

# A BETTER CANADA

## Values & Priorities after COVID-19

**First Report**

SEPTEMBER 2020

**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

**Vancity**

This study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research:

**ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE FOR SURVEY RESEARCH**

Environics Institute for Survey Research conducts relevant and original public opinion and social research related to issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it has been changing, and where it may be heading.

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**VANCITY**

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# Contents

- Executive Summary ..... 1
- Introduction ..... 3
- Experiences with COVID-19 ..... 5
- Current Situation and Outlook for the Future ..... 10
- Expectations of Governments and Corporations ..... 15
- A Better Canada ..... 19
- Conclusion ..... 29
- Source material ..... 31



# Executive Summary

*A Better Canada: Values and Priorities after COVID-19* is a comprehensive study of public opinion about what Canadians are expecting from their governments, from corporations and from one another. It took place at the end of the summer of 2020, roughly five months after the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in Canada, and as both citizens and public officials sought to find the right balance between measures to contain the coronavirus, and the desire to reopen schools and workplaces. The study builds extensively on the results of previous surveys, in order to explore whether and how Canadian attitudes have changed in the wake of the pandemic.

The survey confirms the extensive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of Canadians. Seven in ten say that the pandemic has affected their day-to-day life to a great or to some extent. Parents with at least one child at home under the age of 18, immigrants and racialized Canadians are especially likely to say the pandemic has affected them to this extent. In terms of specific experiences relating to the pandemic, the most commonly reported are those relating to mental health: one in three Canadians say they've experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks as a result of COVID-19, and almost three in ten say they've had difficulty sleeping. Two in five Canadians, including over one in two women between the ages of 18 and 34, either experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks, or had difficulty sleeping, as a result of COVID-19.

Many of the specific experiences related to the pandemic, including those relating both to mental health, and to the disruption of employment and income, are more likely to be reported by younger Canadians than their older counterparts. While, among those infected, the health consequences tended to increase with age, among the population as a whole, it was young adults (and young women in particular) who appear to have borne the brunt of the pandemic's impact on daily life.

Despite the pandemic's far-reaching impact, a majority of Canadians say their personal financial situation is unchanged compared to six months ago, and expect there to be no

change over the next six months. While Canadians, generally speaking, are not very optimistic about their personal finances, they are also not overly pessimistic – in fact, the level of pessimism is generally lower than that seen during previous recessions. Moreover, the proportion of Canadians worried about job security is no higher than it was a year ago, and the proportion worried about their incomes has declined. COVID-19 also does not appear to have dented Canadians' sense of self-confidence; since the onset of the pandemic, there has been little change in how Canadians feel about their ability to deal with adversity, or in the extent to which they have a hopeful view of the future.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic does not appear to have prompted a consistent or comprehensive shift in attitudes about the role of governments and businesses in society. In terms of attitudes about government, changes over time have been modest; while the proportion seeing governments as having a positive impact is somewhat higher than previously recorded, the proportion preferring a larger government with more services is slightly lower, as is the proportion seeing taxes as mostly positive. But the overall pattern is more one of continuity than of change. In terms of corporations, there has been no change in the extent to which Canadians believe that they have social responsibilities that go beyond their obligations to their own bottom lines. While most say it's important for corporations in Canada to provide a good return for people who have invested in the company, Canadians are more likely to say it's very important for corporations to pay employees a wage that is sufficient to allow them to make ends meet, and to keep the salaries of senior executives under control.

While *A Better Canada* shows that the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada has so far not upended the prevailing patterns of Canadian public opinion about the role of governments and corporations, this does not mean that Canadians favour the *status quo*. Indeed, the opposite is the case; there is widespread public support for a range of reforms, from providing quality long-term care for the elderly, to covering all essential medicines through public drug plans, to making

sure employees can take paid sick days when they need to, to making affordable and high-quality daycare for young children available to all parents who need it, to reducing the income gap between the rich and the poor.

