

Election Interference: Canadians tilt towards calling for a public inquiry; majority call government response 'evasive'

Past CPC voters three-times as likely as past Liberal, NDP voters to say this issue 'very important'

May 26, 2023 – David Johnston's decision *not* to call a public inquiry into what the Trudeau government knew and how it reacted to attempted election interference by the Beijing regime caught many political watchers by [surprise](#). New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians leaning towards the view that the "special rapporteur" erred in judgment.

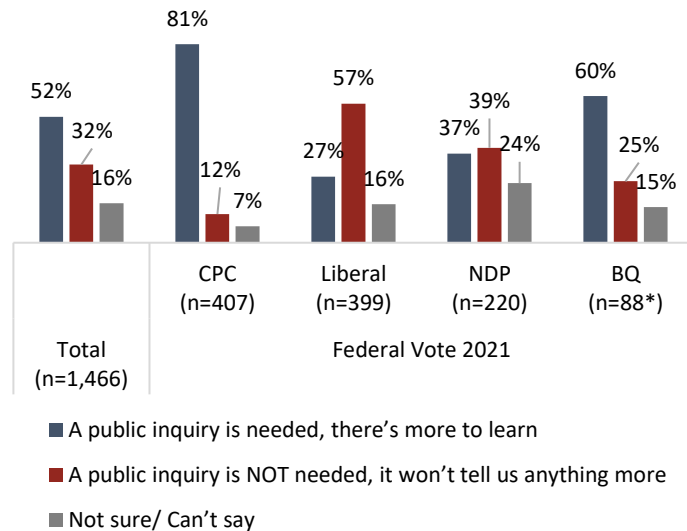
A national public opinion survey self-commissioned this week by ARI finds half (52%) say an inquiry should have been called, while one-in-three (32%) feel this is unnecessary and 16 per cent are unsure.

The data reveal deep political chasms dividing Canadians on the issue of attempted meddling by the Chinese government, and Ottawa's reaction to it. Past Conservative voters appear galvanized over this issue, frustrated with Johnston's call and dubious that the issue is getting the attention it needs. The vast majority (81%) say an inquiry should go ahead, 93 per cent say the issue of foreign interference is important, while just 14 per cent say they have confidence in the Trudeau government's ability to handle the file.

Past Liberal voters are far more circumspect with significant numbers more inclined to profess either ignorance or inner conflict over key elements of the issues. Half (49%) say they have not been following the story closely and, compared to Conservatives, one-third as many say this issue is very important (22% vs 60%).

Overall, approaching three-in-five (57%) Canadians feel Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberal government have been evasive on the matter of foreign interference. Only 16 per cent say instead the federal government has been transparent. Notably, relatively few 2021 Liberal voters (35%) believe the party they voted for (and now in government) has been open and transparent on the matter of election interference; one-third (36%) lack confidence in the government to handle this file.

Which of the two statements below is closer to your own point of view regarding a formal public inquiry?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 23-25, 2023 among a representative randomized sample of 1,466 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:

- Twice as many Canadians believe Johnston was the wrong choice (44%) as the right one (22%) to lead this investigation. A plurality of past Liberal voters (45%) say it was the correct decision to choose the former governor general, but many (36%) are uncertain.
- More than two-in-five (43%) Canadians believe elections are becoming less free and fair in the country. More (46%) say freedom of speech is weakening in the country and half (48%) believe news organizations have less freedom to report the truth than before ([see detailed tables](#)).
- Two-thirds (67%) of Canadians believe the Chinese government likely tried to interfere in Canadian elections. This is consistent with the proportion seen [in March](#).

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: Awareness and perceptions of election interference

David Johnston's interim report on the issue of attempted Chinese interference in Canadian elections – and the decision not to seek a public inquiry into it – brought a new twist to the winding and often rocky road wandered in recent months by the Trudeau government, Canada's political class, and its security services.

