



2019  
NATIONAL  
OPINION POLL

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# CANADIAN VIEWS ON HUMAN CAPITAL FROM ASIA



ASIA PACIFIC  
FOUNDATION  
OF CANADA

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## ABOUT THE ASIA PACIFIC FOUNDATION OF CANADA

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The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) is dedicated to strengthening ties between Canada and Asia with a focus on expanding economic relations through trade, investment, and innovation; promoting Canada's expertise in offering solutions to Asia's climate change, energy, food security, and natural resource management challenges; building Asia skills and competencies among Canadians, including young Canadians; and improving Canadians' general understanding of Asia and its growing global influence.

APF Canada is well known for its annual national opinion polls of Canadian attitudes regarding relations with Asia. APF Canada places an emphasis on China, India, Japan, and South Korea, while also developing expertise in emerging markets in the region, particularly economies within the Association for Southeast Asian Nations.

Visit APF Canada at [www.asiapacific.ca](http://www.asiapacific.ca).

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL OPINION POLL

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Since 2004, the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada has been conducting regular nationwide surveys to assess Canadians' attitudes toward countries in the Asia Pacific, and their perceptions of Canada-Asia relations. Unique in its construction and its objectives, APF Canada's National Opinion Poll has been instrumental in drawing a portrait of Canadians' perspectives on Asia and the region's increasing relevance to Canada's prosperity.

The 2019 National Opinion Poll is the second thematic survey of the year, with a focus on Canadian attitudes toward international high-skilled talent migration to Canada.

### WITH A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION, THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS POLL IS THREE-FOLD:

1. To explore Canadian attitudes toward inbound high-skilled international talent, especially from Asia;
2. To examine factors (e.g., country of origin; language proficiency; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM] knowledge) that are crucial considerations for Canada in attracting high-skilled and educated international talent; and
3. To inform policy-makers on the challenges of attracting and retaining international talent.

### PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT:

- Talent refers to highly educated (i.e., university degree) workers or students with management, professional, or technical skills.
- *High-skilled worker*, unless noted otherwise, refers to highly educated workers with management, professional, or technical skills.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of increasingly sophisticated technologies is transforming the future of work and driving up the demand for high-skilled talent – highly educated (i.e., university degree) workers and students with management, professional, or technical skills. In addition to the issues posed by an aging workforce, this creates additional challenges for advanced economies, including Canada. While Canada has a reputation of being a talent hub, “brain drain” – the outmigration of high-skilled Canadians – has been [an issue for Canada](#) since the 1990s, making it even harder to meet the growing demand for high-skilled talent.



*Many Asian countries boast a young, high-skilled work force*

Source: Photo by Hike Shaw on Unsplash

As competition for the acquisition of international talent becomes fierce, Asia presents a hopeful opportunity. Many Asian countries, including emerging economies such as India and Vietnam, boast a relatively [young and educated](#) labour force. [Investing more than any other countries in research and development](#) (R&D), South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are also leaders in research, especially in technology. Consequently, [Asian universities are rapidly climbing up global rankings](#), further equipping domestic talent with in-demand skills for the future. However, the region has also seen [a growing trend of international outmigration for better opportunities](#). This, together with the existing strong Asian diaspora in Canada and the [United States losing attractiveness for international talent](#)



following the recent rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, has opened a window of opportunity for Canada to harness the Asian talent pool. This window of opportunity, however, is closing with Asian economies joining the global competition for high-skilled talent. [A 2019 Independent Task Force Report from the Council of Foreign Relations](#) urges the United States government to take an active role in attracting and retaining international students, particularly in the fields of science and technology. Similarly, to ensure Canada remains competitive globally, the country's future immigration policy must address the pressing challenges posed by a growing talent deficit.

With an aim to inform public policies around attracting and retaining international talent, this edition of APF Canada's National Opinion Poll assesses Canadian attitudes toward the recruitment of foreign workers, with special attention to high-skilled talent from Asia, their importance for the future of the Canadian economy, and immigration policies Canada should pursue.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE POLL

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**CANADIANS RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF TAPPING INTO THE GLOBAL TALENT POOL AND, MORE SPECIFICALLY, ACQUIRING TALENT FROM ASIA WITH STEM SKILLS.** Fifty-six percent of Canadians believe that Canada's shortage of high-skilled workers is becoming a deterrent to its competitiveness in the global economy. Accordingly, slightly more than half of Canadians (54%) agree that Canada should look to Asia for international talent in the next 10 years, while 34% disagree and 12% are not sure of their opinion. When presented with the opportunity to capitalize on the tightened immigration policy in the United States, 60% of Canadians support attracting high-skilled talent from Asia. Finally, a considerable majority (74%) think highly educated workers with STEM skills deserve further attention in our immigration policy.

**CANADIANS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THEIR CONCERNS RELATED TO IMMIGRATION FROM ASIA OUTWEIGH THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF HAVING MORE INTERNATIONAL TALENT IMMIGRATION FROM ASIA.** Fifty-three percent of Canadians believe that the potential benefits of having more talent from Asia outweighs the potential concerns, while slightly more than one-third of Canadians disagree with that statement. Most Canadians associate potential benefits of international talent immigration with addressing workforce shortages and transferring knowledge and technology to the country while they remain concerned about Canada's capacity to support social integration of the foreigners, the inconsistent credential recognition system, and mismatch between skills and labour market demand.

**AMID CURRENT TENSIONS BETWEEN CANADA AND CHINA, CANADIANS PERCEIVE A LESS RECEPTIVE ENVIRONMENT IN CANADA FOR INTERNATIONAL TALENT FROM CHINA.** Six out of 10 Canadians believe receptiveness to Chinese talent has decreased, while 24% disagree

with that statement. Nonetheless, 65% of Canadians are still in favour of the immigration of highly educated workers in the STEM fields from China. But, in comparison, Canadians are more in favour of immigration of STEM talent from the Philippines (69%), India (73%), South Korea (76%), as well as from the United States (79%) and the European Union (82%).

**DESPITE MODERATE CONCERNS ABOUT INTERNATIONAL TALENT FROM ASIA AND CHINA, CANADIANS CONSISTENTLY CONVEYED THAT PLACE OF BIRTH IS NOT AN IMPORTANT CRITERION WHEN CHOOSING INTERNATIONAL TALENT.**

Only 3% of Canadians think that birthplace should be a priority when recruiting international talent, while 9% think it should be considered when recruiting STEM talent. Furthermore, while 53% of Canadians believe that international talent should originate from countries sharing Canada's core values to some extent, as many as 40% think that immigration policy should focus solely on individual characteristics, without any consideration of the country of origin.

**CANADIANS WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO PRIORITIZE INTERNATIONAL TALENT THAT HAS STEM SKILLS, IS PROFICIENT IN ENGLISH OR FRENCH, AND IS LIKELY TO ADAPT TO CANADIAN CULTURE EASILY.**

Forty-six percent of Canadians include STEM skills and language competencies among the top skills that international talent joining the Canadian workforce should possess. Forty-four percent also consider adaptability to Canadian culture to be a top priority. When considering the criteria for Canada to select international talent with STEM skills specifically, Canadians express a similar set of expectations. They stress the need to consider factors such as skills and competencies (74%), language proficiency (64%), cultural adaptability (54%), and work experience (54%).

**CANADIANS SUPPORT A RANGE OF POTENTIAL PUBLIC POLICIES AIMING TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN MORE INTERNATIONAL TALENT FROM ASIA.** The policies getting the most support aim to enhance Asian student exchange and co-op programs in Canada (77%) and extend the length of temporary work permits for international talent (71%). When the



focus is on talent from China specifically, support for policies drops about 10 percentage points. Nonetheless, support remains significantly stronger than opposition for all suggested policies. Furthermore, 65% of Canadians support the ongoing Start-up Visa Program that is aimed at attracting immigrant entrepreneurs to Canada, and only one out of 10 does not believe the program to be beneficial.

**THERE IS A STARK DIVIDE IN RESPONSES BETWEEN LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE CANADIANS, BOTH IN TERMS OF INTERNATIONAL TALENT RECRUITMENT PRIORITIES AND CURRENT CONCERNS**

**REGARDING THE CANADIAN ECONOMY.** Liberals are more likely than Conservatives to believe that a shortage of high-skilled workers is becoming a deterrent to Canada's competitiveness in the global economy. Furthermore, a slight majority of Conservatives believe the concerns of accepting more talent from Asia outweigh the potential benefits. Additionally, 72% of Liberals agree that Canada should capitalize on the tightened immigration policy in the United States to encourage international migration of high-skilled talent from Asia, while only 49% of Conservatives agree with that statement. More broadly, Conservatives generally exhibit lower support for policies favouring Asian talent immigration, as opposed to supporters of all other major political parties of Canada.

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE HIGH-SKILLED TALENT MARKET

Canadians recognize the importance of tapping into the global talent pool and, more specifically, acquiring talent from Asia.

**First of all, Canadians are aware of the challenges posed by the global shortage of talent and its negative impact on the Canadian economy.**

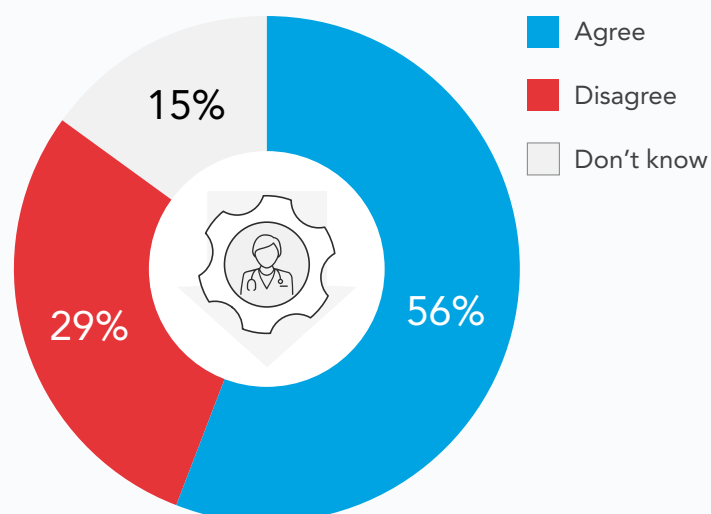
Projections suggest that, due to the discrepancies between the growth of demand for high-skilled workers and the number of available trained workers globally, there will be [a deficit of 21% in the global pool of high-skilled workers by 2020](#).<sup>1</sup> As their populations age, more and more developed countries lack high-skilled workers. This is the case for Canada and it will have adverse effects on the Canadian economy by [impeding productivity and business growth](#). The Canadian tech sector, for example, suffers from brain drain because [the sector is not compelling enough yet to compete with the world leaders in tech](#). To drive growth in the sector and close the gap with global leaders, Canada needs to actively recruit international talent and attract creative investors.

