

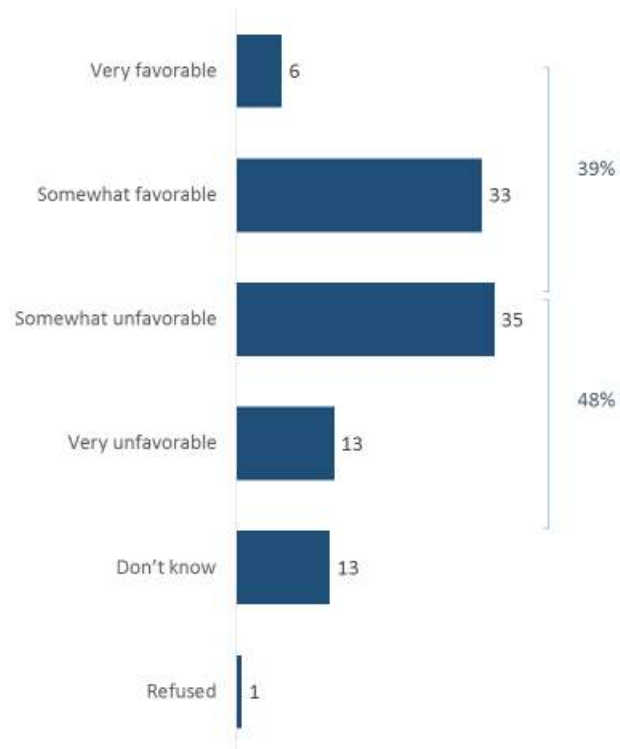
## Perceptions of China will Constrain Public Support for Closer Relations and Policy Concessions

The Trudeau Government has clearly signaled that it wants a different relationship with China than under previous governments. Policy efforts in this regard are going to engage Canadians in a relationship that they have probably not thought to much about on an on-going basis and the Government risks its political capital in pursuing closer ties with China.

Canadians largely recognize China’s economic ascendancy and many see a time, if it is not here already, that China will supplant the United States as a Superpower. This should provide the basis for a rational deepening of the economic ties between the two countries to ensure that Canada is a net beneficiary rather than a net loser from China’s economic and political power. The challenge is that Canadians continue to be oriented to the South not the East. The closeness and even strong attachment that Canadians feel with the U.S. is not mirrored in our attachment to China and this will likely act as a brake on public support for closer ties.

Canadians are going to be asked to weigh in on their views of specific issues (trade, human rights, and foreign investment). How do we expect Canadians to feel about these questions? Rather than focus on specific policy areas, it is helpful to consider the broad context of public sentiment about China. That context is

Figure 1 – Overall Impressions of China



Q12B. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of China?  
 SOURCE: Pew Research Centre, Pew Research Center's Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, n=1004

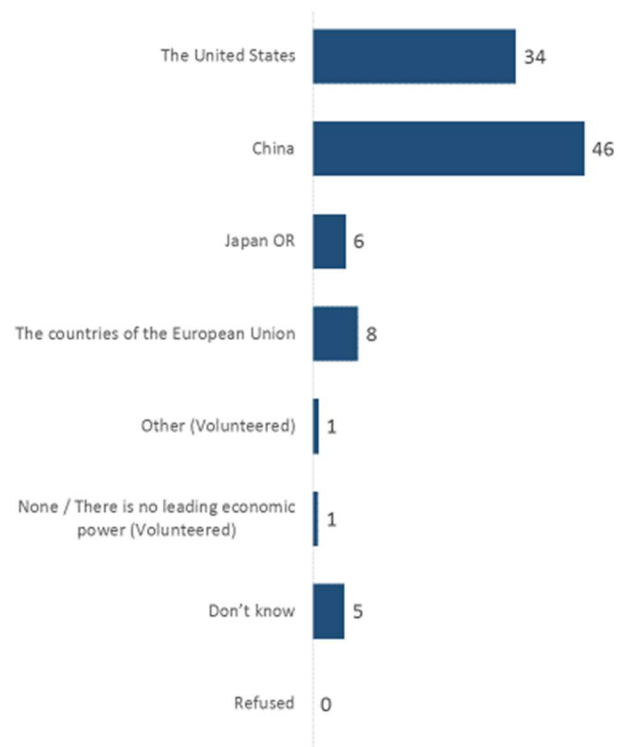
a [2015 Pew Research multi-country survey](#) (The [Pew Research Center](#) bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here) that included asking Canadians a number of questions on China.