After weeks of media reports [based on leaked Canadian Security Intelligence Service \(CSIS\) documents](#), political and community pressure, and an arguably flat-footed initial response, the Trudeau government

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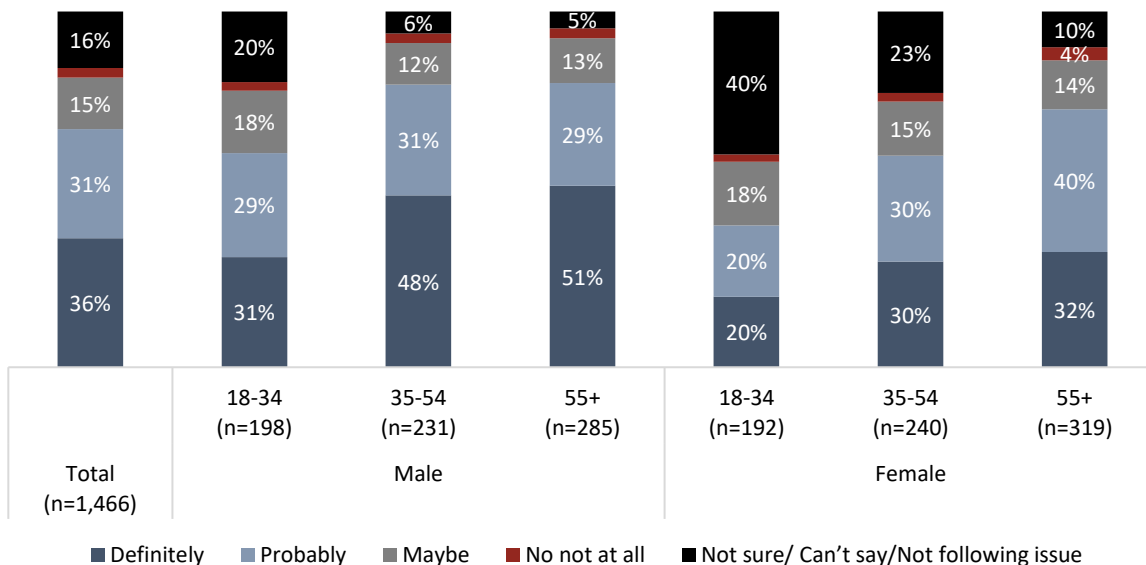
responded to allegations China attempted to interfere in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections by appointing former governor general Johnston as a “special rapporteur” [to look into foreign interference in March](#).

Johnston’s interim report concludes more needed to be done to counter foreign interference and [cast doubt](#) on the veracity of some media reports. But it did not recommend a public inquiry, [something parliament has already called for](#).

Canadians largely convinced China engaged in election interference

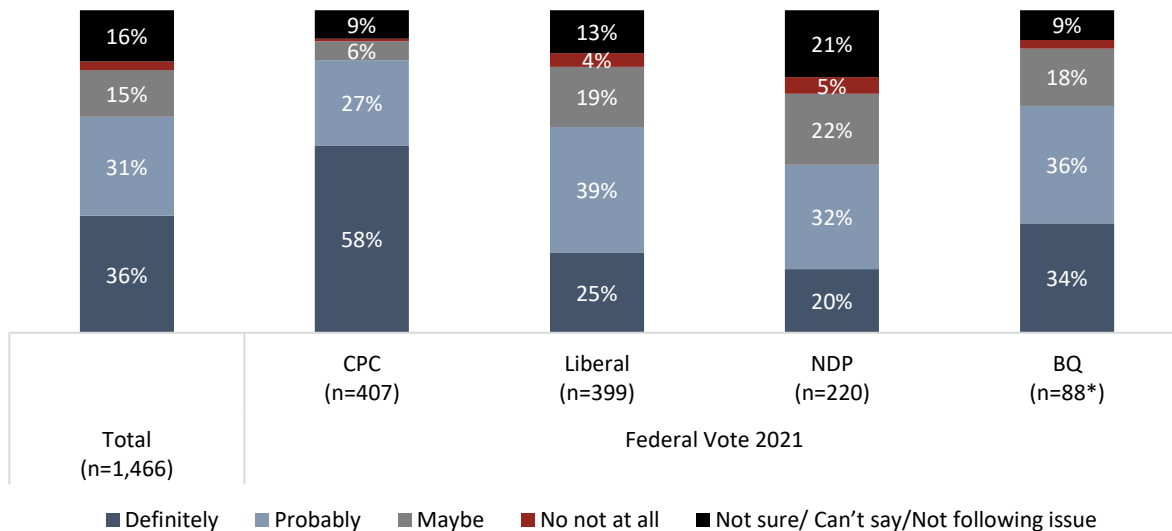
After months of headlines, a majority of Canadians believe the Chinese government did attempt to interfere in Canadian elections. This belief is stronger among men than women and especially among those older than 34. Women aged 18- to 34-years-old are most likely to profess that they aren’t sure or are not following the issue:

Based on what you’ve seen read or heard, what do you think? Do you believe the Chinese government tried to interfere in Canadian elections?



There is much more certainty on this issue among past Conservative voters than supporters of the other major parties. A majority of those who voted CPC in 2021 say they believe the Chinese government “definitely” tried to interfere in Canadian elections. That said, it is a sentiment shared, albeit less adamantly, across the political spectrum:

Based on what you've seen read or heard, what do you think? Do you believe the Chinese government tried to interfere in Canadian elections?



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Four-in-five see potential interference as an important issue

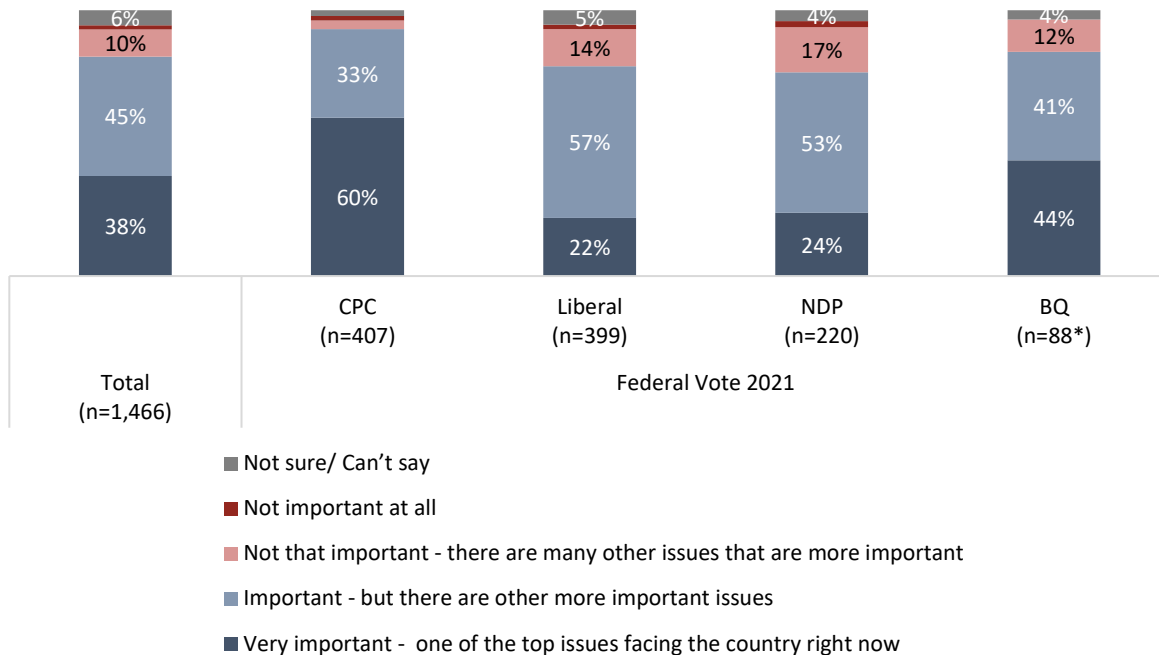
Most Canadians (82%) describe the potential of Chinese interference in Canadian elections as an important issue, with two-in-five (38%) believing it to be one of the top issues the country currently faces. Few (12%) would say it is not important.

Across the political spectrum, there are differing assessments of how important the issue is. Past CPC voters are nearly three times as likely to describe it as one of the top issues the country faces currently as those who voted Liberal or NDP in 2021. Those latter partisans are more likely to believe there are other issues that are more pressing:

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How important do you believe is this issue of potential Chinese government interference in Canadian elections?