Canadians are demonstrably aware of this issue as 56% are concerned by the impact of the talent shortage in Canada, while 29% are not (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about international talent - A shortage of high-skilled workers is becoming a deterrent to Canada's competitiveness in the global economy. **Base:** n=1,524

*Most Canadians believe that a shortage of high-skilled workers is becoming a deterrent to Canada's competitiveness in the global economy*



<sup>1</sup> | Korn Ferry defines "highly skilled worker" as individuals who have completed post-secondary education, such as college or university, or a high-level trade college qualification.

**Second, Canadians are generally open to the immigration of international talent from Asia to alleviate the talent shortage in Canada.**

There is – quite literally – a world of opportunities when it comes to attracting international talent (high-skilled workers, STEM scientists, or international students). However, global competition to attract high-skilled talent is increasing, with a sharp rise in developed labour markets drawing from the surplus of workers in emerging economies. A prime example of this is China, which has a surplus of workers at the moment, but [that surplus is expected to vanish in 10 years](#). The Chinese government’s investment in R&D is possibly one of the reasons behind this declining surplus. Beijing’s R&D [investment has increased tenfold over the last 20 years](#) and is projected to continue growing, which will in turn lead to the retention of local high-skilled talent, and will arguably attract more from the global pool.



*The Chinese are investing heavily in R&D*

Source: Photo by Road Trip with Raj on Unsplash

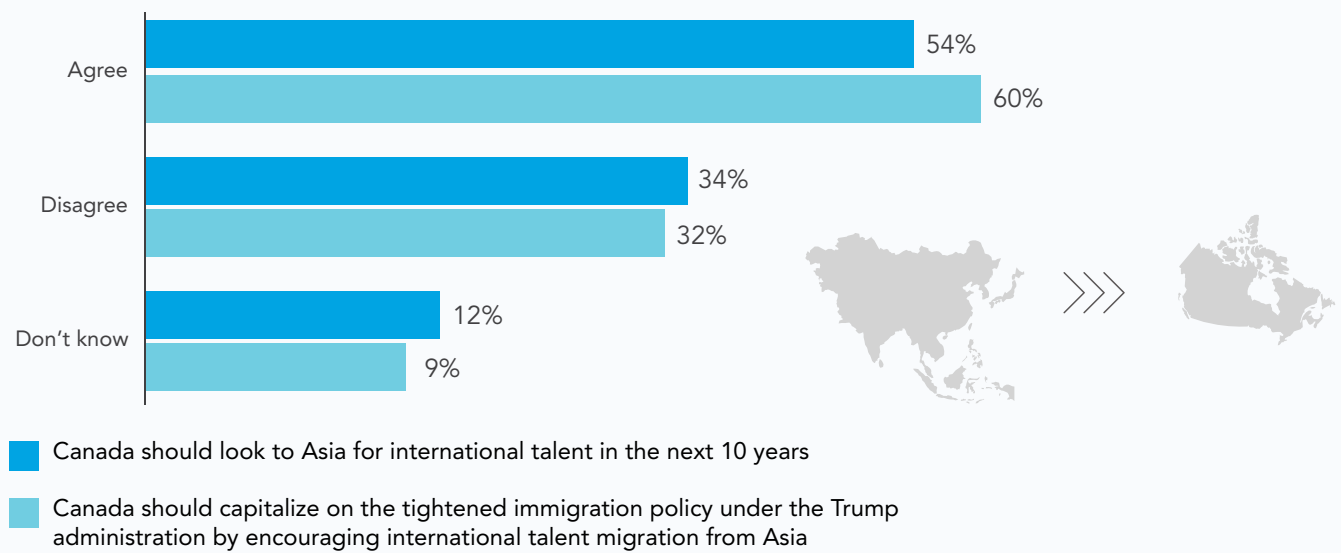
At this crucial time, 54% of Canadians agree that Canada should look to Asia for international talent in the next 10 years. However, only a few respondents had a firm opinion on the question – either strongly agreeing (12%) or strongly disagreeing (11%) with the proposition – suggesting that the majority of the public is uncertain on the subject.

In the context of rising anti-immigration sentiment in the United States, Canadians are also in favour of a more assertive immigration policy – but one that encourages and eases the migration of international talent to Canada. Sixty percent of Canadians agree that Canada should capitalize on the tightened immigration policy under the Trump administration by encouraging international migration of high-skilled talent from Asia. When presented in this context, the immigration of high-skilled talent from Asia gets more support, as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

*Opinions on immigration of international talent from Asia*

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about international talent. **Base:** n=1,524





## FEELINGS TOWARD HIGH-SKILLED TALENT FROM ASIA

Canadians believe the immigration of talent from Asia and elsewhere is part of the solution to cope with changes in the labour market, as it augments the supply of labour and contributes to knowledge and technology development in Canada. Concerns related to talent immigration from Asia are mitigated since not only is Asian talent equipped with the STEM skills in demand in the Canadian labour market, but it also has strong diaspora networks in Canada to aid the social integration process.

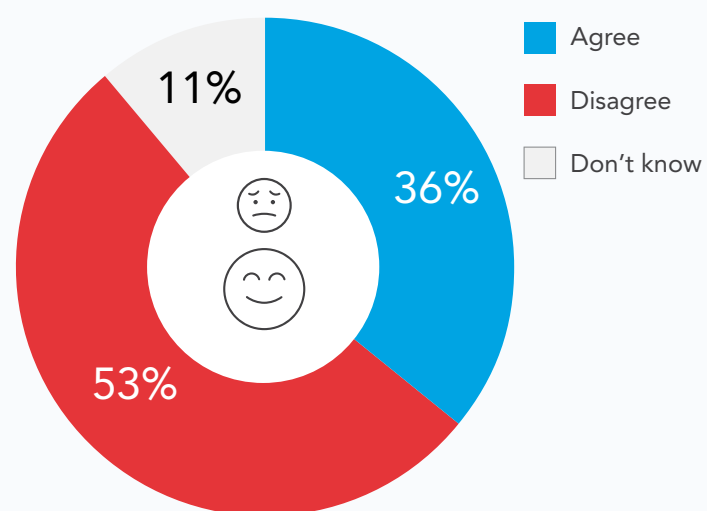
**When it comes to international talent from Asia, most Canadians think the potential benefits outweigh the potential risks.**

Opening up borders to international talent involves risks and benefits; however, slightly more than half (53%) of Canadians disagree that the potential concerns of having more talent from Asia outweigh the benefits, and only 36% agree (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about international talent - Overall, potential concerns of having more international talent from Asia join the Canadian workforce outweigh the potential benefits. **Base:** n=1,524

*Potential benefits of having more international talent from Asia join the Canadian workforce outweigh the potential concerns*



Interestingly, there is a statistically significant relationship between the level of education and the perception of risks and benefits. People who hold a university degree are more likely to perceive more benefits than risks related

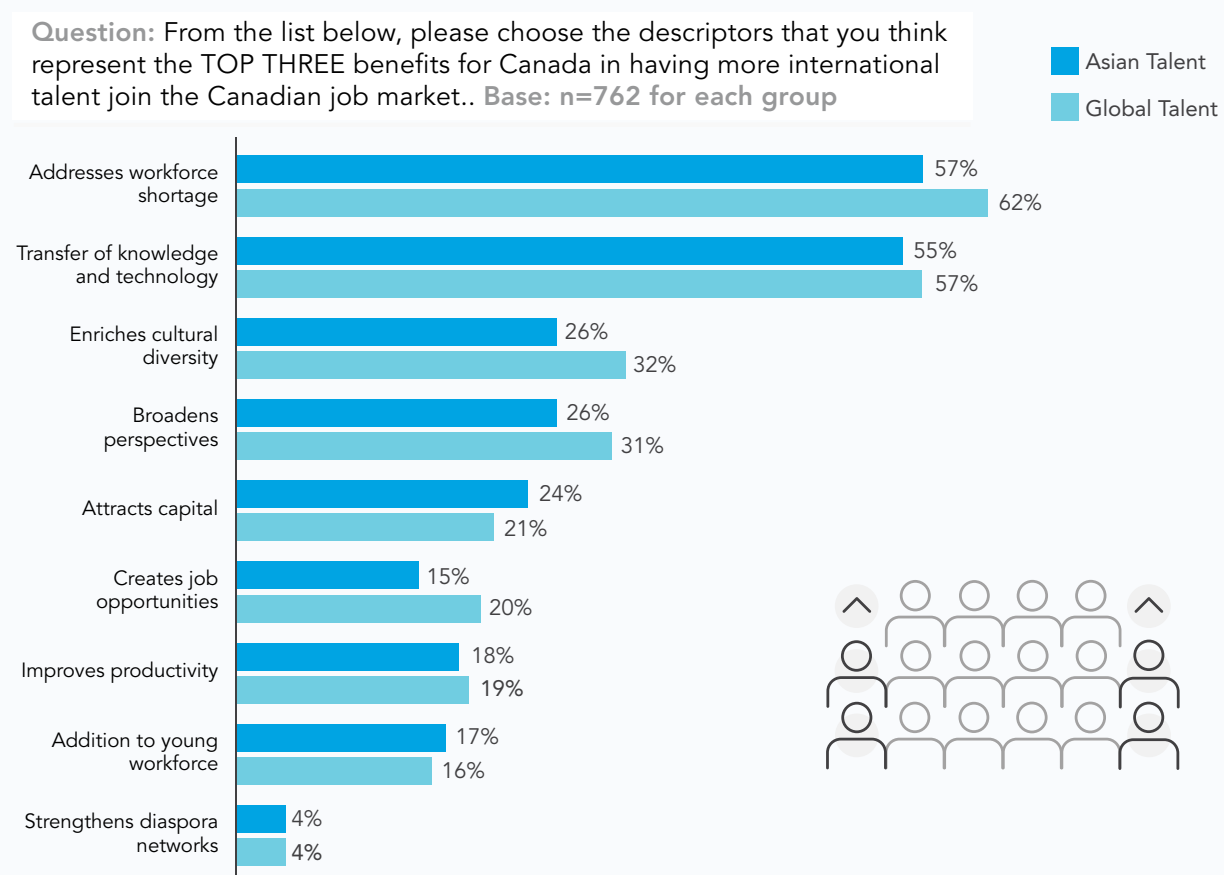
to the immigration of international talent from Asia, than people without a university degree. We further found that this is driven by greater concerns among the less educated population over foreign influence on Canadian culture and heightened social welfare competition.