There is also ample evidence to suggest that, for many, the eventual reopening of the economy should mean something better than going “back to normal.” A majority, for instance, think that investing more in clean energy technologies and environmentally friendly businesses can make it possible to combine a faster economic recovery with action on climate change. At the same time, most Canadians think the way that our economy works needs to be changed, with a plurality saying that this change should be fundamental in nature. Only five percent think that the way our economy works is fine the way it is. Lower-income Canadians are more supportive of the option of fundamental change, while higher-income Canadians tend to prefer minor changes; but it is notable that fewer than one in ten higher-income Canadians say that the economy is fine the way it is.

While there is no single reason why many Canadians wish to see fundamental change to the economy, the two most prominent types of reasons are those related to inequality, fairness or the power of big business; and those related to government spending, taxation, mismanagement or corruption. The reason most likely to be mentioned by both higher and lower-income Canadians is the same, namely the need to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Albertans are more likely than other Canadians to say that the way the economy works needs to be fundamentally changed. They are also more likely to mention both the environment and the need to diversify the economy as reasons why fundamental change is needed.

Overall, while *A Better Canada* confirms the extent of public support for improvements in areas such as health care, child care, economic inequality and the environment, the study's findings also show that this is generally consistent with the longstanding pattern of Canadian public opinion, and not a sudden reaction to the dramatic changes associated with COVID-19.

# Introduction

No event in Canada's modern history has been as disruptive as the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a short period beginning in mid-March, most workplaces, schools, bars and restaurants, and sports and entertainment venues closed. International travel was suspended, and non-essential movement between communities in Canada strongly discouraged. Visits by family and friends to loved ones in hospitals and care facilities were prohibited. By April, three million fewer Canadians were employed, with the unemployment rate more than doubling, from 5.5 to 13 percent.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, governments in Canada acted quickly to implement large-scale emergency relief measures for individuals, families and businesses, including income support, wage subsidy and rent relief programs. By July, the federal government reported having committed over \$212 billion in direct support to individuals and businesses. This included the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), replacing lost employment income, which by July had been delivered to over eight million Canadians at a cost of over \$50 billion. Additional funds were earmarked to allow for the deferral of tax payments, and to increase transfers to provinces and territories. The net result is a projected federal deficit for 2020-21 of over \$300 billion, a figure well over 10 times that which had previously been expected.<sup>2</sup>

The pandemic has shone a light on some of Canada's greatest strengths – including a robust public health system, a dedicated public service, and a social fabric reflecting bonds of mutual trust and solidarity – but it has also exposed some of its weaknesses. Seniors living in long-term care, low-income service workers, Canadians living in poverty, the homeless, those living with disabilities, Indigenous communities, and many others have suffered disproportionately from the virus and the restrictions imposed to control it. Several studies have confirmed that

racialized Canadians and immigrants have been more likely to contract COVID-19 and to experience job loss, due to the compounding of inequalities relating to employment, income, housing and access to public services.

As summer turns to fall, the country's collective efforts continue to be focused on containing the spread of the virus and caring for those unable to escape its reach. But attention is also shifting to the work of reopening workplaces and schools, and resuming recreational activities as safely as possible. In that context, the question arises as to whether the primary objective is to get back to how things were, or to use the crisis as a catalyst for change. For many, the goal should be to “build back better,” a phrase adapted from the disaster relief sector, emphasizing the importance of addressing pre-existing weaknesses when recovering from a catastrophe. But even if many agree that the need to restart the economy offers an opportunity to implement change, there may no consensus as to what exactly that change should be.