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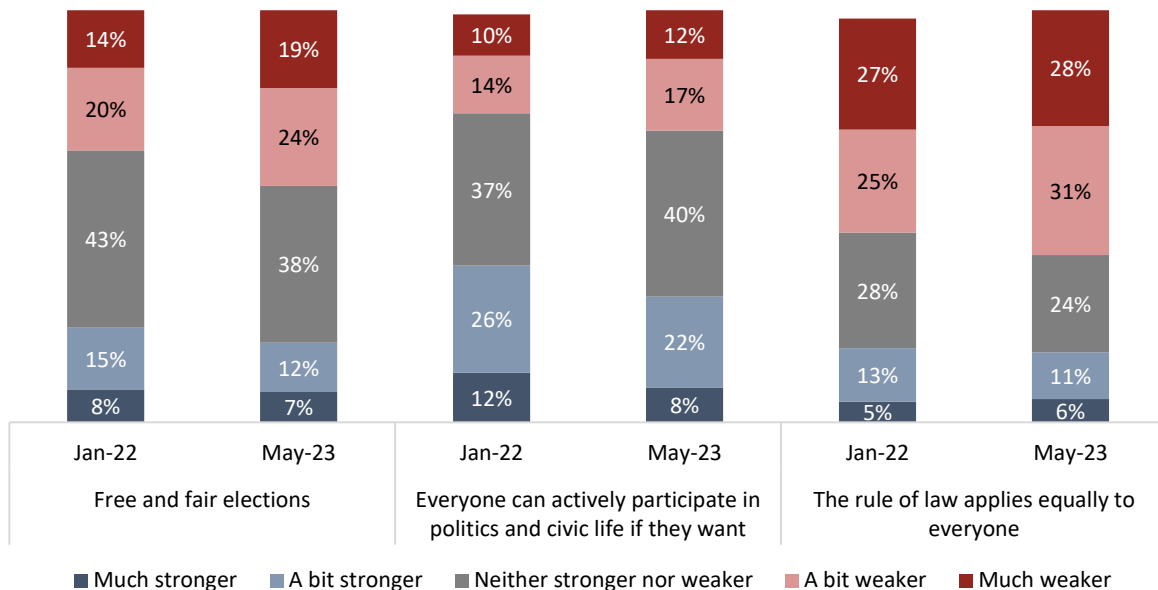
Two-in-five say Canadian elections are becoming less free and fair

In the wake of these continuing revelations about potential Chinese influence on Canadian politics, there is a growing sense among Canadians that fundamental democratic pillars are weakening in their country. More Canadians believe free speech, the freedom of the media, free and fair elections and the equal application of the rule of law are becoming weaker than stronger in Canada. In the case of the latter two measures, Canadians are more likely to believe they are faltering than they were in January 2022 ([see detailed tables](#)).

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Here are some elements of what defines a democratic nation. Thinking about each – would you say they are growing stronger or getting weaker in Canada.



Part Two: Perceptions of government response

The issue of election interference, and investigations into it, are not new. [In 2019](#), the federal government established the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, a team of public servants, to assess incidents of interference. Morris Rosenberg released an assessment of their work in February after Global News and the Globe and Mail released multiple reports detailing potential Chinese interference. Rosenberg's report concluded the attempted interference [did not compromise](#) the result of the 2021 federal election. However, Rosenberg has been viewed as having [a conflict of interest](#) in the situation, as he was the former president and CEO of the Trudeau Foundation.

The Procedure and House Affairs Committee, a cross-party parliamentary committee, has also been looking into the issue of foreign interference [since November](#). There was some controversy as Liberal committee members [blocked efforts](#) to bring Trudeau's chief of staff Katie Telford before the committee, before they finally relented [in April](#).

And, as mentioned above, Trudeau appointed Johnston as special rapporteur, though there has been [much criticism of his appointment](#) and [his initial report](#).

