

Campus Encampments: Generational divide over support for pro-Palestinian camps, length of time they can stay

Near half of 18-34s in U.S., Canada say 'several months' of camps is fine; majority of 55+s disagree

June 3, 2024 – As universities across the country celebrate convocations, some of Canada's largest institutions do so in the face of pro-Palestinian encampments entrenched on university grounds for more than a month.

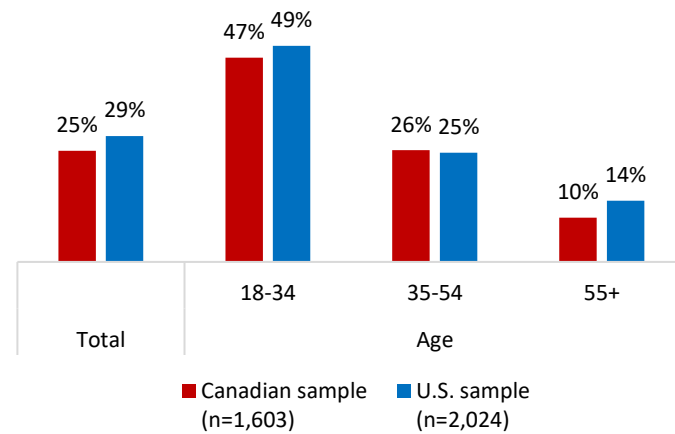
New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds the camps' welcome on campus wore out weeks ago in the eyes of many Canadians. Two-in-five (42%) Canadians say it is acceptable for students to set up protest camps overnight; half (50%) disagree. And that's where acceptance peaks. Two-thirds believe it is unacceptable for encampments to last weeks (64%) or several months (66%).

Canadians are not unified in their views on this subject; there is a stark generational contrast. A majority (53%) of 18- to 24-year-old Canadians believe an encampment lasting several months is fine. The proportion who share that belief shrinks considerably with age, down to one-in-10 (9%) of those older than 64 who would agree.

This study was conducted simultaneously by ARI in the United States and Canada, offering a cross-border view of encampments which began first on American campuses before Canadian students followed suit. Canadians and Americans share similar views as these protest camps persist: near identical minorities of people on both side of the border believe camps lasting overnight (41% U.S., 42% Canada), several days (38% U.S., 39% Canada), several weeks (32% U.S., 29% Canada) and several months (29% U.S., 25% Canada) are acceptable.

There is also similar pattern seen among American age cohorts as those in Canada, with half (49%) of American 18- and 34-year-olds and a similar number (47%) of Canadians that age who believe camps lasting several months are fine, outnumbering those older than 54 on both sides of the border (14% U.S., 10% Canada) who agree by more than three-to-one.

% who say it is 'acceptable' for university students to protest by setting up encampments on campus 'for several months'



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 24-28, 2024 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.

ARI conducted a second online survey from May 24-28, 2024 among a representative randomized sample of 2,024 American adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum USA](#). 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.

Both surveys were self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- When it comes to the demands of the protesters – that universities disclose, divest, and sever ties with Israeli institutions – opposition (46%) is higher than support in Canada (31%). Similar figures (41% oppose, 31% support) are seen among Americans.
- Likely NDP voters support campus encampments lasting from overnight (75%) to several months (56%) at a majority level, while most of those who would vote CPC say they find any length of encampment unacceptable. Likely Liberal voters are split on encampments lasting several weeks (47% acceptable, 47% unacceptable), but most view anything longer than that unacceptable.
- President Joe Biden has dealt with criticism – and a protest vote during the Democratic presidential nomination process this year – over his administration’s handling of Israel’s war in Gaza. With that in the background, more than two-in-five (43%) of those who would vote Biden for president day believe protest camps lasting several months is acceptable. One-in-eight (13%) likely Donald Trump voters say the same.

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: How long is too long?

Canadian students were late to the university encampment game but have now established pro-Palestinian camps on campuses across the country. McGill University students set up the first Canadian encampment [on April 29](#) – following the lead of American post-secondary students who first began camping at Columbia University almost [two weeks earlier](#) – meaning the longest Canadian camp is more than a month old.

