



New Survey Finds Quebec Respondents Positive and Pragmatic about Relations with China

7 May 2018

Summary Announcement

As Ottawa awaits the outcome of the NAFTA negotiations and amidst deepening tensions in US-China relations, a new survey shows that Quebecers have views of China and the prospect of deeper relations even more positive than in the rest of Canada.

Conducted by Qualtrics on behalf of a research team based at the Institute of Asian Research, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia and the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa, the survey conducted in March 2018 used identical questions posed to a national sample in September 2017. Respondents had the option of responding in either official language, 296 choosing English and 225 French.

Contrary to media speculation that Quebecers would be more anxious than other Canadians about China's rising presence and influence, in several key areas Quebec residents were in fact more optimistic about opportunities and less concerned about the risks.

Like Canadians elsewhere, Quebec respondents see trade and investment as the top priorities for the federal government followed by cooperation on global issues including climate change, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping. 72% support negotiation of a Canada-China FTA, slightly higher than the 69% in the national survey in 2017.

Fully 48% hold a favourable view of China compared to 36% in the national survey. This compares to 53% who hold a favourable view of the United States, a figure almost identical to that in the national survey.

Like the national sample, a significant majority of Quebec respondents feel that China will surpass the United States in the next decade as the world's largest economic power. They are even stronger in the view that in the next decade China will be a more responsible global leader than the United States, more likely to maintain global peace, be more respectful of people around the world, and be better at addressing environmental issues. They are slightly less concerned about China's influence on housing affordability.

Views of China's political system and human rights record are as negative as they are in the rest of Canada. Unlike the national sample, Quebec respondents ranked advancing human rights in China ahead of protecting Canadian values and institutions at home from a rising Chinese presence. They are more likely to disagree with the proposition that China is too powerful to be pressured about its human rights situation and more likely to view the strengthening of rule of law as the best way to improve human rights.

The two surveys point to continued anxiety about global order and leadership in the era of Donald Trump. Despite this – perhaps because of this – Canadians inside and outside Quebec harbour a willingness to

expand relations with China even while aware of its more assertive foreign and defence policies and rising presence inside Canada.

This pragmatism stands in contrast to the frequent negativity of editorial opinions about Xi Jinping's China in much of the mainstream English-language media. Quebec respondents who completed the survey in French are even more positive about China than those who completed the survey in English, though sample sizes are too small to draw any firm conclusions.

In Quebec, social media is the most frequent source of news about China followed by TV, whereas online newspapers and blogs take the top spot Canada-wide. The evidence that a considerably higher proportion of Quebecers (42%) almost never listen, watch or read news about China as compared to 27% in the rest of Canada may help explain the link between media exposure and attitudes.

The results from both the Quebec and national surveys suggest that the door is open to a more active agenda by the Trudeau government in deepening relations and living with a China that Canadians across the country recognize as increasingly important to their future.

The full results for the Quebec survey, including for the aggregate and both the French and English language responses, as well as the October 2017 national survey are available at www.iar.ubc.ca/reports.

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