It is against this backdrop that the Environics Institute for Survey Research and the Vancouver City Savings credit union joined forces to conduct a comprehensive study of public opinion about what Canadians are expecting from their governments, from corporations and from one another. *A Better Canada: Values and Priorities after COVID-19* consists of a survey of 3,008 Canadians, carried out online between August 17 and 24, 2020. The survey covers how Canadians were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, their economic outlook, and their expectations of both governments and businesses. By building extensively on the results of previous surveys conducted over the past several years, and even decades, this new study sets out to explore whether and how Canadian attitudes have changed in the wake of the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0287-01.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada, *Economic and Fiscal Snapshot 2020* (July 2020); <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/fin/publications/efs-peb/homepage/EFS2020-eng.pdf>.

## About this Report

This report is the first of two that will present the results from *A Better Canada: Values and Priorities after COVID-19*. Its focus is on the impact of COVID-19 on Canadians' day-to-day lives, on their current economic situation and outlook for the future, on their expectations of governments and corporations, and their aspirations for Canadians in areas such as health care, child care and the environment (the second report, to be published later in 2020, will examine communities and citizenship). The survey findings underline both the extent of continuity in public attitudes on many of these issues, despite the scale of the disruption caused by the pandemic, and the degree of public support for change.

Detailed data tables are available under separate cover, and provide the results for all survey questions by population demographics and other relevant characteristics (see the study project page at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org)). All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

Information about the previous surveys cited in this report is listed under Source Material at the end of the report. Complete results from these surveys can be found in various reports available at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org) or upon request from the Environics Institute for Survey Research.

## Acknowledgements

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# Experiences with COVID-19

Seven in ten Canadians say that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their day-to-day life to a great or to some extent. Parents with at least one child at home under the age of 18, immigrants and racialized Canadians are especially likely to say the pandemic has affected them to this extent. Two in five Canadians, including over one in two women between the ages of 18 and 34, either experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks, or had difficulty sleeping, as a result of the pandemic.

## The pandemic's impact on day-to-day life

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has affected Canadians' daily lives. Seven in ten (70%) Canadians say that, generally speaking, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their day-to-day life to a great (22%) or to some (48%) extent. About one in four (24%) say they weren't affected very much, and only five percent say they were not affected at all.

In general, younger Canadians are slightly more likely than their older counterparts to say that their day-to-day lives have been affected to a great or to some extent, as are women compared to men, and Canadians living in cities with a population of at least 100,000 compared to those living in smaller towns or rural areas (see Table 1). Canadians

outside Quebec (75%) are more likely than Quebecers (53%) to say they've been affected to a great or to some extent; Quebecers are much more likely than other Canadians to say they haven't been affected very much (37%, compared to 21%), but are still very *unlikely* to say that they've not been affected at all (8%, compared to 4%).

Beyond this, three groups in particular are somewhat more likely than average to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their day-to-day life to a great or to some extent:

- Parents with at least one child at home under the age of 18 (78%), and particularly if at least one child was under the age of five (80%);
- Immigrants (79%); and
- Racialized Canadians<sup>3</sup> (79%).

In some cases, the factors just mentioned compound one another; for instance, the population groups most likely to say that their lives have been affected to a great or to some extent are immigrants or racialized Canadians with at least one child at home under the age of 18 (87% and 86%, respectively), and women with at least one child at home under the age of five (82%).

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<sup>3</sup> In this survey, racialized Canadians are defined as all those who do *not* select the category "white" when indicating what best describes their ancestral origins or cultural background.

TABLE 1

To what extent has your day-to-day life been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