In some cases – at the [University of Calgary](#) and [University of Alberta](#) – camps were dismantled almost immediately by riot police, others were only [temporary by design](#). While university administrations at McGill have called for police action to break-up the encampment, [it has lasted](#).

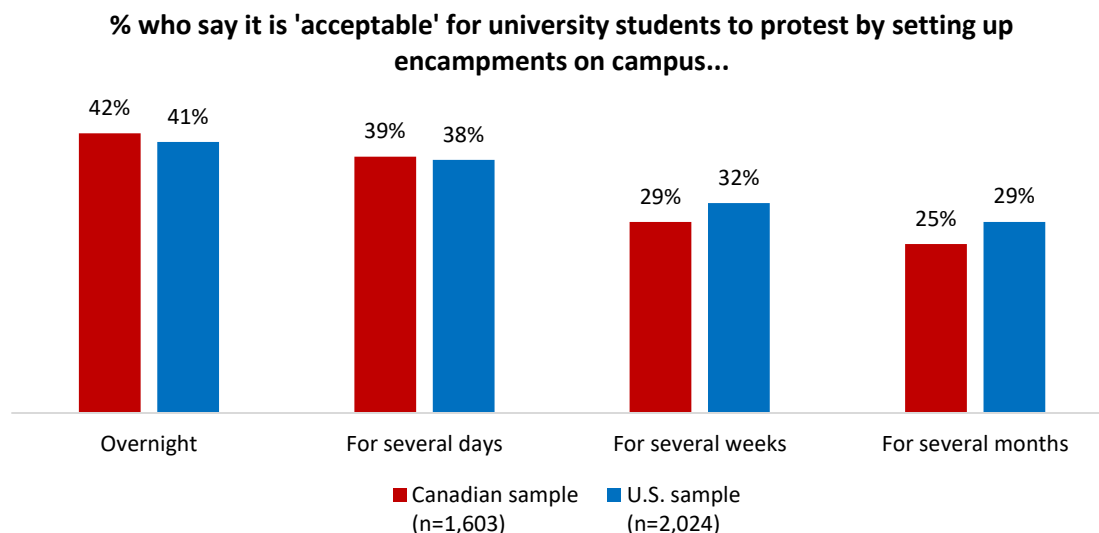
Half of Canadians believe even overnight is too long

Earlier data from the Angus Reid Institute found most Canadians believe protesting in a university campus courtyard is acceptable. To further examine the issue of these campus protests, in these new data for this report, respondents were asked whether they found it acceptable or not for these protests to setup encampments of various durations.

Related: [Protest Positions: Canadians say universities are fair game for demonstrations; hospitals, schools less so](#)

Overall, Canadians' acceptance declines as the length of time increases. Even for an overnight camp, fewer Canadians feel it is acceptable (42%) than not (50%, [see detailed tables](#)). When it comes to encampments of several weeks or several months, Canadians who say they are fine are outnumbered by two-to-one by those who say it is not okay for students to camp on university grounds for that long.

ARI conducted parallel surveys in the United States and Canada, finding that Americans and Canadians hold similar views on the acceptability of the length of campus encampments:



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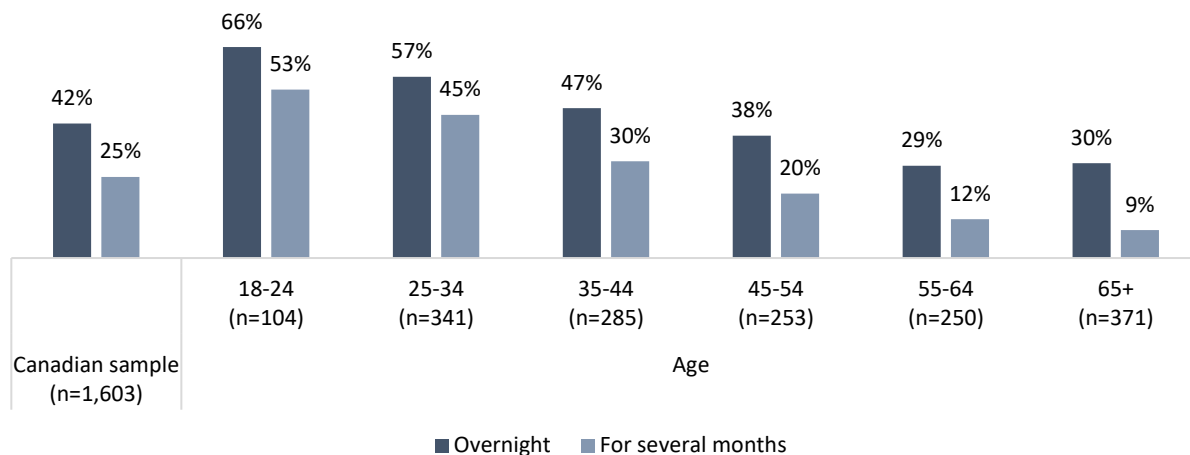
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Majority of Canadian 18- to 24-year-olds say months of encampments ‘acceptable’

There is a massive gap in the views of younger Canadians – who are more likely to protest, in general – and Canadians older than 34-years-old. Two-thirds (66%) of 18- to 24-year-olds say an overnight protest encampment is acceptable, and a majority (53%) that age believe a camp lasting “several months” is fine. They are the only age group to believe a multi-month-long protest camp on university grounds is acceptable at a majority level.

Canadians aged 35- to 44-years-old are divided whether or not an overnight camp is okay (47% to 42%) and shift to opposed to a camp of several months (30% to 59%). All older age groups oppose encampments of all lengths of time at a majority level (see detailed tables).

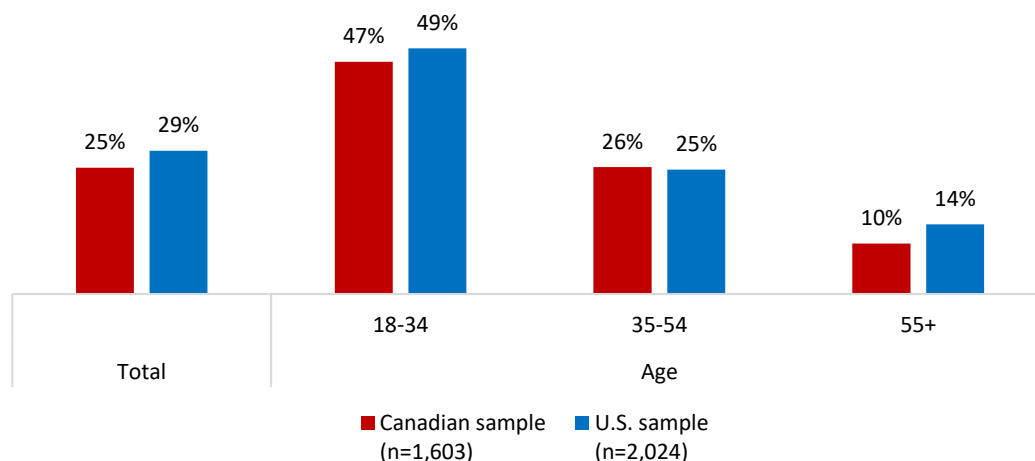
% who say it is 'acceptable' for university students to protest by setting up encampments on campus...



Generational divide evident in U.S. and Canada

There are further parallels across the 49th parallel on this issue. Canadians and Americans of the same generation hold similar views as to the acceptability of the length of various encampments. Canadian and American 18- to 34-year-olds are more than three times likely to view students camping on university grounds for “several months” as acceptable as those older than 54:

% who say it is 'acceptable' for university students to protest by setting up encampments on campus 'for several months'



Political views on both sides of the border

Political persuasion also appears to drive views on the acceptability of protest camps by university students. In Canada, likely NDP voters say even a protest camp of several months is acceptable at a majority level (56%). In the early days of Canadian university encampments, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh said [on social media](#) that he stood “in solidary with students and anti-war advocates” and he would defend students’ right to peacefully protest.