**Transfer of knowledge and technology, and an increase in labour supply, are seen as the top benefits of international talent immigration to Canada.**

To assess whether the public sentiment toward high-skilled talent from Asia is any different from the sentiment toward international talent from around the world, we conducted a split-sample survey experiment – the national sample was split into two sub-samples that are equally representative of the Canadian population by region, gender, and age. One group was questioned about Asian international talent and the other about global international talent. All respondents were asked to list up to three benefits and three concerns they have with respect to talent immigration.

FIGURE 4

*Perceived benefits for Canada in having more international talent*



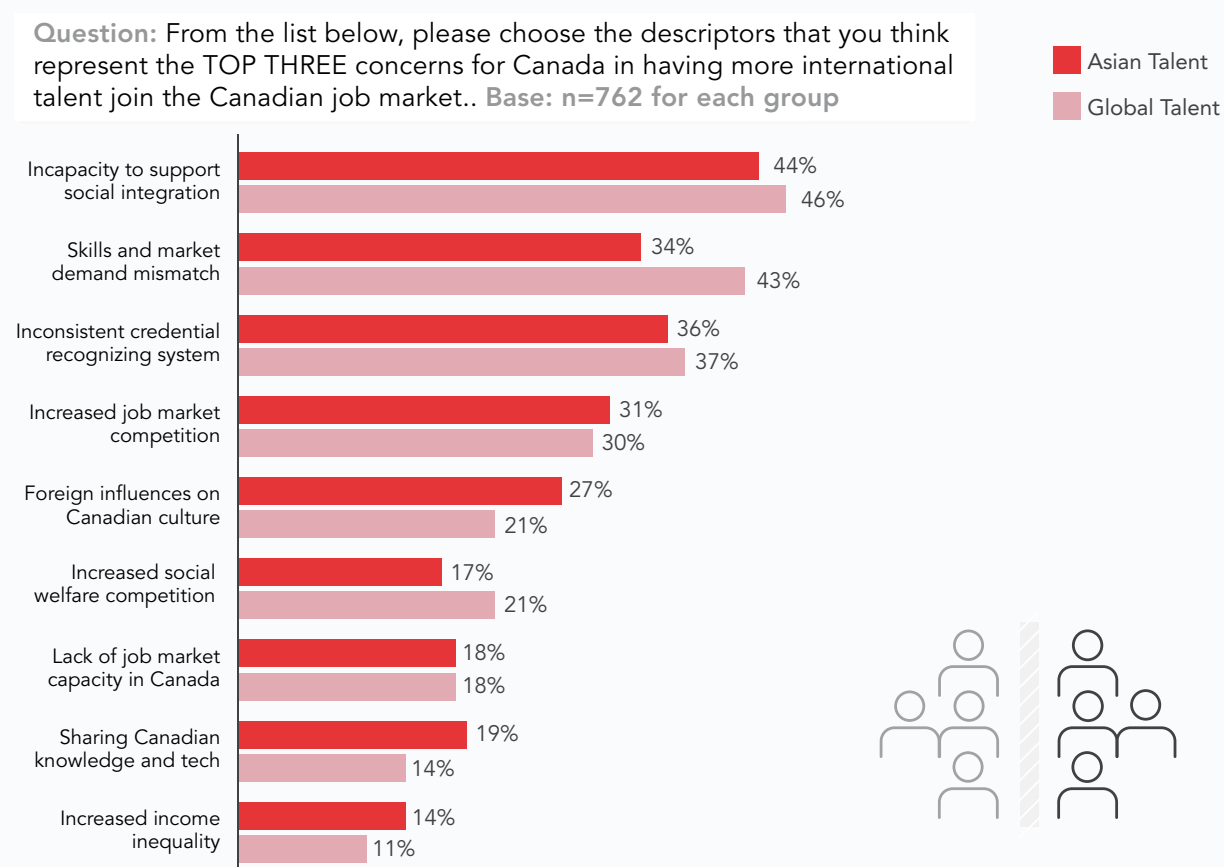


Regarding potential benefits, both groups identified addressing the workforce shortage in Canada (60%) and transfer of knowledge and technology to Canada (56%) as the top benefits of attracting international talent to Canada (Figure 4). Other frequently identified benefits were the enrichment of cultural diversity (29%) and the broadening of perspectives (29%).

In contrast to potential benefits, concerns over the immigration of high-skilled talent are moderate (Figure 5). The biggest concerns for both the groups – Asian and global talent – were a potentially insufficient capacity to support social integration of newcomers (45%), followed by the mismatch between immigrants’ skills and labour market demand (39%), an inconsistent credential recognizing system in Canada (37%), and increased labour market competition for Canadian citizens (31%).

FIGURE 5

*Perceived concerns for Canada in having more international talent*



In sum, no significant divergence in potential benefits or concerns is revealed between the two groups, suggesting similar views on international talent from Asia versus globally. Compared to Asian talent, there are slightly stronger

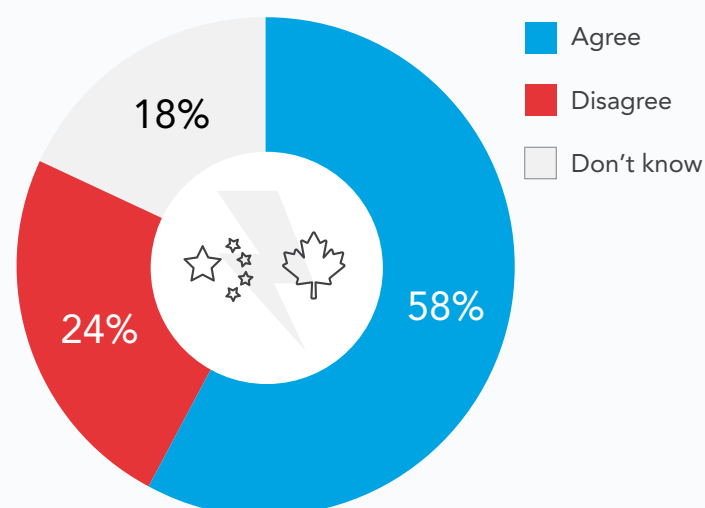
opinions on perceived benefits and concerns around global talent, reinforcing the idea that there is simply a lack of awareness about international talent from Asia. Exploring differences in responses between the two groups, we found that Canadians are more concerned (six percentage points) about Asian talent influencing Canadian culture compared to when the source region of international talent is not specified. On the other hand, Canadians believe Asian talent better matches Canadian labour market demand than the global talent pool – by nine percentage points.

**Aligned with the finding that Canadians do not perceive talent from Asia much differently than global talent, Canadians are open to the immigration of international talent and workers from around the globe, including from China, despite tensions that hamper enthusiasm.**

FIGURE 6

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about international talent - Canadians have become less receptive to international talent from China amid the current tension between Canada and China.  
**Base:** n=1,524

*Canadians have become less receptive to international talent from China amid the current tension between Canada and China*



As a result of current tensions, 58% of Canadians perceive a less receptive environment in Canada for international talent from China, compared to only 24% who feel receptiveness has not declined (Figure 6).

However, this does not tell us anything about the actual receptiveness of Canadians toward talent from China. Canadians may perceive an overall resistance to the immigration of Chinese talent, whether due to media coverage or policy, but this is discordant with their personal preferences. As displayed in Figure 7, 65% of Canadians continue to support the immigration of highly educated workers in the STEM fields from China.

