

Canada's Global Image: Half of Canadians believe nation's international reputation is on the decline

More than half of Canadians want defence spending to increase to NATO target, but the rest don't

May 16, 2023 – A cache of leaked Pentagon documents recently confirmed a secret that many have suspected for years, as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reportedly admitted that Canada is unlikely to ever meet the two per cent military defence spending target recommended by NATO.

Amid this, a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians less enthusiastic about their perception of the country's international reputation than they have been in recent years. Half of Canadians (51%) say Canada has a good or very good reputation abroad, while one-quarter say it is poor or very poor (25%) and one-quarter (24%) say it is average. Notably, there has been a 33-point drop since 2018 in the proportion offering a positive view.

While there is concern that Trudeau's private admission on Canada's willingness to spend on defence might damage the country's standing among allies – two-in-five (42%) say this – Canadians are divided as to whether

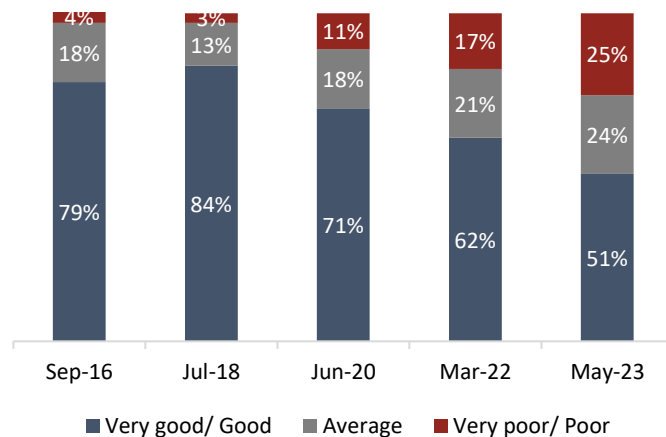
their nation should strive to satisfy the defence-spending goal set by NATO members. Presented with the current and projected percentages and figures in billions of dollars required to hit two per cent, the largest group – 47 per cent – would increase spending to the NATO goal, while another seven per cent would increase spending further, beyond that recommendation. That said, one-in-three Canadians (34%) say that the current spending level of 1.3 per cent of GDP is fine, and one-in-eight (12%) say even that is too high and it should be reduced. The proportion saying Canada should increase its spending to two per cent or higher has increased 11 points since 2019.

Among the largest drivers of divergence on this issue are age and gender. Women and men younger than 35 are much more likely than those older to say that spending should be reduced, while men older than 34 are most supportive of an increase to or beyond the two per cent target.

More Key Findings:

- One-in-five (19%) Canadians believe Trudeau admitting their country will never reach the NATO defence-spending target enhances Canada's reputation by being straightforward while three-in-

Overall, what kind of reputation would you say Canada has internationally?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 8 - 10, 2023 among a representative randomized sample of 1,603 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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ten (29%) believe the comment will have neither a positive nor negative effect on international evaluation of Canada.

- Seven-in-ten (69%) of past Conservative voters believe Trudeau risks damaging Canada's reputation with his defence spending admission. Fewer, but still one-quarter, of past NDP (26%) and Liberal (26%) voters agree.
- In 2018, three-in-ten Canadians (29%) said Canada's reputation had improved over the past decade, while one-quarter (25%) said it had worsened. Now, half say it has worsened (49%) and just 12 per cent say it has improved.

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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Part One: NATO and defence spending

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there has been [closer collaboration](#) between Canada and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. However, there also has been mounting pressure on Canada from NATO members to spend more on defence. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [said last month](#) he was looking for members to consider the requirement that NATO members spend two per cent of their GDP on defence "not as a ceiling, but a floor". NATO estimated [Canada spent 1.29 per cent of GDP on defence](#) in the 2022-23 fiscal year, short of the two per cent target [agreed to in 2014](#).