GROUP	<i>A GREAT OR</i>				
	<i>SOME EXTENT</i>	<i>GREAT EXTENT</i>	<i>SOME EXTENT</i>	<i>NOT VERY MUCH</i>	<i>NOT AT ALL</i>
Total	70	22	48	24	5
Female	72	23	49	22	5
Male	67	20	47	28	5
Age 18-24	74	20	54	20	4
Age 25-34	74	24	50	21	2
Age 35-44	69	21	48	21	7
Age 45-54	67	24	43	26	6
Age 55+	68	19	49	28	5
Recent immigrants	77	24	53	16	4
Immigrants	79	24	54	17	3
2nd generation	73	22	51	21	5
3rd generation plus	65	21	45	28	5
White Canadians	68	20	47	27	5
Racialized Canadians	78	26	52	15	5
At least one child at home under the age of 5	80	26	54	16	3
Women with at least one child at home under the age of 5	82	24	59	14	4
At least one child at home under the age of 18	78	25	52	18	4
Immigrants with at least one child at home under the age of 18	87	25	62	12	2
Racialized Canadians with at least one child at home under the age of 18	86	27	59	11	2
Community size of 1 million or more	73	25	48	21	4
Community size of 200,000 to 999,999	69	21	49	24	5
Community size of 100,000 to 199,999	76	24	52	23	1
Community size less than 99,999	61	16	45	31	7
Racialized Canadians in cities of at least 1 million	79	24	55	14	4
Immigrants in cities of at least 1 million	80	27	53	15	3
Canada outside Quebec	75	23	51	21	4
Quebec	53	15	38	37	8

Q.40

*This question is about your experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. Generally speaking, to what extent has your day-to-day life been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?*

## Specific experiences with COVID-19

Canadians were also asked whether they'd had a number of specific experiences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (nine separate experiences were included in the list).

- The most common experiences were those related to **mental health**: one in three Canadians (32%) say they've experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks as a result of COVID-19, and almost three in ten (28%) say they've had difficulty sleeping.
- The next most common type of experiences relates to work, or the combination of **work and family responsibilities**. Among those in the labour force, 18 percent say they've had difficulty balancing responsibilities at work and at home, 17 percent say they've been asked to reduce the number of hours per week they work, and 17 percent say they became unemployed. The proportion of those in the labour force saying they've had difficulty balancing responsibilities at work and at home is higher for those with at least one child at home under the age of 18 (26%, especially for women in this situation (29%)), particularly if at least one of those children is under the age of five (32%, especially for women in this situation (41%)).

- In terms of the **financial impact**, eight percent of Canadians say that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, they've missed a major bill or credit card payment, and five percent say they've been unable to pay their rent or mortgage. Among those age 25 to 34, the figures are 14 and 12 percent, respectively.
- Finally, four percent of Canadians say they've experienced the death of a family member or friend due to COVID-19, and two percent say they contracted **the virus** themselves.

Naturally, each of these experiences is more likely to be reported by those who say that they've been affected to a great extent by the pandemic. They are also more likely to be reported by younger Canadians. Compared to those age 55 and over, Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34 are two and a half times more likely to say they experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks as a result of COVID-19; twice as likely to say they had difficulty sleeping; and more than three times as likely to say they had difficulty balancing responsibilities at work and at home. While, among those infected, the health consequences tended to increase with age, among the population as a whole, it was young adults (and especially young women) who appear to have borne the brunt of the pandemic's impact on daily life.

**TABLE 2**  
**Specific experiences resulting from COVID-19**

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE	TOTAL	INCIDENCE (%) AMONG:			
		AFFECTED BY COVID-19 TO A GREAT EXTENT	AGE 18-34	AGE 35-54	AGE 55+
Experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks	32	52	45	36	18
Had difficulty sleeping	28	48	35	32	18
Had difficulty balancing responsibilities at work and at home*	18	30	22	20	6
Been asked to reduce the number of hours per week that you work (without losing your job)*	17	20	22	15	14
Become unemployed (were laid off or lost your job)*	17	34	20	13	20
Missed a major bill or credit card payment	8	17	13	9	3
Been unable to pay your rent or mortgage	5	14	10	5	1
Experienced the death of a family member or friend due to COVID-19	4	6	4	4	4
Contracted the COVID-19 virus	2	3	2	2	1
None of these	45	20	27	38	66

\* Results for these items are for respondents in the labour force only.