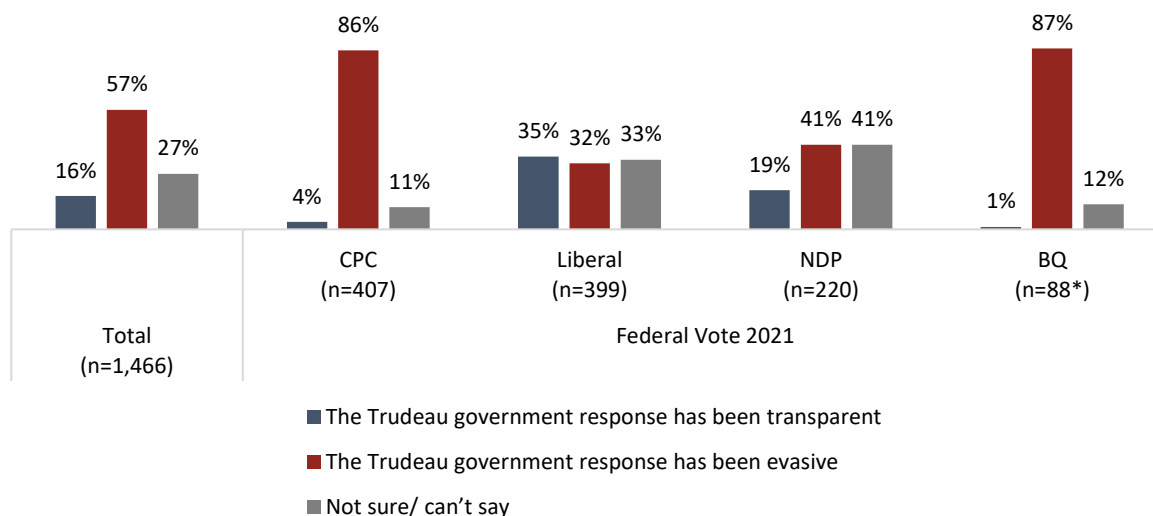
CPC voters say government is obfuscating, Liberal supporters aren't sure what to think

Canadians are three times as likely to believe the Liberal government has been evasive than transparent in its dealings with allegations of Chinese government interference in Canadian elections. Past Liberal and NDP voters are less likely to describe the action of Trudeau's government as evasive than others, but aren't exactly mounting a full-throated defence or endorsement of the government's response, either. Indeed, just 35 per cent of 2021 Liberal voters describe the Trudeau government as forthcoming:

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When it comes to the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau government’s response to this issue of attempted Chinese government interference in Canadian elections, which statement is closer to your view, based on what you’ve read, seen, or heard?



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On combatting foreign interference, Liberal government has a confidence problem

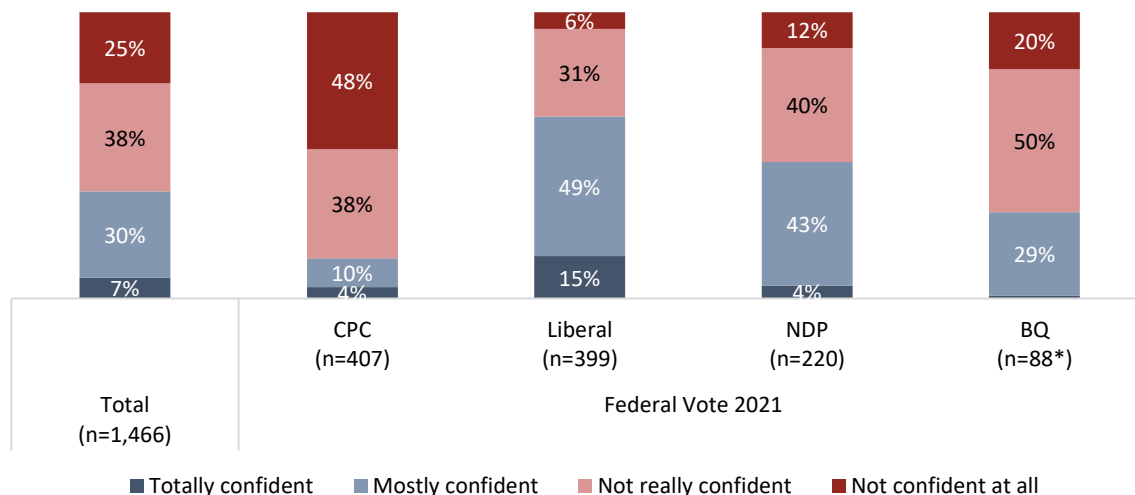
One of the key findings in Johnston’s initial report is that the federal government must improve mechanisms for tracking and combatting attempts at foreign election interference. Johnston noted “serious problems” with how intelligence is shared and “considerably more” needs to be done to increase Canada’s ability to resist foreign interference in the democratic process. As it stands today, Canadians have little confidence that the government will be able to combat interference in the future.