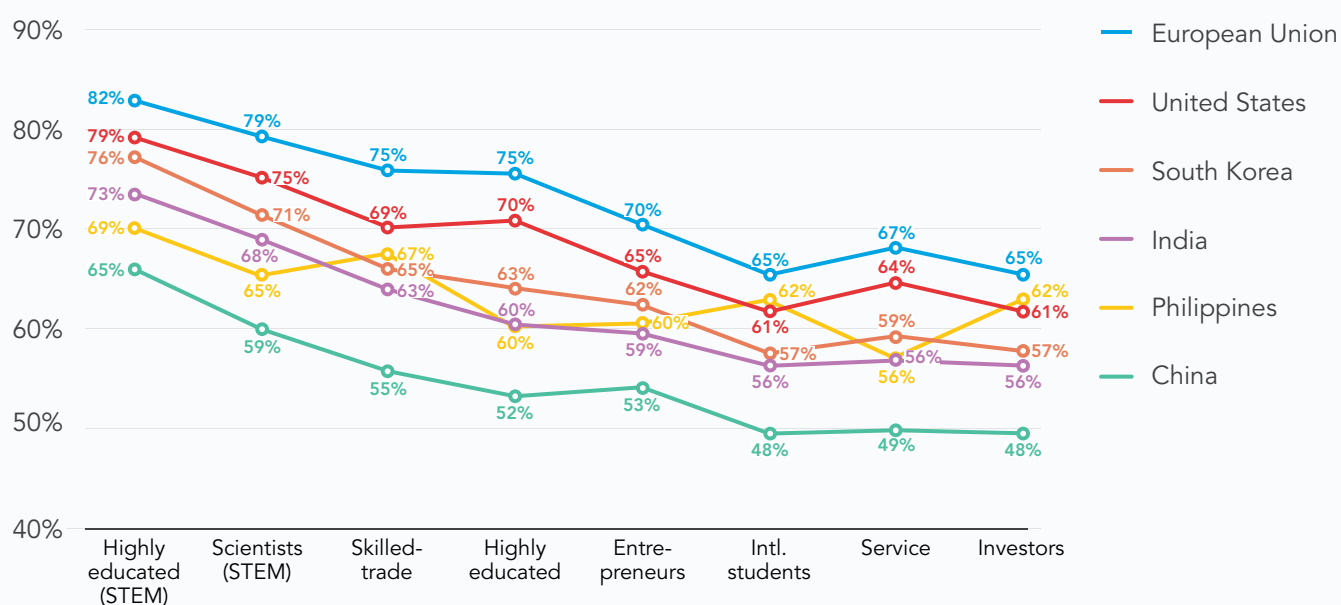
To grasp the level of receptiveness of Canadians to international talent from China and other countries, we asked survey respondents to identify the groups of workers from different countries that they would accept having more of in Canada.

Among the countries included in the survey, data suggests that China is the least preferred source of talent across all types of workers, while the most sought after talent by Canada is from the United States and the European Union. Compared to the other Asian countries (India, South Korea, and the Philippines), support for workers from China falls by approximately 10 percentage points. Nonetheless, Chinese talent immigration, except for university students (48%), is supported by more than half of Canadians. Chinese investors and international students get support by just under 50%, while the other 50% were either undecided or abstained to give their support to the immigration of investors and students from China.

FIGURE 7

*Canadians' views on the immigration of different groups of workers, by country of origin*

**Question:** Which groups of potential workers in each country/region would you accept Canada having more of? **Base:** n=1,524



While the immigration of all types of talent from India, South Korea, and the Philippines gets support from roughly 55% to 75% of the public (Figure 7), South Korea generally draws the most support, and most distinctly for

workers in the STEM fields: an understandable feeling toward workers from a [world-leading country in technology and R&D](#). Filipino talent, meanwhile, gets a surprisingly high level of support considering the smaller size of its economy. Furthermore, while the Liberal government has expressed its [plan to diversify the pool of international students to Canada](#), which is currently skewed toward Chinese students, Canadians are certainly open to students from other Asian countries, notably from South Korea (62%) and the Philippines (60%).

While the current poll indicates that Canadians positively believe in acquiring high-skilled talent from Asia, the country has long embraced a broader Asian workforce. According to [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada](#), [more than 40% of the workers in the Canadian manufacturing industry were born in another country](#). In metropolitan areas such as Calgary, AB, which ranks fifth on [The Economist's list](#) of the most livable cities around the world, one-third of the workforce, contributing to various segments of the economy, [comprises immigrants](#). Three of the largest source countries for immigrants in Calgary are in Asia – the Philippines, India, and China.



*Asian workers in the STEM fields are highly sought after*

Source: Photo by JodyHongFilms on Unsplash

## CRITERIA FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HIGH-SKILLED TALENT

**Despite moderate concerns about international talent from Asia and China, throughout the survey Canadians conveyed that the country of origin is not a primary concern to the recruitment of international talent.**

We found that only 3% of Canadians think that place of birth should be a priority when recruiting international talent, and only 9% think it should be considered when recruiting international talent with STEM skills. In addition to that, 40% of survey respondents said that Canada should focus its immigration policy exclusively on individual characteristics rather than country characteristics (Figure 8). The other 58% of Canadians prioritize at least one characteristic of the immigrants' origin country – and not solely individual characteristics – such as source countries that uphold values that are important to Canadians (53%), have good bilateral relations with Canada (26%), and are of economic importance to Canada (22%) (Figure 9).

FIGURE 8

**Question:** Thinking about Canada's immigration policy regarding international talent, do you think Canada should prioritize talent from countries with the following characteristics? **Base:** n=1,524

*Mixed opinions on priorities for immigration policy when recruiting international talent*

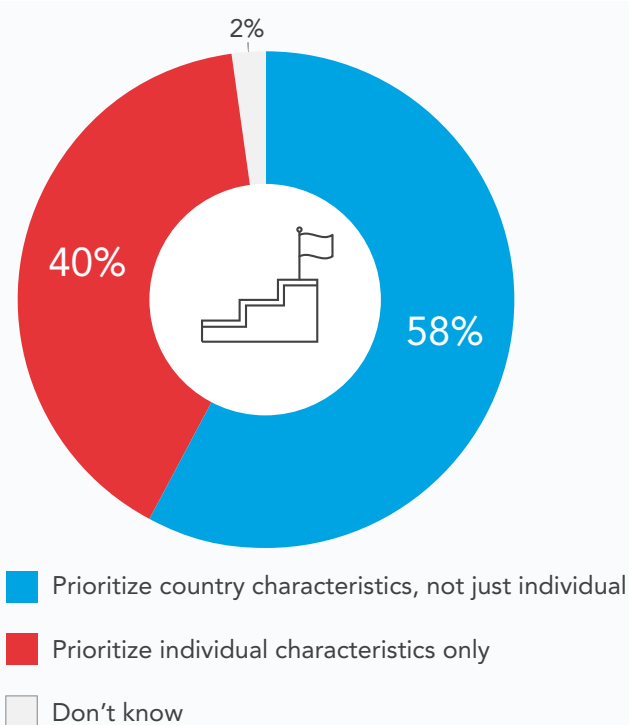
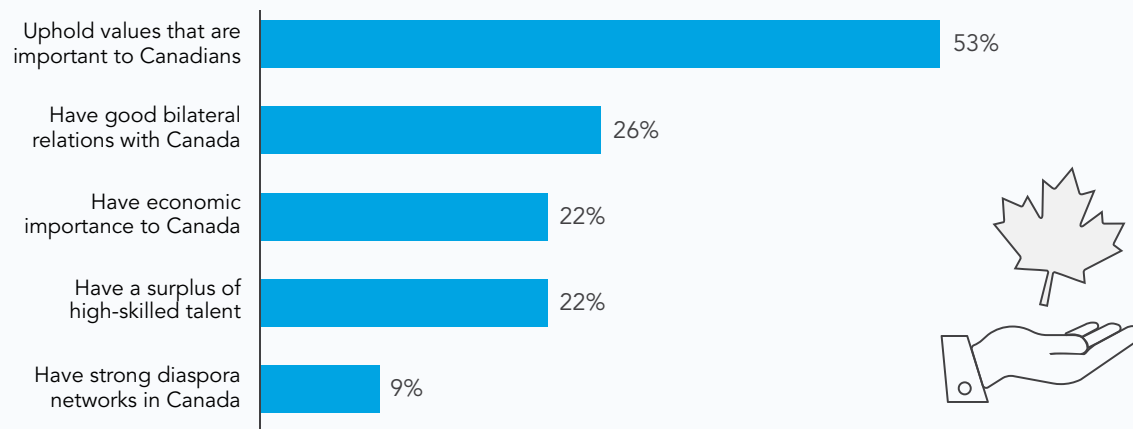


FIGURE 9

*Source country characteristics that Canada should prioritize for international talent migration policy*

**Question:** Thinking about Canada's immigration policy regarding international talent, do you think Canada should prioritize talent from countries with the following characteristics? **Base: n=889**



**Canadians prefer highly educated workers with STEM skills, who are likely to integrate well in Canada, over any other group of workers.**

We found that almost three-quarters of Canadians think that Ottawa should focus its immigration policy on attracting highly educated workers with STEM skills. We were particularly interested in analyzing the concerns about security risks linked to technology, such as espionage. However, major concerns are not reflected in Canadians' outlook on talent immigration (Figure 10) as scientists in the STEM fields get almost as much support as highly educated workers with STEM skills (a five percentage point difference). Regarding Chinese talent specifically, concern is only marginally higher (a six percentage point difference). Notably, as the respondents grow older, they are more likely to worry about security risks, and people from Quebec are twice as likely to be concerned as people from Ontario or British Columbia.