Q.41

*And as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you experienced any of the following?*

As immigrants and racialized Canadians are somewhat more likely to say they've been affected by COVID-19 to a great or to some extent, it's not surprising that they're also somewhat more likely to report specific experiences related to the pandemic. For instance, racialized Canadians are more likely than those who identify as white to have had their hours of work reduced or to have become unemployed; the same is true for recent immigrants<sup>4</sup> compared to those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents. Racialized Canadians and recent immigrants are also more than twice as likely as average to have experienced the death of a family member or friend due to COVID-19.

The extent of the pandemic's impact can be illustrated by combining some of the experiences mentioned in the survey (see Table 3). Two in five Canadians, including over one in two women between the ages of 18 and 34, have either

experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks, or had difficulty sleeping (or both). Three in ten Canadians in the labour force – including 38 percent of racialized Canadians – have either had their hours of work reduced or become unemployed (or both) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One in five men between the ages of 18 and 34 have been unable to pay their or mortgage, or missed a major bill or credit card payment (or both).

It's important to note that the survey results represent the self-reported impact of the pandemic once the mitigating effect of the different emergency measures put in place by governments across the country, including income supports for individuals and wage subsidies for businesses, are factored in. The survey cannot say how many more Canadians would have reported difficulty making bill payments or experiencing heightened anxiety in the absence of these measures.

**TABLE 3**  
**Combined experiences resulting from COVID-19**

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE (COMBINED)	TOTAL	INCIDENCE (%) AMONG:							
		WOMEN	MEN	AGE 18-34	WOMEN	MEN	AGE 25-54 WITH	IMMIGRANTS	RACIALIZED
		AGE 18-34	AGE 18-34	AGE 18-34	AGE 18-34	AGE 18-34	INCOME <\$60K		CANADIANS
Experienced more depression, anxiety or panic attacks; or had difficulty sleeping	39	46	32	51	53	47	52	38	38
Become unemployed; or been asked to reduce the number of hours per week that you work*	30	33	28	35	37	32	36	35	38
Been unable to pay your rent or mortgage; or missed a major bill or credit card payment	10	11	9	18	15	21	21	9	15

\* Results for these items are for respondents in the labour force only.

Q.41  
 And as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you experienced any of the following?

<sup>4</sup> Recent immigrants are those who have been in Canada for 10 years or less.

# Current Situation and Outlook for the Future

Few Canadians are currently optimistic about their personal finances, but nor are they feeling overly pessimistic – in fact, the level of pessimism is lower than that seen during previous recessions. Additionally, Canadians are no more worried about job security than they were a year ago, and the proportion worried about their incomes has declined. Since the onset of the pandemic, there has also been little change in how Canadians feel about their ability to deal with adversity, and the extent to which they have a hopeful view of the future.

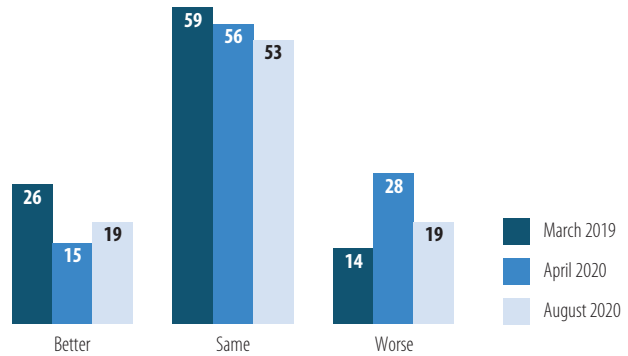
As well as asking directly about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, *A Better Canada* also explores the pandemic's impact through a number of questions about Canadians' current situation (particularly their financial situation) and about how they see their future. The survey finds that, despite the difficulties brought about by the pandemic, Canadians have not become noticeably more pessimistic in their outlook.

## Personal financial situation

A majority of Canadians say their personal financial situation is unchanged compared to six months ago, and expect there to be no change over the next six months. While Canadians, generally speaking, are not very optimistic about their personal finances, they are also not overly pessimistic – in fact, the level of pessimism is generally lower than that seen during previous recessions.