Those who would vote Liberal if an election were held today lean towards believing encampments of several days are acceptable but are more likely to reject camps lasting several weeks or months. Prime Minister and Liberal leader Justin Trudeau [was more measured in his remarks](#) on the university encampments in early May. He did not speak for or against the encampments, but instead said universities are places for free speech but that everyone should feel safe on campus.

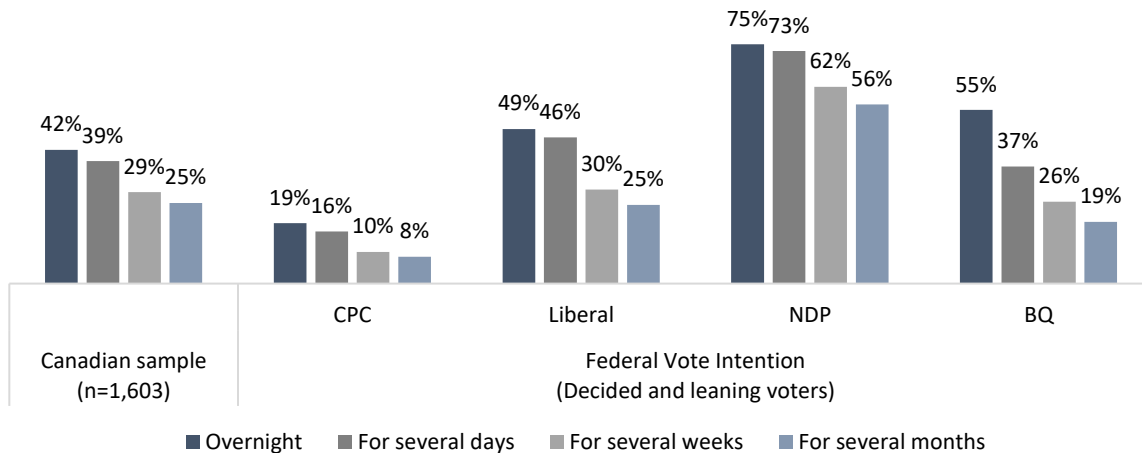
Likely Conservative voters find encampments of any length unacceptable by an overwhelming majority. Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre has only addressed the issue [in a statement from his office](#), saying that Conservatives “denounce unequivocally the glorification of terrorism and antisemitism in our streets and on our campuses.”

Bloc Québécois leader Yves-François Blanchet [has condemned](#) the encampment at L’Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), arguing that the freedom of other students has been compromised by the encampment – which has since been resolved by negotiation between protesters and university administration, more on that later in the report. Likely Bloc Québécois voters support an overnight encampment at a majority level, but believe anything longer than that is unacceptable:

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President Joe Biden has been facing a protest vote during the Democratic primary in the lead-up to the 2024 election. While Biden is the presumptive Democrat nominee for president, party voters have been voting “[uncommitted](#)” to protest his and the U.S. government’s response to Israel’s war in Gaza. It has proven to be [a difficult issue](#) for Biden to navigate, as he faces pressure for support from Israel, a historic and close ally, and from pro-Palestinian potential Democrat voters as the civilian casualties have mounted as the war has drug on. Student leaders expressed disappointment when Biden condemned campus protests in the U.S. [in early May](#), arguing that Biden response and overall pro-Israel stance on the war risks “losing an entire generation of voters”.