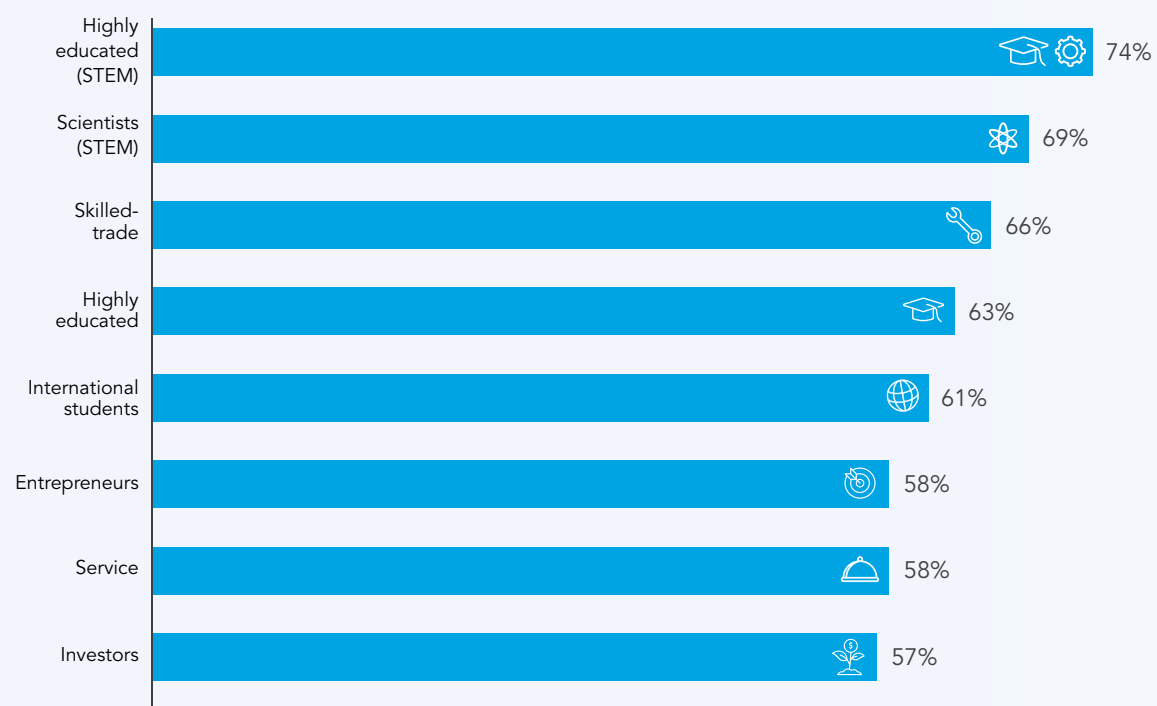


Although the public exhibits lower support for other groups of workers, well over half of them support the immigration of all other types of workers – namely, international university students (61%), entrepreneurs (58%), service workers (58%), and investors (57%).

FIGURE 10

*Preferred fields of migrating international talent*

**Question:** Which groups of potential workers in each country/region would you accept Canada having more of? **Base:** n=1,524



*Canadians welcome highly educated workers with STEM skills*

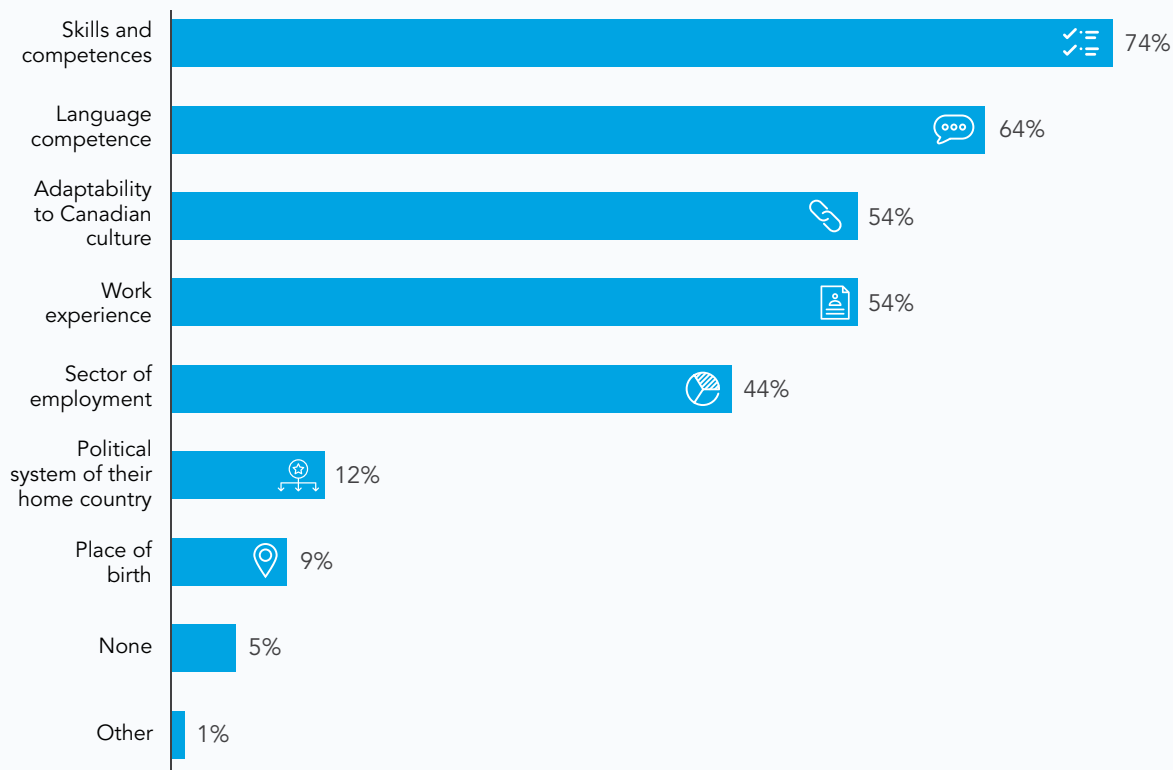
Source: Photo by Arif Riyanto on Unsplash

We also asked Canadians to list the criteria they think the government should consider when recruiting STEM talent abroad (Figure 11). The most popular criteria for recruiting STEM talent are based on specific skills and competencies (74%), language competence (64%), and adaptability to Canadian culture (54%).

FIGURE 11

*Preferred criteria for the recruitment of international STEM talent*

**Question:** Do you think Canada should have criteria on selecting international talent with STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills based on...? **Base:** n=1,524



**In addition to STEM skills and adaptability to Canadian culture, the government should give more consideration to international talent with creativity and innovation skills, as well as work experience.**

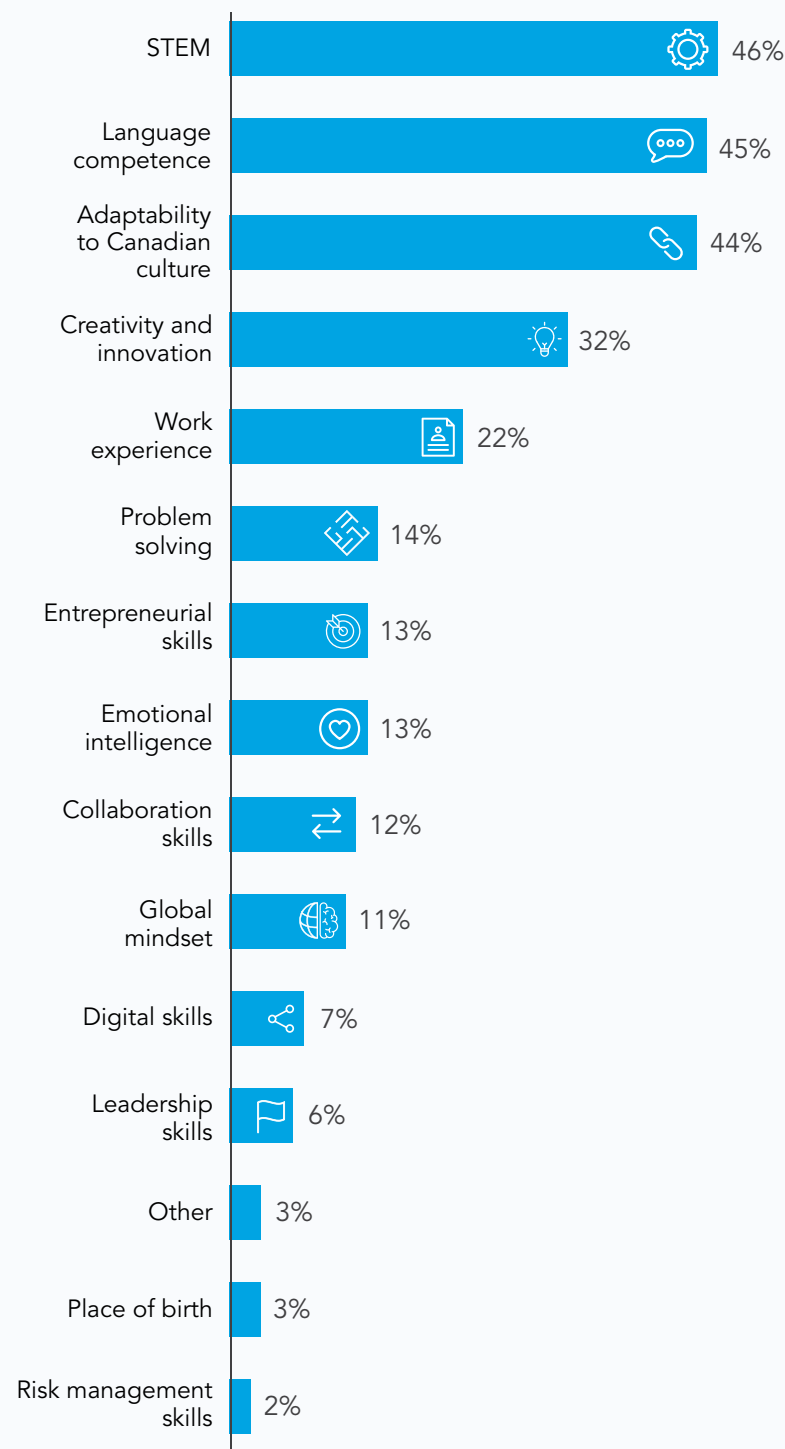
Similar results to those discussed previously (in Figure 11) were found when taking a broader look at the qualities and skills Canadians want the government to prioritize when seeking international talent to join the

Canadian workforce. STEM skills, language competence, and adaptability to Canadian culture lead the list of priorities for about 45% of Canadians (Figure 12). Those skills are followed by creativity and innovation (32%) and work experience (22%), which are also popular choices.

FIGURE 12


*Canadian views on qualities and skills the government should prioritize when seeking international talent*

**Question:** Which of the following qualities/skills in workers should the government of Canada give the highest priority when seeking international talent to join the Canadian workforce? Please choose up to THREE. **Base:** n=1,524





Finally, according to the McKinsey Global Institute, [emotional skill has been identified, alongside STEM skills, as an essential skill for the labour market of the future](#). However, we found that emotional intelligence is considered a priority by only 13% of Canadians, which might be an underestimation of the importance of this skill for the future of work. Emotional intelligence was defined by early proponents [Peter Salovey and John Mayer](#) as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions.”