Fewer than one-in-ten (7%) say they are totally confident that the government will effectively handle this issue, while three-in-ten are mostly confident. That said, one-quarter have no confidence and two-in-five (38%) have little:

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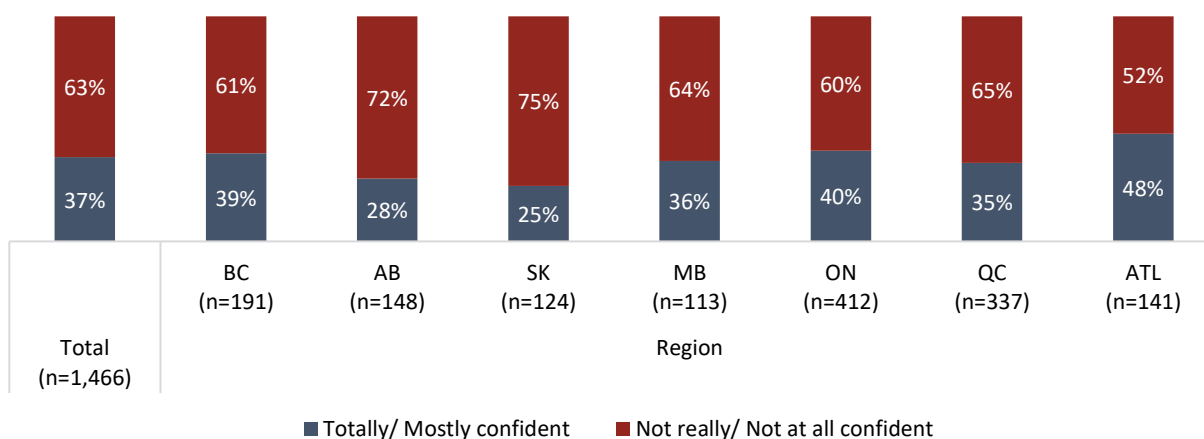
Thinking about these recent events, how confident are you in the Canadian government to combat election interference in future federal elections?



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

There are considerable variances across region in terms of confidence in the government, but nowhere in the country do the Liberals receive majority confidence on this issue:

Thinking about these recent events, how confident are you in the Canadian government to combat election interference in future federal elections?



Part Three: Canadians tilt towards a public inquiry

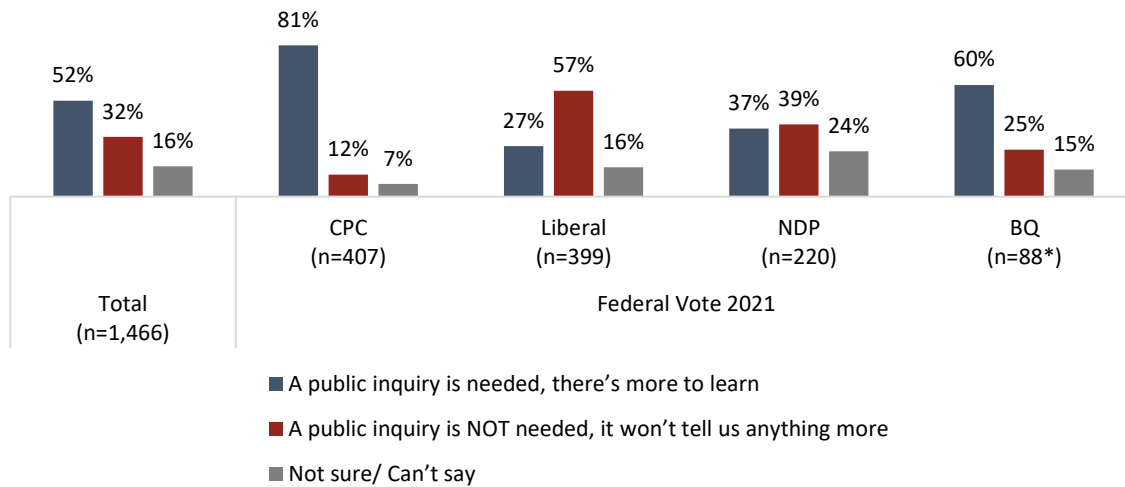
Trudeau stated at the outset of the initial inquiry into election interference undertaken by Johnston that he would abide by whatever recommendation was given – whether that be for a public inquiry or another path. Johnston claimed that a public inquiry itself would be limited in its value because much of what was reviewed in the initial report “cannot be disclosed publicly” due to it being classified intelligence. For past