Half say we should spend more on defence, half not sold

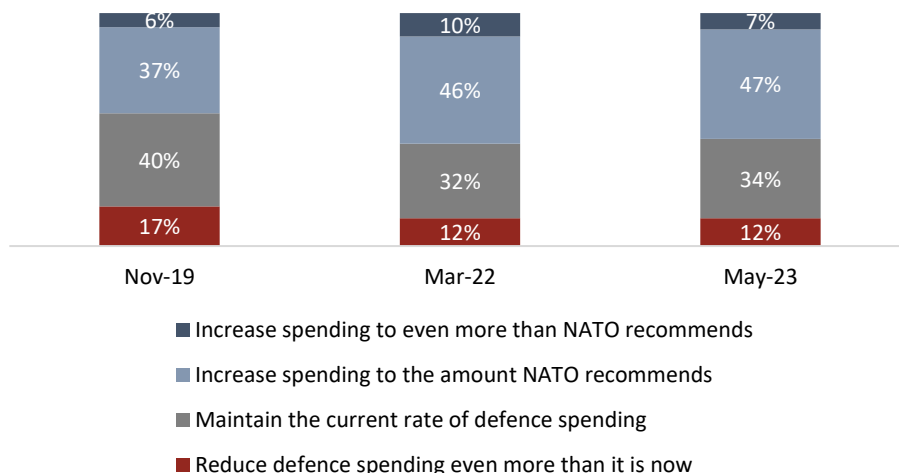
A majority of Canadians (54%) now say Canada should spend at least to the NATO recommended target of two per cent of GDP (47%) or more than that (7%), an increase of more than 10 points from 2019 (43%) and a similar number to that noted in 2022 (56%).

However, one-in-three (34%) Canadians prefer defence spending stay at the current rate and one-in-eight (12%) prefer Canada spend less on defence than it is now:

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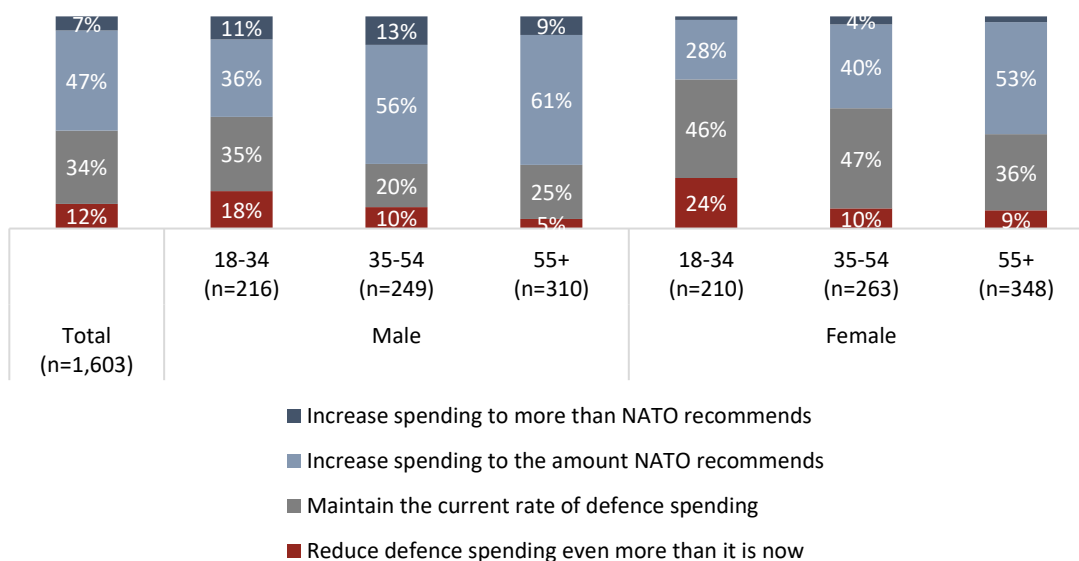
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If you oversaw Canada’s budget, what would you do?