On balance, Canadians have a more unfavourable than favourable view of China (39% favourable and 48% unfavourable) but it is not a story of deep dislike. Only 13% hold the *very unfavourable* view and many are unsure (13%). The implication of a lean toward a negative outlook and the uncertainty is that a large percentage of the population will automatically be skeptical about specific policies that impact our relationship because it is much easier to have a general positive orientation than it is to support concrete action that may have implications for Canada’s interests or values.

Because Canadians are divided when it comes to China, the issue also is a potential minefield in terms of navigating specific policy issues. In the Spring of 2015, Liberal voters leaned in a more positive direction (47% favorable) than Conservative (41%) or NDP voters (34%).

In the Spring of 2015, when the fieldwork took place, the Liberal Party had a slight lead over the governing Conservative Party and the Opposition NDP. As the election campaign unfolded in the leadup to the election on October 19, 2015, the Liberal Party captured 40% of the vote and managed majority status. So while the Liberal Party expanded its support beyond its base in the Spring of 2015, it is noteworthy that while its base of support was one of the more positive

Figure 2 – Leading Economic Power



Q17. Today, which ONE of the following do you think is the world's leading economic power?  
SOURCE: Pew Research Centre, Pew Research Center's Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, n=1004

toward China, a significant portion of the Liberal base in 2015 was negatively disposed toward China.

**Table 1. Attitudes about China among Most Preferred Federal Party**

	Liberal Party	Conservative Party	NDP	BQ	Green Party	None/No party	Don't know/Refused
Number of cases	(236)	(211)	(217)	(24)	(61)	(67)	(182)
<b>Net favorable</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>39%</b>
Very favorable	6%	6%	6%	8%	2%	6%	7%
Somewhat favorable	41%	35%	28%	46%	23%	22%	32%
<b>Net unfavorable</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>40%</b>
Somewhat unfavorable	33%	35%	40%	17%	31%	45%	29%
Very unfavorable	8%	12%	17%	25%	28%	7%	12%
Don't know/ refused	11%	11%	9%	4%	16%	19%	21%

Q182 If a Canadian federal election were held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?

Q12B. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of China?

To put the favorability toward China in context, 68% are either very or somewhat favorable toward the U.S. (29 points higher) As Canada's closest geographic neighbor and deep trade relationship, Canadians have a much closer relationship to the U.S.

While Canadians are quite segmented when it comes to their favorability, they tend to share the perspective that the Government of China does not respect personal freedoms. Only 5% of Canadians think China respects freedoms and 9% are don't know. So many Canadians are favourably oriented toward China even while acknowledging that China does not respect personal freedoms.

This is important because the debate about any policy involving China is likely to include discussions about human rights. Human rights concerns can be used to argue against non-economic issues such as extradition but also to argue that China should only have greater economic access if it respects personal freedoms. Canadians can expect issues of China's treatment of individual liberty to be raised in the debate even if this is primarily from those opposed to closer ties or particular policy choices. The virtual consensus on China's lack of

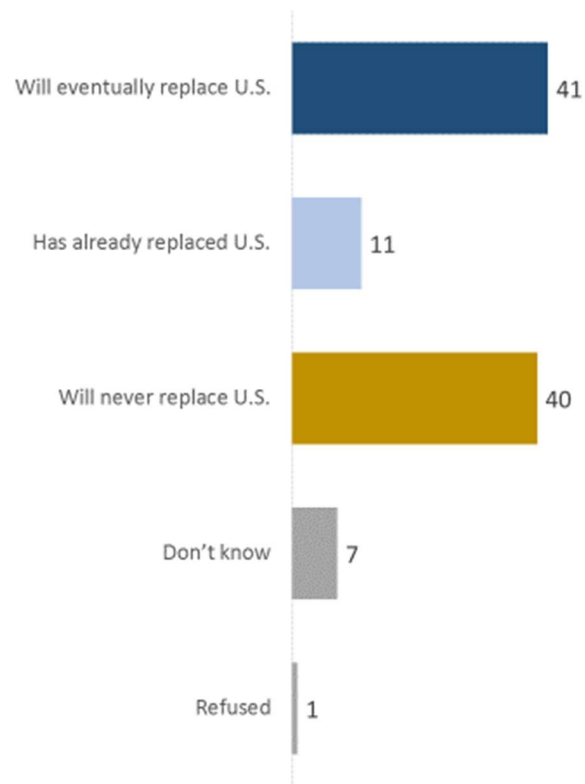
respect makes it readily available as a counterpoint. Canadians won't dispute the truth of these claims and must then only decide how much they matter.

One of the potential reasons for Canadians to think positively about China is the economic success it has had. In this vein, when asked to choose the world's leading economic power, 46% of Canadians think it is China compared with 34% who identify the United States.