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Liberal voters, the recommendations from Johnston are largely sufficient. Twice as many say that a public inquiry is not needed as say it is. Past NDP voters are divided almost evenly, while past Conservative and Bloc voters are overwhelmingly in support of a public inquiry:

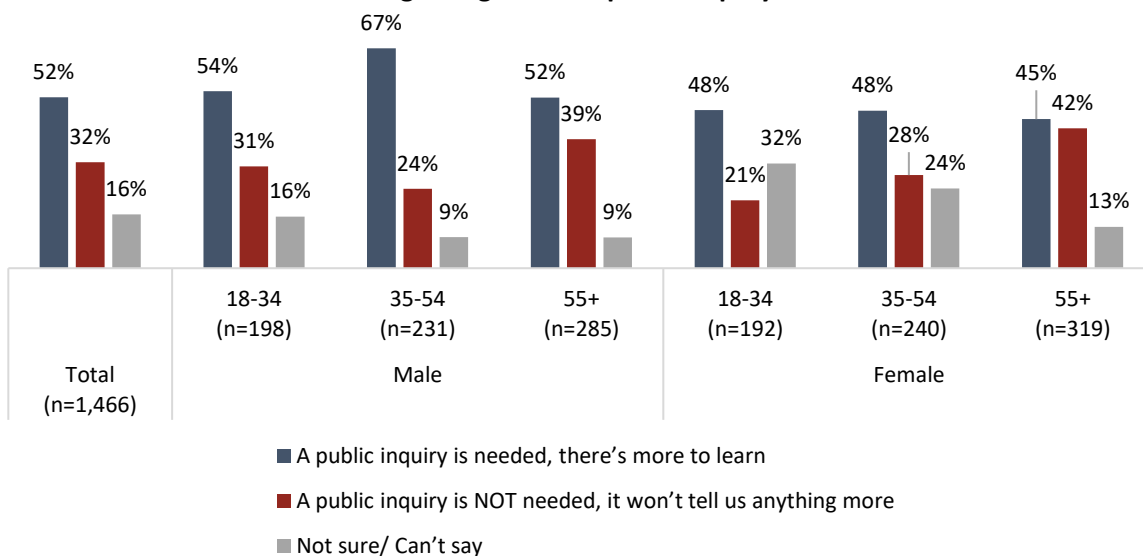
Which of the two statements below is closer to your own point of view regarding a formal public inquiry?



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Men between the ages of 35 and 54 are particularly vehement about the need for a public inquiry, though it is worth noting that there are no age and gender groups that say a public inquiry is not needed as their top response:

Which of the two statements below is closer to your own point of view regarding a formal public inquiry?