*Emotional intelligence ranks low on Canadians' priorities when seeking international talent*

Source: Photo by Mimi Thian on Unsplash

## IMMIGRATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

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In 2016, a Canadian [government-led national opinion poll on immigration](#) showed that more than twice as many Canadians supported an increase in the number of immigrants as Canadians who opposed it. In 2019, we found that this has not changed, as Canadians endorse broadening immigration policies to secure more international talent and expanding immigration programs.

### **Canadians are in favour of a more open immigration policy to Asian talent, including from China.**

We asked Canadians if they supported or opposed different immigration policies geared toward attracting and retaining international talent from Asia. In doing so, we conducted a split-sample survey experiment, asking the same questions to two equally representative sub-samples of the Canadian population by region, gender, and age. To further assess the difference in sentiments toward China specifically, one group was asked if they supported policies aimed at Chinese immigrants and the second group was asked if they supported policies aimed at Asian immigrants more broadly.

The six policies that were proposed are supported by a majority of Canadians, for both China and Asia (Figure 13). Even though about 10% of the respondents do not have an opinion on the question, there remains support from more than 50% of Canadians for each policy. The most popular policies for Asia are encouraging university students to gain experience in Canada through exchange or co-op programs (77%), extending the length of temporary work permits for international talent (70%), encouraging family reunification for immigrating talent through visa programs (67%), and providing support for career development for international students (62%).

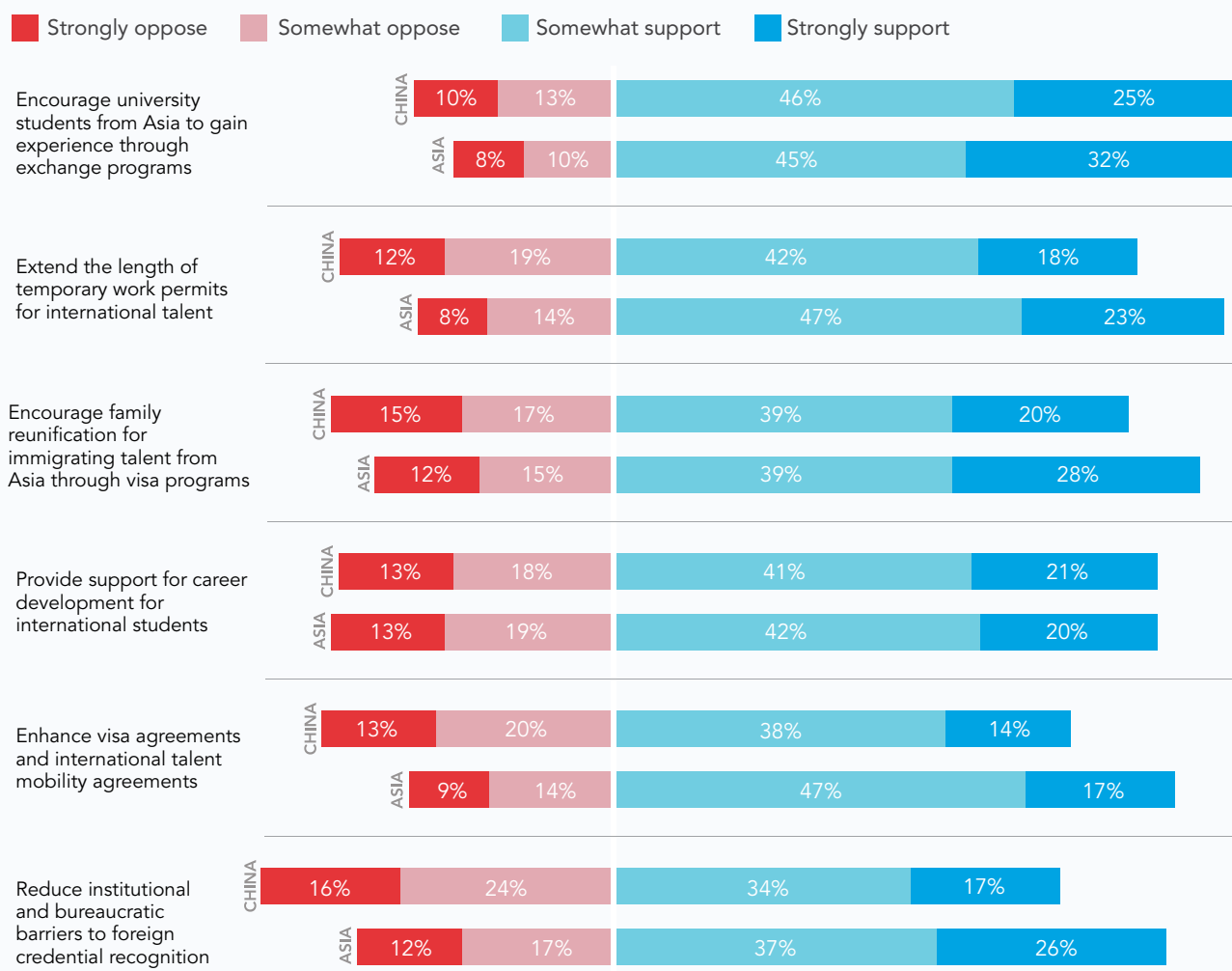
Policies aimed at China find lower support than policies for all of Asia, suggesting people are less inclined to support Chinese talent immigration. Overall, nearly 10% of the population amends its response when the policies are aimed at China specifically, as opposed to Asia. The starkest differences are regarding the enhancement of visa agreements (12 percentage points lower for China) and reducing barriers to foreign credential recognition for international talent wanting to work in Canada (12 percentage points lower for China).

FIGURE 13

*Support for public policies geared toward attracting and retaining international talent from Asia*



**Question:** Would you support or oppose the following public policies to attract or retain international talent from Asia? **Base:** n=1,524





In a recent report from [Georgetown University on strengthening the artificial intelligence \(AI\) workforce in the United States, the authors acknowledge the global talent shortage with regard to the field of AI](#), and that it can have negative outcomes in terms of the economy and security. In Canada, immigration minister [Ahmed Hussen further declared that Canada must be proactive and smart in its immigration policy](#) if it wants to remain a global leader in attracting high-skilled talent and sustain the Canadian labour market supply. The recommendations from the Georgetown University report and the position of Canada's immigration minister are in sync with our 2019 National Opinion Poll findings. It can be deduced from the data that open immigration policies that attract and retain foreign-born, high-skilled workers and students in Canada, particularly those with STEM skills, are a pertinent issue for the public, as was underscored in the previous section (in Figure 10).

Following from this poll, it can be argued that the Canadian government needs to frame policies that promote exchange programs for international students, such as the [Kakehashi project that encourages student exchange between Japan and Canada](#), and provide support for the students' career development in Canada. The government also needs to reduce institutional and bureaucratic barriers to foreign credential recognition, and [encourage professional \(medical, law, etc.\) associations to do the same in order to prevent billion-dollar losses to the Canadian economy](#). Furthermore, it is pertinent to enhance the agreements that promote international talent mobility, improve family reunification visa programs for high-skilled workers, and extend the length of temporary work permits given to international talent, thereby making Canada a more lucrative destination. Ottawa needs to consider further research in identifying the educational degrees that are most useful for the Canadian labour market, locate the problems that incoming international talent are facing, and overall reduce the barriers for retaining such talent.

Broader immigration programs also have an impact on talent in the Canadian labour market by promoting the immigration of international talent as investors or entrepreneurs, and by growing the demand for high-skilled workers when investment is made in fields requiring such workers.

**Canadians support the ongoing Start-up Visa Program that invites immigrant entrepreneurs to set up their business ventures in Canada.**

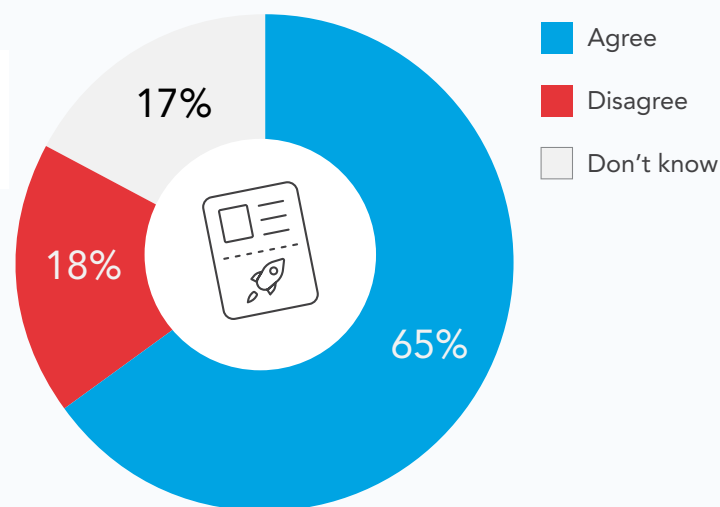
The [Start-up Visa Program](#), which was first launched in 2013, targets innovative entrepreneurs from abroad who have the potential to establish successful businesses in Canada and create jobs in the process. The program requires applicants to secure a minimum investment of C\$200,000 from a designated Canadian venture capital fund or C\$75,000 from a designated Canadian angel investor group, or to be accepted by one of the initiative's designated business incubator programs such as Biomedical Commercialization Canada Inc. or Extreme Innovations, among others. The visa program further offers funding, guidance, and training to entrepreneurs through private organizations in Canada. In the survey, a small description of the program was provided prior to asking members of the public for their opinions.

