (25%), Saskatchewan (24%), and Ontario (24%) are the most likely to disagree:

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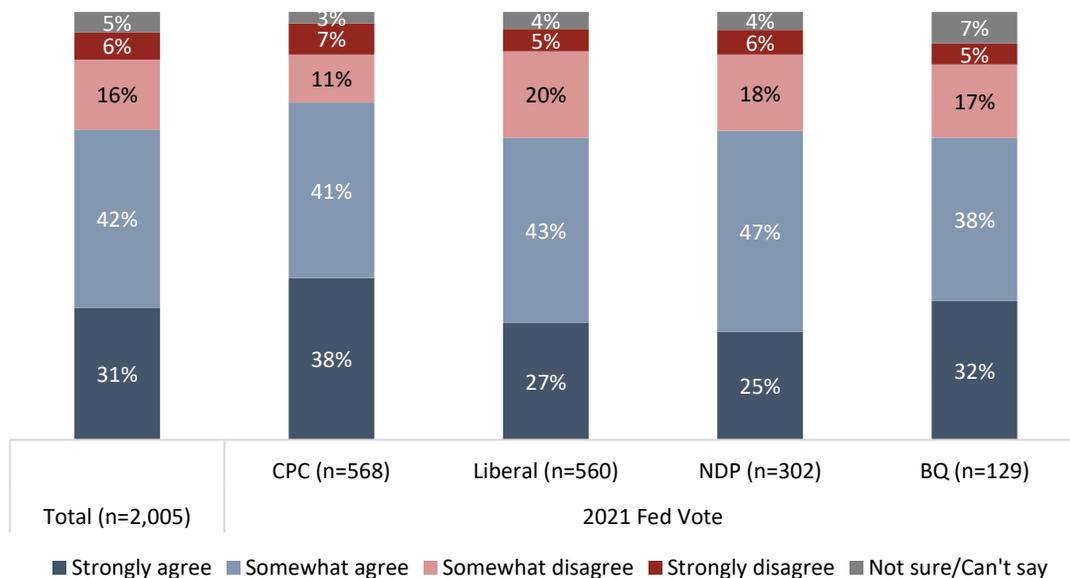
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Agreement - It's unrealistic that anything Canada does will change China's behaviour



Four-in-five (79%) of past Conservative voters say Canada can't affect China's behaviour, the highest number of any party's supporters. Meanwhile, one-quarter of Liberal (25%) and NDP voters (24%) believe Canada can influence the government in Beijing:

Agreement - It's unrealistic that anything Canada does will change China's behaviour



Part Two: Can Canada afford to do less business with China?

Most believe Canada could cut trade with China without affecting economy

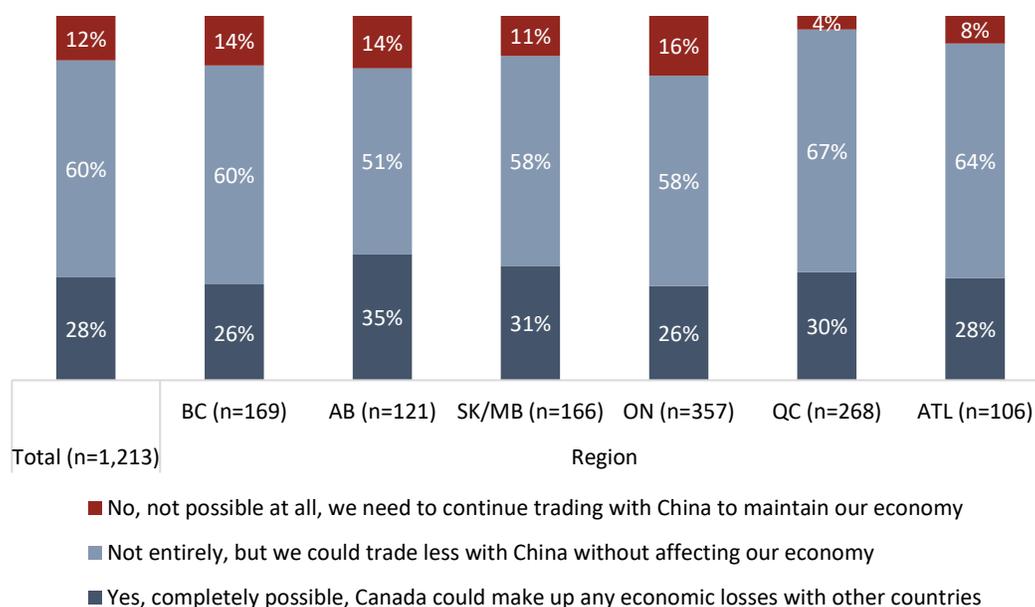
Those who want less trade with China were asked if that was realistic – could Canada trade with China less without an economic penalty?

Most say Canada's economy would survive with less reliance on trading with China while one-in-ten (12%) say it's impossible to do so without a significant economic cost.