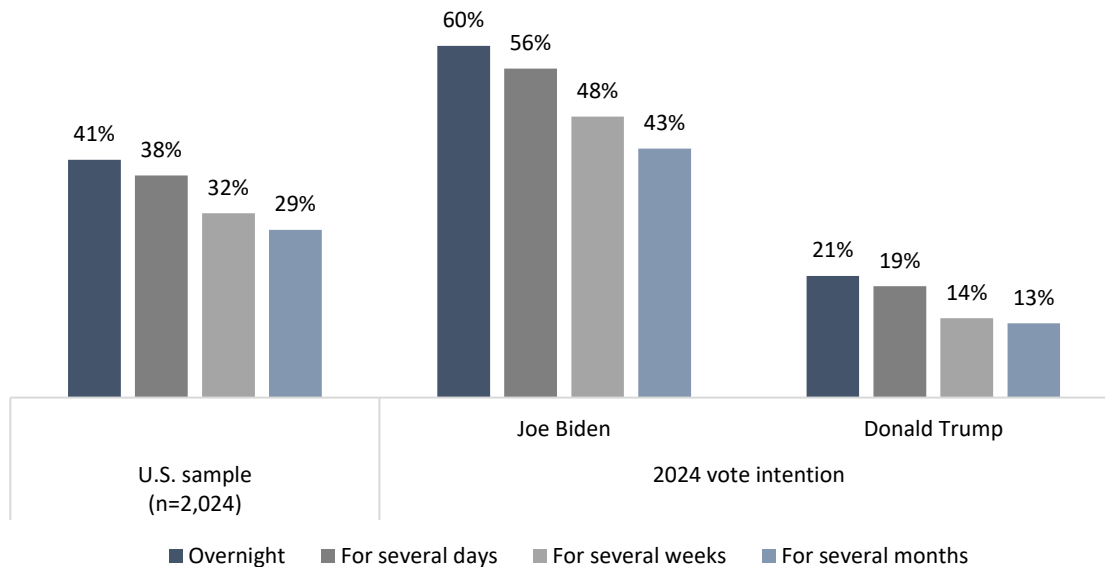
As the war has drug on, the Biden administration has called on Israel to [reign in civilian casualties](#). Biden also called for the war to end with a permanent ceasefire [last week](#).

Americans who say they intend to vote Biden are much more supportive of campus protests lasting overnight (60%), for several days (56%), several weeks (48%) or several months (43%) than likely Donald Trump voters:

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Part Two: Disclose and divest?

The university encampment movement that has [spread across North America](#) has multifold purpose. Some hope to raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis, others hope to challenge apathy, changing hearts and minds, while many are attempting to apply pressure to universities themselves to disclose the financial relationships they have with Israel in order to put pressure on that country's government to end its military actions in Gaza.

At the University of Toronto, where [as many as 177 tents](#) are set-up, protesters claim they will not leave until the university discloses its financial connections with Israel and divests. University administration [offered](#) to create a working group to explore disclosure of the school's investments but said it would stop short of ending partnerships with Israeli universities.

Protest camps at [McMaster University](#), [UQAM](#) and [Ontario Tech University](#) have ended through negotiation, with administration agreeing to some of the protesters' terms. In all three cases, the universities agreed to a degree of disclosure of investments the universities have made but did not agree to severing academic ties or divesting from Israeli companies.

Whether or not divestment is possible, it's certainly a popular demand. The following universities have seen similar requests made by demonstrators in ongoing encampments:

- [Concordia University \(whose students have camped at nearby McGill\)](#)
- [McGill University](#)
- [University of Ottawa](#)
- [University of British Columbia](#)
- [University of Toronto](#)

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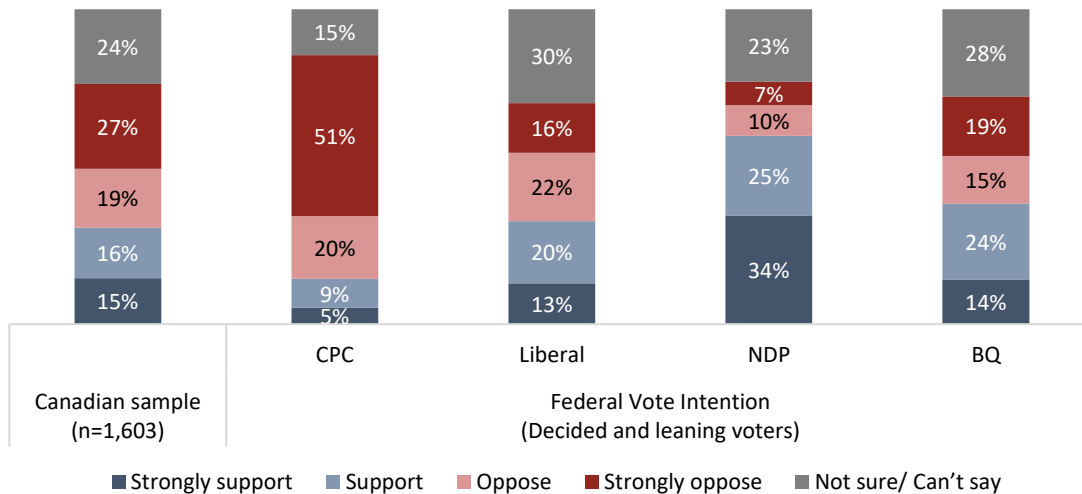
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- [University of Victoria](#)
- [Vancouver Island University](#)
- [Western University](#)