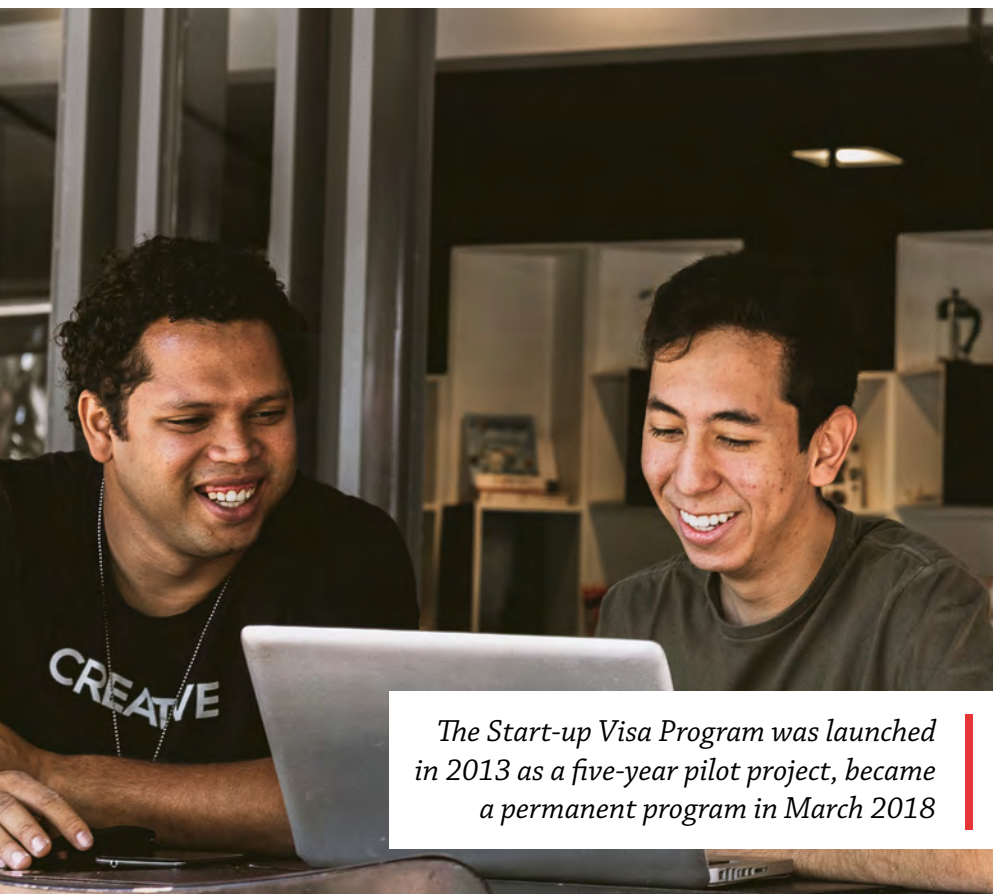
Our survey revealed that 65% of Canadians support the Start-up Visa Program, while only 18% oppose it (Figure 14). About half of Canadians think the program will help attract international talent with entrepreneurial skills (53%), enhance Canada's global competitiveness in innovation (48%), and boost Canada's innovation ecosystem by promoting diversity and interconnectedness among different actors in innovative industries (46%).

FIGURE 14

**Question:** Do you support or oppose the Start-up Visa Program?  
**Base:** n=1,524

*The majority of Canadians support the Start-up Visa Program*





*The Start-up Visa Program was launched in 2013 as a five-year pilot project, became a permanent program in March 2018*

Source: Photo by Disruptivo on Unsplash

Furthermore, we observed that the program is not widely known to Canadians, and this lack of awareness about the program drives opposition. Three times as many people who oppose the program said they don't know much about the program (20%) in comparison to people who support the program (7%).

Although support for the Start-up Visa program is overwhelming, three-quarters of the supporters believe it should be accompanied by restrictions – primarily, restrictions on the sector of the entrepreneurs' business (51%), and secondly, on the number of jobs

that the business can generate (42%). Currently, there are no such restrictions. According to the [2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada \(IRCC\)](#), the agency had accepted 132 applications since 2013 under the five-year Start-up Visa pilot program. The Start-up Visa was made a permanent part of IRCC's immigration policies on March 31, 2018.

## POLITICAL DIFFERENCES OVER HIGH-SKILLED INTERNATIONAL TALENT FROM ASIA

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There is a stark divide in response across political party lines in terms of perceptions of the state of the Canadian high-skilled talent market, international talent recruitment priorities, and Asian and Chinese talent immigration.

**While Liberals are more likely than Conservatives to perceive a lack of high-skilled talent in Canada and to be open to Asian immigration, both Liberals and Conservatives recognize distinct benefits from the immigration of international talent.**

We asked survey respondents which political party is most closely aligned with their political views in federal politics. The weighted sample of respondents is composed of 28% Liberals, 22% Conservatives, 17% New Democrats, 13% who associate with the Green Party, 10% who associate with other parties, and 10% who preferred not to disclose their political views. We then identified statistically significant variation in opinions among Canadians with contrasting political views.

Sixty-five percent of Liberals and 53% of Conservatives believe a shortage of high-skilled workers is becoming a deterrent to Canada's competitiveness in the global economy. At the same time, 44% more Liberals than Conservatives are likely to look toward Asia for international talent in the next 10 years. This drastic difference cannot entirely be explained by the fact that Liberals are more likely to perceive a shortage of high-skilled workers. Both New Democrats and Green Party supporters are as unlikely as Conservatives to perceive a shortage of workers, but are almost as likely as Liberals to look toward Asia for international talent. Rather, this difference can be explained by different sentiments toward Asia. Canadians sharing different political views exhibit major differences in their perception of the benefits and concerns of Asian talent immigration.

First, 51% of New Democrats perceive the enrichment of cultural diversity as a prime benefit of international talent immigration from Asia to Canada. The same is true for 29% of Liberals, but only 8% of Conservatives. Concurrently, nearly 30% of both Liberals and Conservatives think immigration from Asia is especially beneficial for capital attraction.

Second, reflecting upon the concerns of having more international talent from Asia, Conservatives identified one of their main concerns as the influence of Asia on Canadian culture (44%), compared to 22% of Liberals, 17% of Green Party supporters, and 15% of New Democrats sharing the same concern. Conjoined with that uneasiness, more than half of the respondents who identified as Conservatives think Canada should include Canadian language competencies and adaptability to Canadian culture as the highest priorities when recruiting talent, something that is not true for the other parties. In addition, 32% of Conservatives are concerned about increased social welfare competition for Canadian citizens, whereas only 14% of Green Party supporters, 13% of Liberals, and 8% of New Democrats are concerned with increased welfare competition.

**Unlike all other major political parties in Canada,  
Conservatives mostly oppose public policies supporting  
Chinese and Asian talent immigration to Canada.**

It is pertinent to consider the qualities and skills, prioritized by the public, in selecting international talent, as they inevitably shape stances on public policies focusing on international talent immigration. While Conservatives give more importance to language competencies and adaptability to Canadian culture, Liberals and New Democrats give much more importance to individual characteristics such as creativity, innovation, as well as skills and competencies. However, Liberals side with Conservatives on one thing: as opposed to Green Party supporters and New Democrats, supporters of the two dominant parties of Canada give more importance to immigrants coming from countries that uphold values that are important to Canadians, regardless of individual characteristics.

As seen in Figure 15a, Conservatives ride alone when it comes to international talent immigration policy regarding Asia. Liberals, New Democrats, and



Green Party supporters are all in favour of the six policies suggested in this survey, while only two of those policies are favoured by more than half of Conservatives. When policies are directed at China specifically (Figure 15b), the same is true for the first three parties, but now only one policy is supported by Conservatives – encouraging university students from China to gain work or study experience through exchange or co-op programs in Canada, the most supported policy for other parties as well. Ironically, the least supported policy by Conservatives – encouraging family reunification for immigrating talent from Asia through visa programs – is the second most popular policy for all the other parties.

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*Immigration policy divides political opinion in Canada*



Source: Photo by Serega on Getty Images



FIGURE 15a

Support of Canadians with contrasting political views in policies targeting **Asian** immigration

Question: Would you support or oppose the following public policies to attract or retain international talent from Asia? Base: n=1,213