The up and coming aspect of China's place in the world is further by the fact that many see the rise of China as a superpower beyond its economic success. Few Canadians (11%) think China has replaced the U.S. as the world's leading Superpower but 41% think that China will eventually do so. With half of Canadians holding the belief that China is or will eventually replace the U.S. as the leading Superpower, there is a public opinion rationale for ensuring that Canada has a productive relationship with China.

The challenge is that a large proportion of Canadians are clearly oriented in a southern direction. Forty per cent believe China will never supplant the U.S. as the leading superpower.

Figure 3 – World's Leading Superpower



Q18. Which comes closest to your view – China will eventually replace the U.S. as the world's leading superpower; China has already replaced the U.S. as the world's leading superpower; or China will never replace the U.S.?  
 SOURCE: Pew Research Centre, Pew Research Center's Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, n=1004

Attitudes about the U.S. are critical drivers of how Canadians see China's place in the world. Among those who are very favourable to the United States, 34% think China is the leading economic power and 48% believe the U.S. is the leading economic power. But this is completely reversed for those who are very unfavourably disposed toward the U.S. Among those who hold

very unfavourable opinions about the U.S. 56% think China is the leading economic power and only 24% identify the U.S.

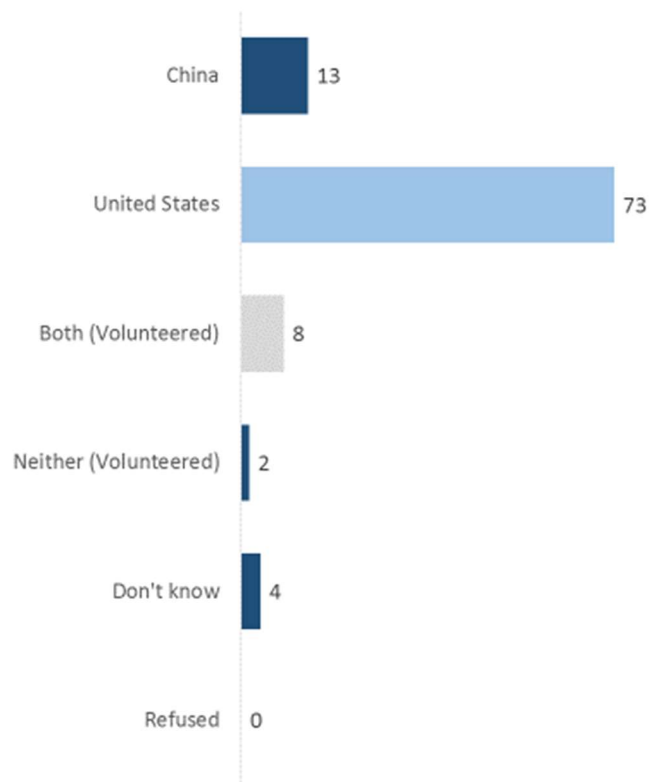
This has implications for how we think about the future in economic terms because so many more Canadians think favorably about the U.S. In fact, a large majority of Canadians, 73%, think our economic ties with the U.S. are the most important compared with only 13% think it is ties with China that are the most important.

It is fair to say that a majority of Canadians recognize the economic importance of China at this time and many perceive that China is on the path to a greater international role in the world. A significant sub set of the population also views China favorably. This context provides a supportive plank for engaging Canadians on our future relationship with China since a productive relationship may offer real benefits as China’s world influence increases.

The pursuit of closer ties to China may be a valuable long-term strategy for Canada but we can expect that Canadians will be very skeptical about the value of this pivot even taking into account the challenges faced with dealing with the U.S. during a Trump presidency. In fact, pursuing a closer relationship risks considerable political capital for two reasons.

The first is the widespread recognition that China does not respect personal freedoms. While this recognition does not appear to be preventing some Canadians from thinking favorably about China, it does offer critics of various policy choices a point of leverage in reminding Canadians

Figure 4 – Most Important Economic Ties



Q26V. Is it more important for CANADA to have strong economic ties with China or with the United States?  
SOURCE: Pew Research Centre, Pew Research Center's Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, n=1004

about who they are dealing with. Emotional appeals to a core value such as personal freedom have the potential to trump other rationales, especially when these are likely to be less understood by Canadians.

The second is the strong attraction to the United States felt by Canadians. At present it is the economic relationship with the U.S. that Canadians think is more important. A pro-China pivot will not resonate with many Canadians despite their recognition of the growing importance of China.

### Data in this Report

The analysis in this paper is based on public opinion that is in the public domain and the Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analysis and interpretation presented.

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