More than two-in-five Canadians oppose

There are diverse opinions in Canada on this aspect of the Israeli-academic-investment relationship. Overall, more Canadians oppose (46%) universities complying with protesters demands than support (31%) them. Those who would support the Conservatives in a federal election are by far the most opposed, with seven-in-10 (71%) saying they oppose the movement. Would-be NDP voters show majority support and the lowest opposition, while potential Liberal and Bloc Québécois voters' opinions are murky with similar numbers supporting, opposing, or voicing uncertainty:

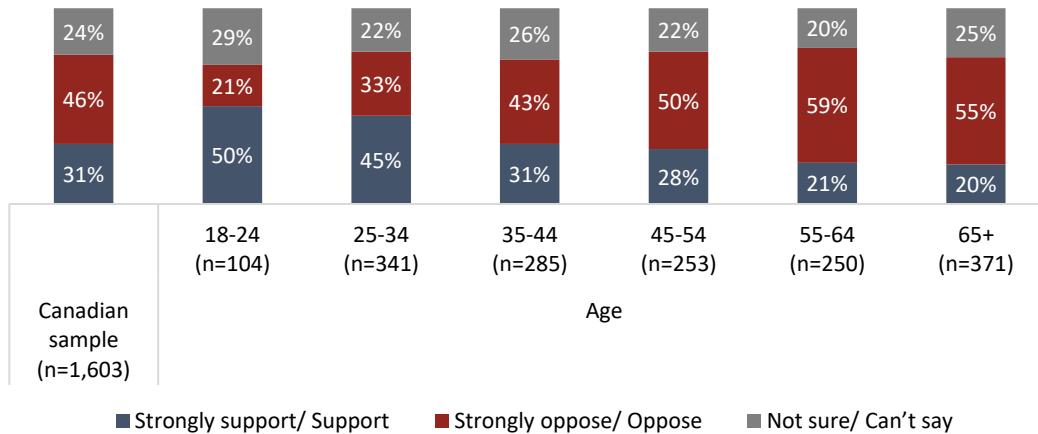
Overall, do you support or oppose universities severing all investment and academic ties they might have with Israel?



Canadian generational divide on aims of campus encampments

Generationally, Canadians are speaking to each other across a massive chasm. Those most likely to be in or around universities – the 18 to 24 age group – are the only cohort wherein a slight majority support the divestment movement. This remains a plurality view for 25- to 34-year-olds, before the inverse becomes true and opposition grows among older Canadians:

Overall, do you support or oppose universities severing all investment and academic ties they might have with Israel?