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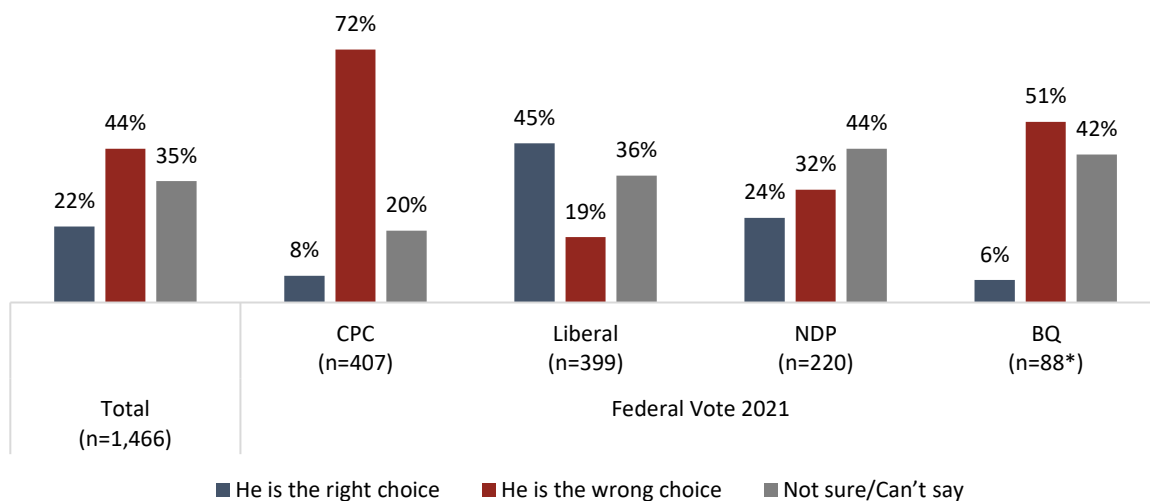
Part Four: The special rapporteur

Canadians disagree with Johnston appointment by two-to-one margin

When appointing Johnston as special rapporteur on this issue, Trudeau characterised Johnston as having an “unimpeachable” character and history. Trudeau has also, however, described Johnston as a family friend, and Johnston has been a member of the Trudeau Foundation since 2018. That charitable organization has been under intense scrutiny recently for a past donation from two Chinese businessmen with a relationship to the Chinese government.

Among those who have an opinion regarding the choice of Johnston in this role, he is seen as the wrong pick by a two-to-one ratio. Only past Liberals see Johnston as the right choice at plurality levels.

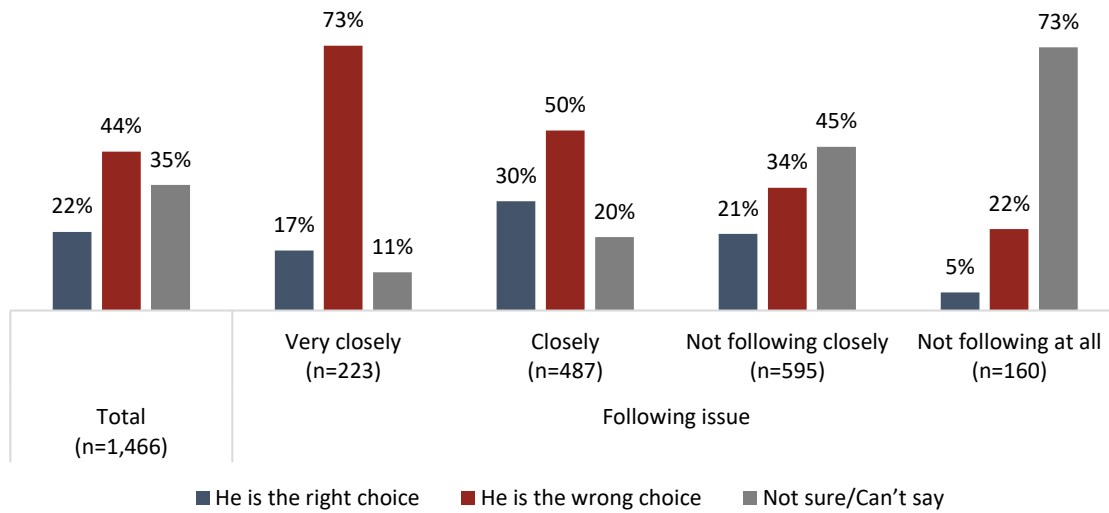
What is your view of Johnston as the choice to lead this investigation?



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

For those following this issue most closely, it is evident that most feel another person should have been chosen for the job:

What is your view of Johnston as the choice to lead this investigation?



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

For detailed results by how closely the respondent has been following the issue, [click here](#).

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