

2012

NATIONAL OPINION POLL:

CANADIAN VIEWS ON ASIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Canadians Are Increasingly Attuned to Asia, But Still Have Concerns

- 4-in-10 Canadians state that they're paying more attention to Asia now than they have in the past 12 months
- The proportion of Canadians who attribute "warm" feelings to Asian countries has also gone up, specifically for China (12%), Japan (34%), South Korea (17%) and Southeast Asia (14%).
- While this shift in their mental maps of Asia has occurred, Canadians are not yet fully embracing Asia. Despite positive shifts in favourability towards Asia, feelings about countries in the region remain well below that of other Western democracies; Australia (68%) and Japan (34%) are notable exceptions.
- Canadians also continue to display a lingering hesitation and concern about Asia, particularly China. While appreciating the benefits of foreign investment from Asian countries, for example, fewer than one-in-five Canadians would be in favour of state-controlled companies from China and India buying a controlling stake in a major Canadian company.

2. Economic Focus Continues to Drive Canadians' Attraction to Asia

- A solid majority (63%) views Asian economies as vital to the well-being of Canada and 57% feel Canada would benefit from more Asian investment, a consistent trend over the past few years.
- China, in particular, is increasingly considered important to Canada's prosperity, up 2-points since 2011, second only to the United States, and well ahead of other Asian countries. Fully half of the Canadian population now sees the growing economic power of China as more of an opportunity than a threat, up by substantial 7-points in the past 12 months.
- India, too, is on Canadians' radar; 57% perceives economic opportunities with this Asian country as well, up 5 points over the past year.

3. Canadians Are Open to Shifting Away from the U.S. and More Towards Asia, But They Want to Maintain Traditional Ties

- 55% agree that strengthening economic and political relationships with Asia should be Canada's top foreign policy priority. This coincides with the preponderant view among more than eight in ten Canadians that the Government of Canada should aim to diversify its trade to be less dependent on the United States.
- Still, Canadians demonstrate some risk aversion, wanting the best of both worlds—diversification and maintenance of traditional ties. Fully eight-in-ten think Canada should develop good economic relations with Asia, but not move away from our historic economic partnerships with the U.S. and Europe.
- For many Canadians, current shifts in the global political and economic order may well be driving Asia's appeal. Two-thirds believe that China's influence in the world will surpass that of the U.S. in 10 years; one-third feels the same about India.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (cont.)

4. Regional Differences in Canada-Asia Relations

- There are noticeable differences in attitudes with Canadians from British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec and the Northern Territories. Their higher favourability towards Asian countries, suggest that proximity to the Pacific may be a less powerful force than originally believed in terms of shaping Canadians' link to Asia.
- Respondents from BC, Alberta, Quebec and the Northern Territories tend to give Asian countries a higher average ranking of favourability; this is notably true for China, India, Southeast Asia, Japan and South Korea.
- Respondents from Ontario tend to rank Asian countries less favourably overall. The proportion of Ontarians who rank China and Southeast Asia with a lower score is higher than those living elsewhere in Canada. Ontarians are also the least likely to consider Canada to be part of the Asia Pacific region (21%).

5. Canadians See the Need to Build a Canada-Asia Energy Relationship, But Are Quite Mixed in Their Views on The Direction It Could Take

- A solid majority (61%) feels a sense of urgency to act now to take advantage of the region's need for energy resources. And many Canadians (43%) even seem prepared to see Canada move quickly into Asia on energy matters despite the important ties we have with the United States on energy. However, a majority remains unconvinced that the economic benefits of Asia's investment in Canada's energy sector outweigh concerns about foreign ownership of our natural resources (26%).
- Just under half believe the potential environmental risk of transporting oil and gas to Asia outweighs the potential economic benefits; four-in-ten share the opposite view. While a slim majority (53%) would support the building of pipelines to transport crude oil to ports on Canada's west coast for export to Asia, public opinion is evenly split on allowing tankers carrying crude oil to enter the waters off Canada's west coast (45%).

6. Fewer Canadians See Human Rights and Democracy Promotion as a Major Priority in Canada's Foreign Policy with Asia

- While about half of Canadians still want the Canadian Government to focus on these issues in their relations with Asian countries, far fewer compared to a year ago think human rights (down 10 points to 45%) and democracy (down 9 points to 49%) promotion should be at the top of the Government's priority agenda for Asia.

7. Canadians' Support Free Trade Agreements Overall, But Are Mixed When It Comes To Asia

- Canadians are generally quite supportive of entering into Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with countries from around the globe. This is particularly true as far as the European Union and Japan are concerned, where support levels are over 60%. However, with other Asian countries—China, India, South Korea, and ASEAN countries—the picture is much more mixed. While more than four in ten would support FTAs with these countries, more than a third oppose the idea.
- Most Canadians have either not heard of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or don't know enough about it to have an opinion. Still, fully four in ten support Canada joining the proposed regional free trade agreement.

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