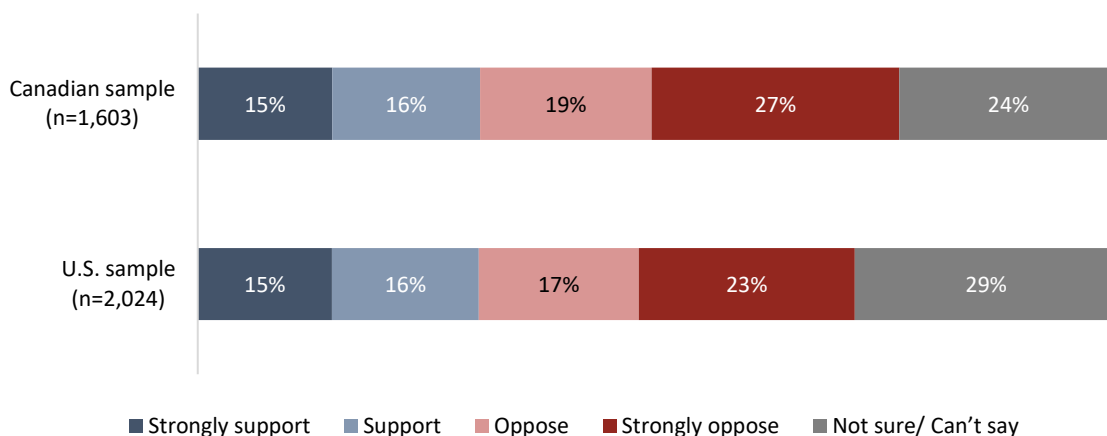


Americans, like Canadians, more likely to oppose than support

Columbia University demonstrators were among the first in this movement to make divestment demands after encampments started in mid-April on that campus. They're joined by other activists in the so-called [BDS \(Boycott, Divest, Sanction\) movement](#), calling for action against major companies like Indigo, SodaStream, Hewlett Packard, and others.

American opinions look near-identical to Canadian ones on this issue, only separated by slightly higher levels of uncertainty in the U.S., and stronger opposition in Canada:

Overall, do you support or oppose universities severing all investment and academic ties they might have with Israel?



Democrats more in favour, Republicans more against universities severing Israel ties

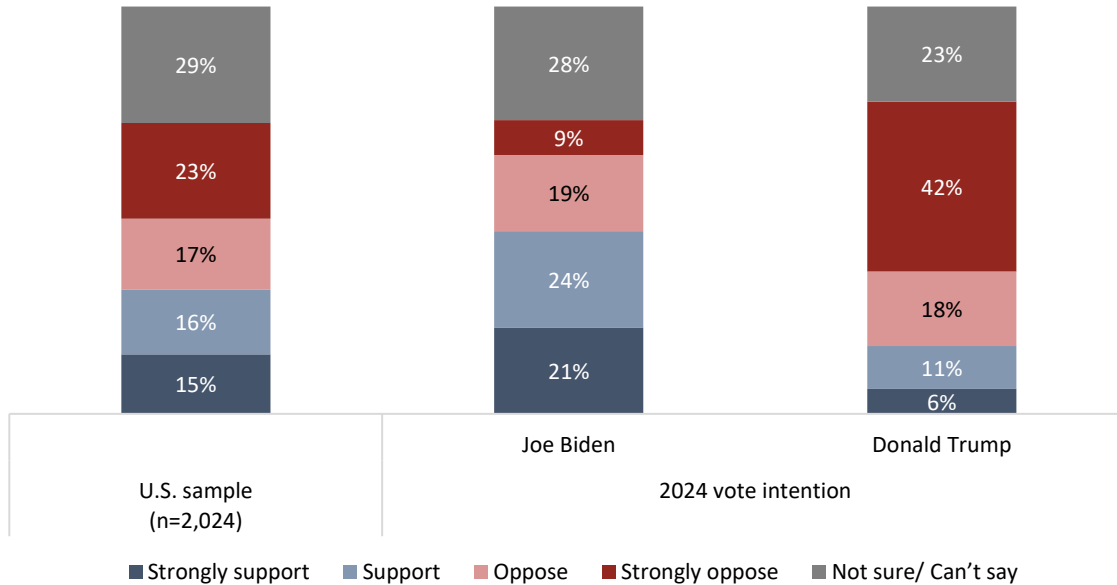
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Further highlighting the thorniness of the Israel-Gaza issue for Biden as the fall election approaches, more than two-in-five (45%) of those who say they would support the incumbent president in the election say they are in favour of universities severing ties with Israel, while three-in-ten (28%) are opposed.

Likely Trump supporters are much more opposed (60%):

Overall, do you support or oppose universities severing all investment and academic ties they might have with Israel?



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

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