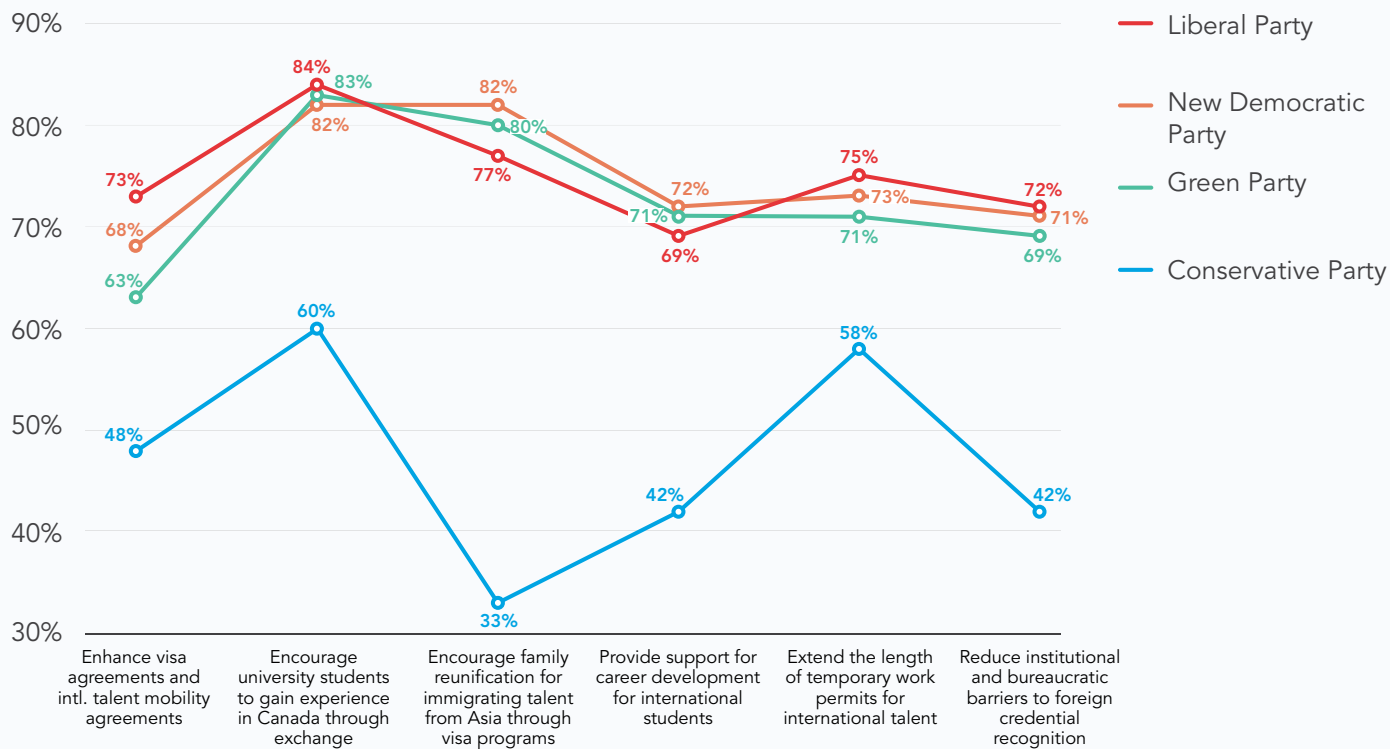
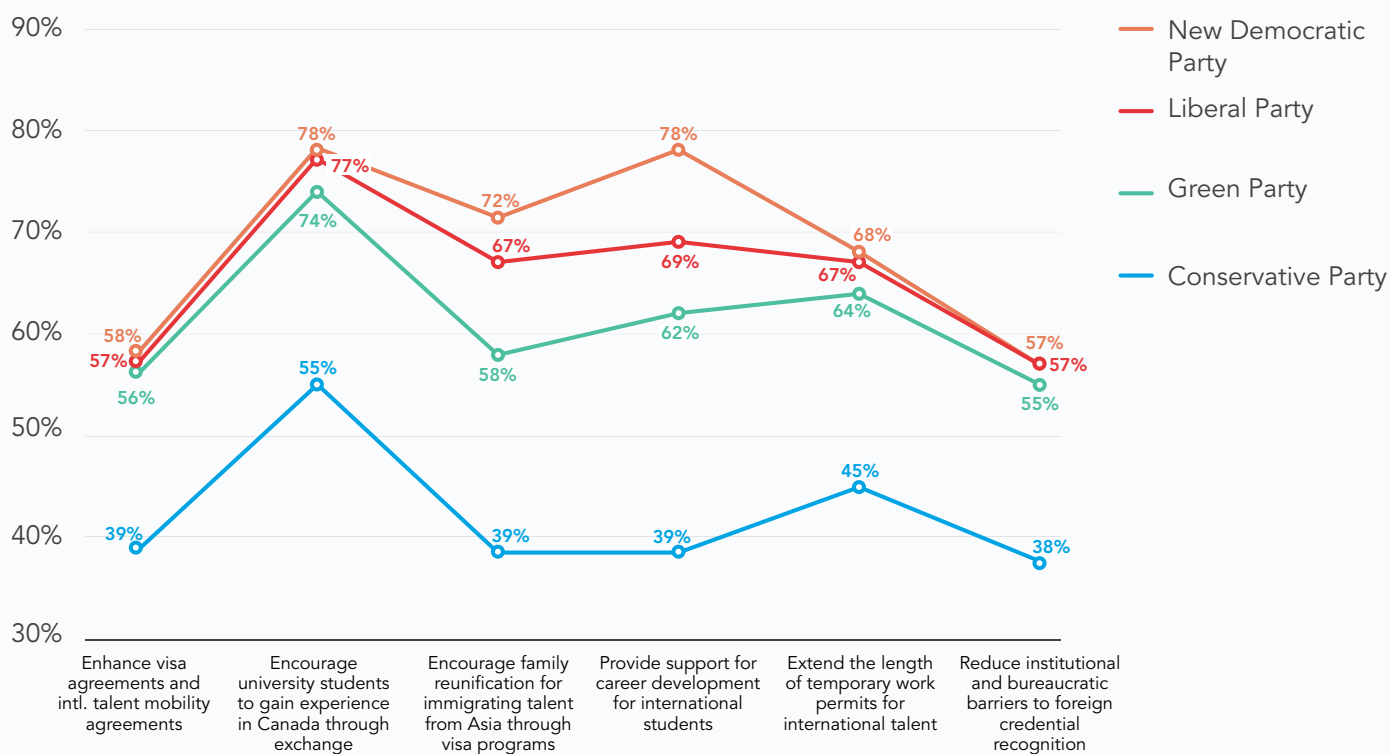


FIGURE 15b

Support of Canadians with contrasting political views in policies targeting **Chinese** immigration

Question: Would you support or oppose the following public policies to attract or retain international talent from China? Base: n=1,213



## CONCLUSION

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Asia offers one of the few promising opportunities to strengthen the high-skilled workforce that Canada needs to meet the labour market demand in a Canadian economy that seeks to remain globally competitive. The Asian region, a leader in the high-tech sector, is booming with a young and educated workforce and has strong ties to Canada. The key takeaway from the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada's 2019 National Opinion Poll: Canadian Views on Human Capital from Asia is that most Canadians want the government to develop public policies promoting the immigration of international talent from Asia to Canada to compensate for Canada's lack of high-skilled workers. Concerns toward China have risen amid the [current trade war between the United States and China and the Huawei affair](#), but our poll found that Canadians are generally willing to withhold their concerns toward China and Asia to recruit talent, especially in the STEM fields. Additional implications and policy recommendations can be drawn from the results of the survey.

First, although most Canadians think benefits outweigh concerns regarding Asian talent immigration, a sizable 36% of the public feels otherwise. Therefore, if the Canadian government chooses to move forward with the majority's desire to attract more Asian talent, it will also need to address public concerns. Some of the primary concerns over recruiting Asian talent are increased labour market competition and foreign influence on Canadian culture. For the former, policies extending Canadian workers' job protection would mitigate the impact of changes in the labour market and further protect Canadians who are vulnerable to international competition. In case of concerns about Asian influence on Canadian culture, it can be mitigated in two ways. On one hand, actions can be taken to promote Canadian culture and values among incoming international (Asian) workers through social integration practices, education, and training, thereby enabling them to adapt to life in Canada. On the other hand, the [concerns about Asian influence on Canadian culture may be driven by a lack of awareness](#) and could be alleviated by building Asia competency among Canadians through education and other public programs. As identified by [Thomson \(2010\)](#), the process of settling

and integrating immigrants into the country is a two-way process, and it requires a commitment from both the immigrants and Canadians: the former have to adapt while the latter must learn to be supportive and welcome the newcomers.

Second, while the incapacity to support social integration of high-skilled immigrants has been identified in this poll as the greatest concern by the Canadian public, [as underscored by Kaushik and Drolet in their 2018 article](#), it is fuelled by several challenges that incoming high-skilled immigrants are facing in Canada. Some of the biggest challenges impacting the social and economic integration of immigrants include lack of recognition of foreign credentials and work experience, lack of information and guidance, racism and discrimination, and health deterioration after arriving in Canada, among others. The public support of immigration, as identified in our latest poll, is a significant step in the direction of effective integration of international talent. However, policy-makers need to co-ordinate with professional associations such as that of law, medicine, and education to reduce the barriers against foreign credential recognition, develop a system to recognize foreign work experience, and plan programs that provide immigrants with information and guidance to adapt to the Canadian way of life. [Research has shown that underutilization of education and skills have a direct effect on immigrants' health and well-being](#), which in turn affect their social and economic integration process. Therefore, it is crucial for the Canadian government to consider policies that not only attract and retain high-skilled workers, but also enable them to flourish in Canada.

In conclusion, this national opinion poll is helpful in unravelling public concerns regarding immigration from Asia, revealing the type and origin of high-skilled international talent that Canadians are looking for, and uncovering specific immigration policies supported by Canadians. Despite general skepticism toward talent from Asia and China, the Canadian public feels the government must craft a well-rounded immigration policy that addresses the issue of talent shortage and related public concerns. In light of the transformative nature of modern work with an increased dependence on technology, it is pertinent to both examine how the international talent pool, in particular from Asia, can bolster the Canadian economy, and to lay the groundwork for future action by Canada in acquiring this vital human resource.

## METHODOLOGY

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APF Canada commissioned EKOS Research Associates to conduct a survey of 1,524 Canadian adults (permanent residents and citizens 18 years and older). The survey was conducted from July 29 to August 6, 2019, using EKOS's research panel, Probit. This panel offers coverage of the Canadian population accessible through internet, home phone, or cellphone. A random, stratified sample for this study was drawn from the panel database using random digit dialling. All data was collected online.

The margin of error – which measures sampling variability – is +/- 2.51% for the entire sample. The average completion time for the survey was 16 minutes. The results have been statistically weighted by EKOS according to the current census data on age, gender, and region to ensure the representativeness of the sample. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

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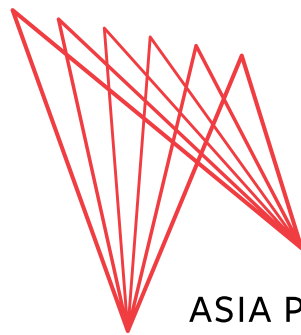
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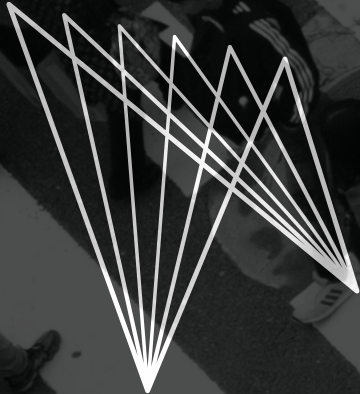
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