Older Canadians, and especially men over the age of 54, are more likely to want to see Canada’s defence spending increase. Meanwhile, Canadians under the age of 35 are more likely to want to see a decrease in defence spending than other age groups:

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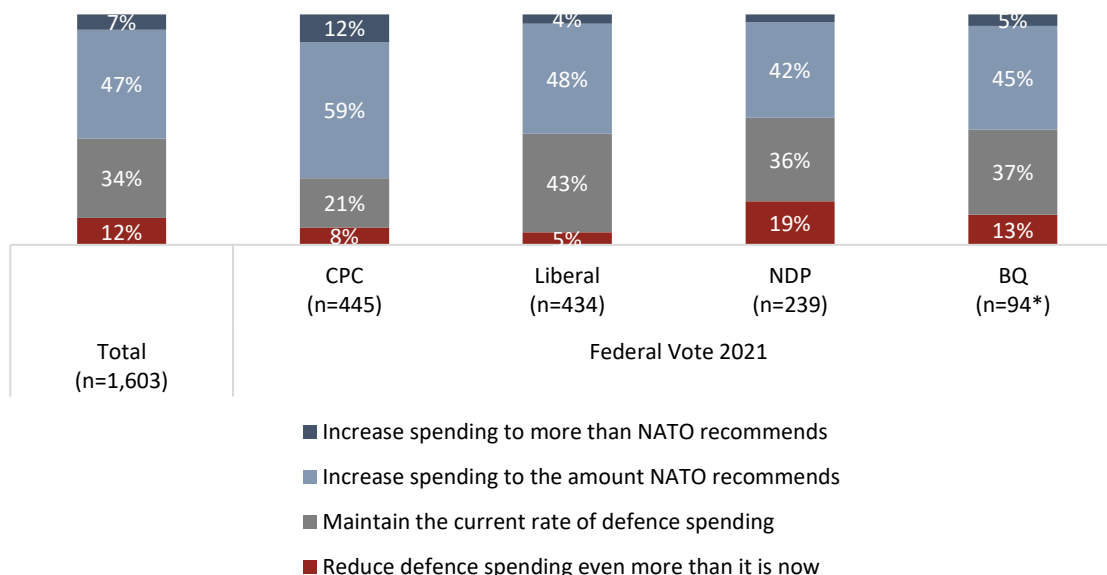


While those who voted Conservative in the 2021 federal election are the most likely (71%) of major party supporters to want Canada to increase its military spending, they are joined by half (52%) of past Liberal and Bloc Québécois (50%) voters. As well, approaching half (45%) of those who voted NDP in 2021 believe Canada should increase its defence spending to at least the NATO target of two per cent of GDP:

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If you oversaw Canada’s budget, what would you do?



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Will Trudeau’s leaked comments on defence spending hurt Canada’s reputation?

As previously mentioned, according to leaked documents, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [privately told NATO officials](#) that Canada would never meet the two per cent goal of defence spending. A leaked assessment from the U.S. Department of Defence also said “widespread defence shortfalls hinder Canadian capabilities while straining partner relationships and alliance contributions”. Canadian military leaders believe the country’s armed forces are near capacity with its current NATO obligations in Europe, [doubting Canada’s ability](#) to take on other missions such as [a potential multinational intervention in Haiti](#).