Quebecers are the most convinced Canada could trade less with China and escape unscathed economically while one-in-six Ontarians who prefer Canada focus its trade efforts elsewhere worry that doing so will come with an economic cost:

You've mentioned that you wish Canada would do less business with China, how realistic do you think that possibility is without negatively affecting our economy?

(Among those who wish Canada would trade with China less)



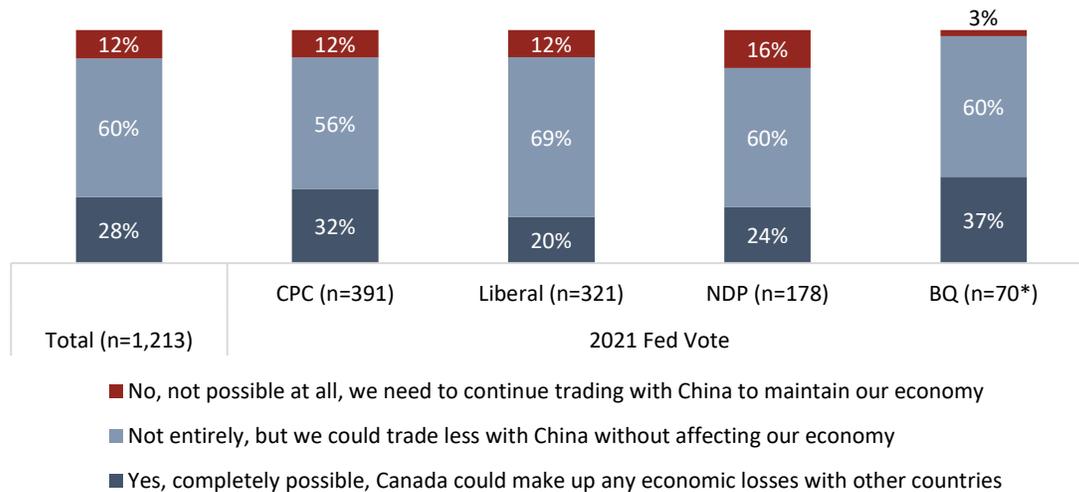
The majority of all party supporters believe the effect of decreasing trade with China would be small, but at least one-in-ten of past CPC, Liberal and NDP voters believe trade across the Pacific needs to continue at the same rate to maintain Canada's economy:

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(Among those who wish Canada would trade with China less)

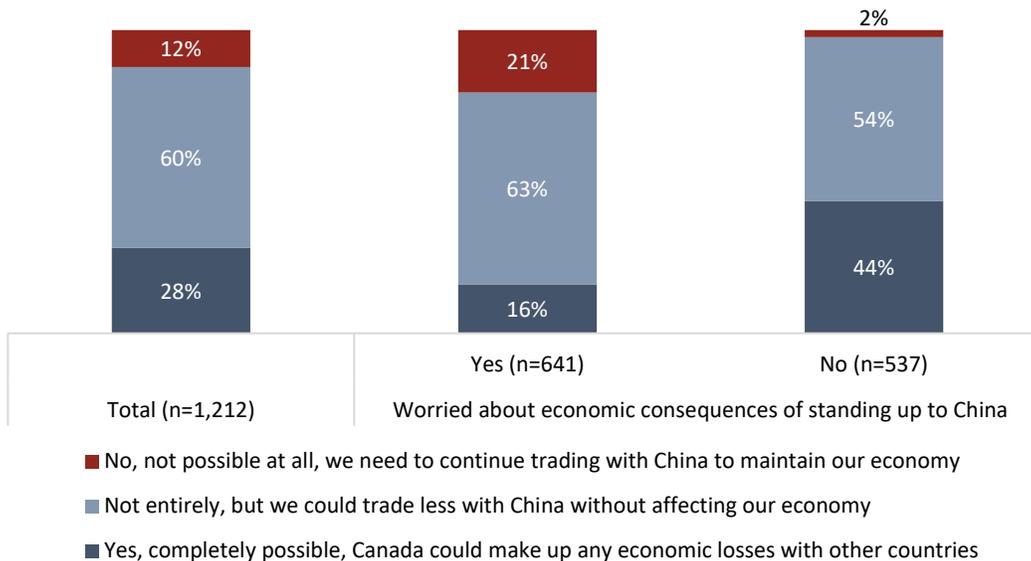


**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

Four-in-five Canadians who worry about the economic costs of angering China, but still want to trade with the country less, believe its possible to do so without hurting Canada's finances too much. Those who don't worry about the economic repercussions for standing up to China are much more optimistic Canada could make up elsewhere the economic losses of reducing its trade reliance on China:

You've mentioned that you wish Canada would do less business with China, how realistic do you think that possibility is without negatively affecting our economy?

(Among those who wish Canada would trade with China less)



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

For detailed results by what respondents think Canada's priority should be in its relationship with China and whether respondents are worried about the economic consequences of standing up to China, [click here](#).

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