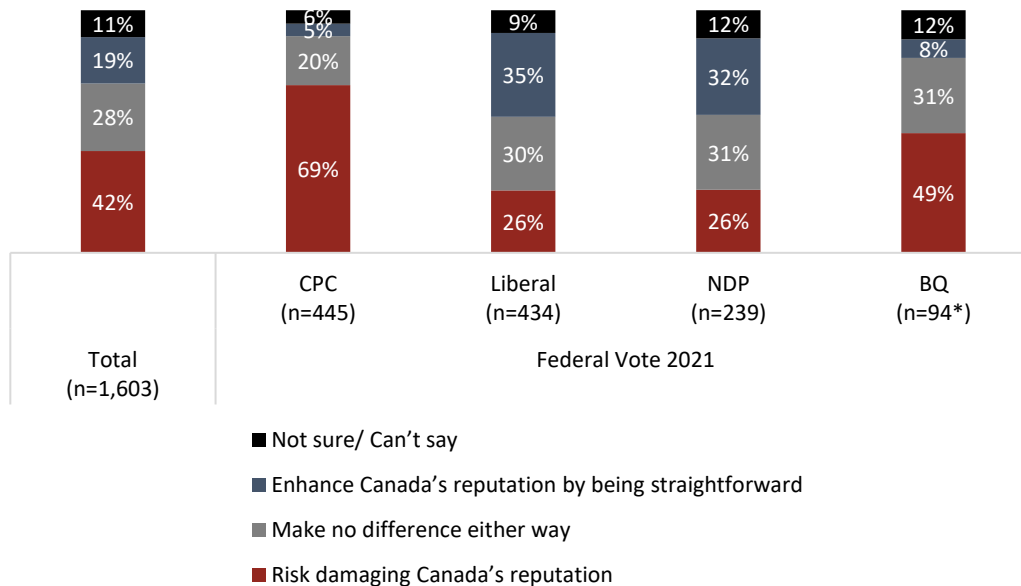
A plurality (42%) of Canadians believes the admission by Trudeau potentially harms Canada’s international reputation. Smaller groups say the comments “make no difference” (28%) or instead enhance the country’s reputation (19%).

Past CPC voters are the most likely to believe (69%) Trudeau risks damaging Canada’s reputation with these remarks about defence spending. Meanwhile, past Liberal and NDP voters are slightly more likely to believe Canada is better off being straightforward, but still one-quarter in each group believe Canada’s reputation could suffer:

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Which is closest to your opinion? Do Trudeau's comments on Canada reaching NATO's defence spending targets...



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Part Two: Canada's international reputation

Trudeau arrived on the world stage as prime minister in 2015 with a message: Canada is (was) "back". The sense among some was that former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's foreign policy had eschewed foundational principles of peacekeeping and multilateralism for military aid and unilateral endeavours. Trudeau promised a new "feminist" vision, more open immigration and refugee resettlement policies, and collaboration on climate goals among others.

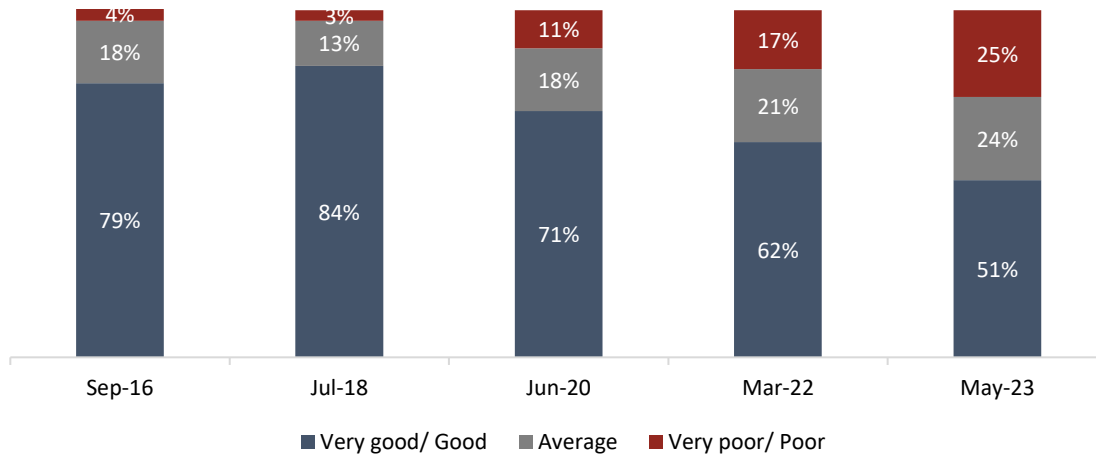
Twice as many say Canada has a good rather than poor reputation, but trending downward

Overall, half (51%) of Canadians say Canada has a good reputation overall, twice as many as say their nation's reputation is poor (25%). However, during Trudeau's first term, there was much higher belief among Canadians that Canada was viewed in high esteem internationally than there is now:

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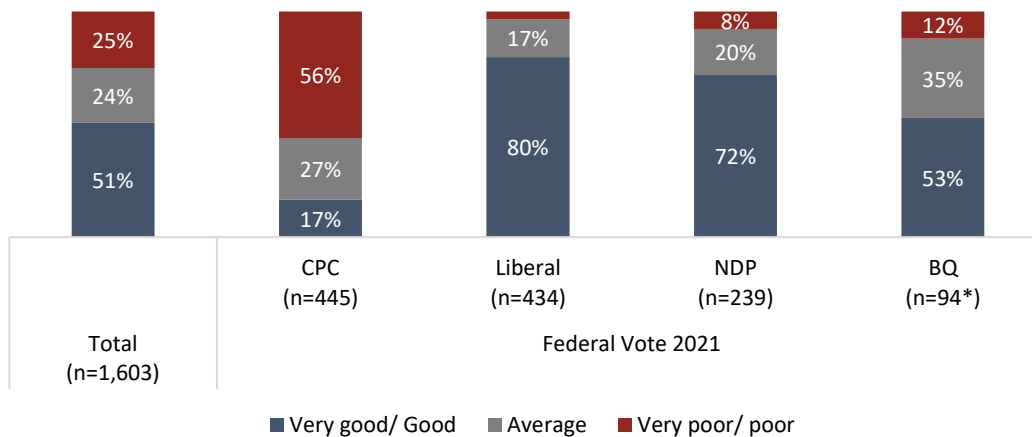
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Overall, what kind of reputation would you say Canada has internationally?



Domestic political tensions correlate heavily with one's views of Canada through the lens of outsiders. Trudeau's Liberal Party voters see a rosy view of Canada when they assess perceptions from outside, while past Conservative voters are divided, but tend to lean toward the negative:

Overall, what kind of reputation would you say Canada has internationally?



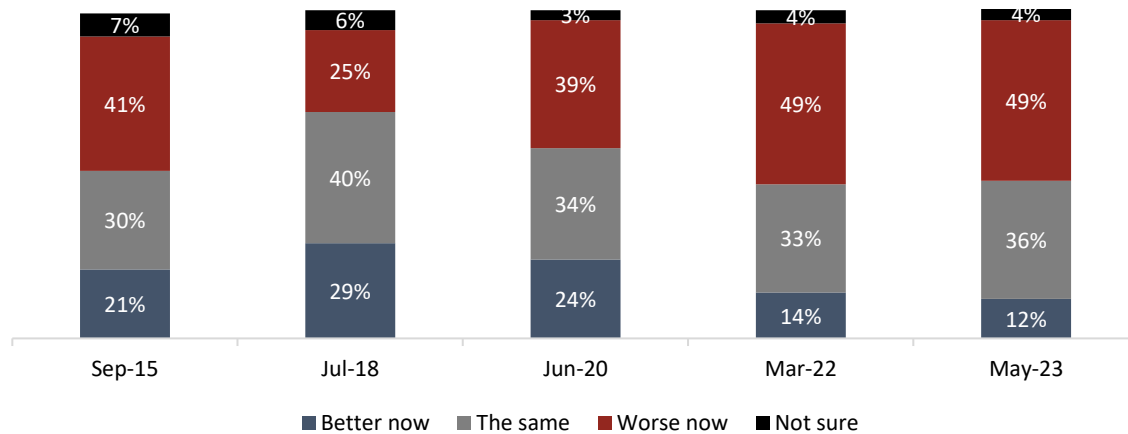
**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

For a time, Canadians perceived the change from the Harper administration to one led by Trudeau as positive. Between 2015 and 2018 the percentage of Canadians saying their country's international reputation had improved rose eight points, with the inverse view dropping 16 points. That momentum has stalled. Now, half of Canadians feel their own country is viewed more negatively than it was a decade ago, while 12 per cent say this perception has improved:

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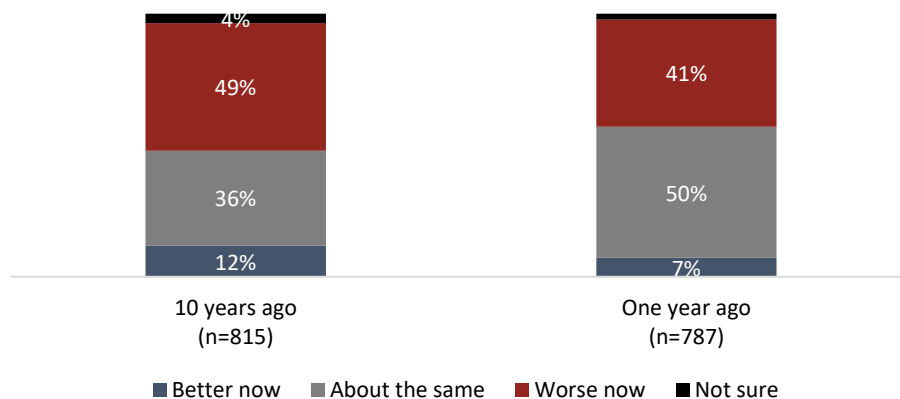
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All things considered, do you think Canada’s reputation around the world is better or worse now than it was ten years ago?



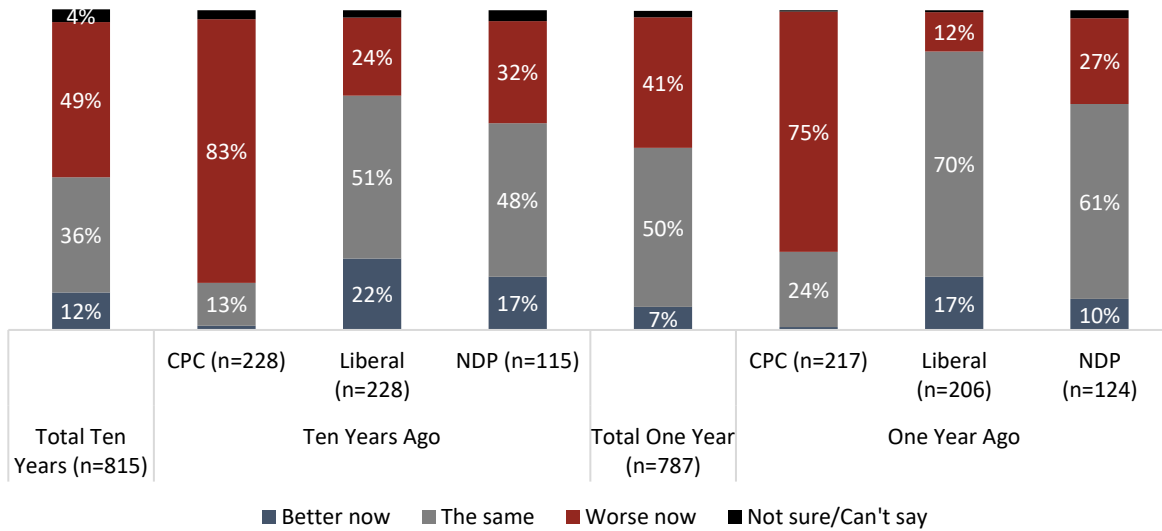
Recent events, outlined above, may have soured Canadians perceptions. To test the longitudinal aspect of this discussion, the Angus Reid Institute asked respondents one of two question variations. Half were asked about Canada’s reputation compared to a decade ago, while half were asked about any perceived change over the past year. In each case, responses are largely negative, but the long-term view appears more critical:

All things considered, do you think Canada’s reputation around the world is better or worse now than it was... (Split sample)



There are unquestionably political perspectives in this discussion. Past Conservative voters are overwhelmingly negative regardless of the time period they’re considering, while those who voted Liberal and New Democrat in 2021 are more likely to say there has been no change. Notably, past Liberal voters are equally divided between saying Canada’s reputation has improved (22%) or worsened (24%) over the past decade of mostly Liberal governance:

All things considered, do you think Canada's reputation around the world is better or worse now than it was...



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