- Relatively few (17%) Canadians say that their personal financial situation today is better than it was six months ago;<sup>5</sup> a larger proportion (28%) says their financial situation is worse, and a majority say it is the same. This particular survey question has not been asked regularly since 1999. Earlier surveys, however, show that the proportion of Canadians today saying that their financial situation today is *better* than it was six months ago is comparable to what it was during the recession of the early 1990s; however, the proportion saying their financial situation is worse is much lower today than during that earlier recession (between 1991 and 1993, roughly two and five Canadians consistently reported that their personal financial situation was worse than it had been six months earlier). In the early 1990s, fewer said that their financial situation was *the same*.
- About one in five (19%) Canadians say that, in the next six months, their personal financial situation will be better than it is today, but the same proportion (19%) says it will be worse; a majority (53%) say it will be the same, and 10 percent aren't sure. The proportion expecting their financial situation to improve is low by historical standards – it was lower only once before, during the recession of the early 1980s. The proportion expecting their financial situation to get worse, however, is currently lower than it was both in the early 1980s and the early 1990s. This question was also asked more recently, including just after the onset of the pandemic. These results show that the proportion of Canadians expecting their financial situation to get *worse* doubled between the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2020 (from 14% to 28%) – reaching a level comparable to that seen during previous recessions – before dropping again to the current level of 19 percent.

CHART 1  
Personal financial situation: better or worse in the next six months?  
2019 – 2020



Note: Results for March 2019 and April 2020 courtesy of the Environics Research Group.

Q.4

And in general, would you say that in the next six months your personal financial situation will be better or worse than it is today?

<sup>5</sup> As the survey was conducted in August 2020, the point of reference is roughly February – just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

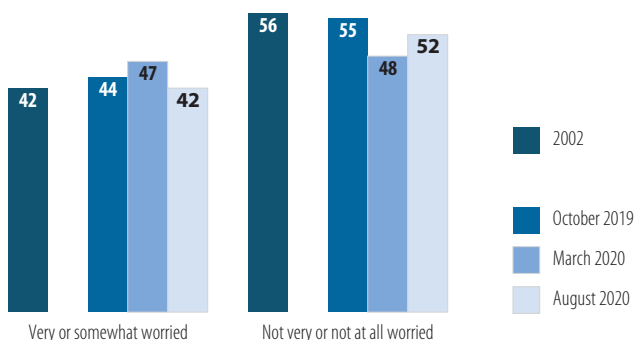
## Employment and income

Not surprisingly, there is a range of experiences among Canadians relating to employment and income, with some feeling relatively secure about their jobs and satisfied with their incomes, and others much more worried about both. But the proportion worried about job security is no higher than it was a year ago, and the proportion worried about their incomes has declined.

- Two in five Canadians (42%) are very (14%) or somewhat (28%) worried about themselves or a member of their immediate family finding or keeping a stable, full-time job; a higher proportion (52%) are not very (26%) or not at all (26%) worried. The proportion that is worried is slightly lower than was the case in March of this year (47%), as the pandemic began to take hold in Canada, and is comparable to the level seen in late 2019 (44%).
- Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of Canadians who say they find their household income to be good enough for them, and that they can save from it; and a steady decrease in the proportion that says their household income is not enough for them – and the pandemic has not interrupted this trend. The proportion finding their income to be “good enough” (32%) is now higher than at any point since 2010; the proportion saying it is “not enough” (24%) is lower than at any point since that date.
- About one in four Canadians (23%) say that they owe a lot more (10%) or a little (13%) more than they can afford in terms of their credit cards and loans (excluding mortgages). This is similar to the proportion reporting that they owed more than they could afford in 2005 (22%), but slightly higher than in 2008 (18%) and 2012 (19%).

CHART 2

### Worried about keeping/finding a stable, full-time job 2002 – 2020

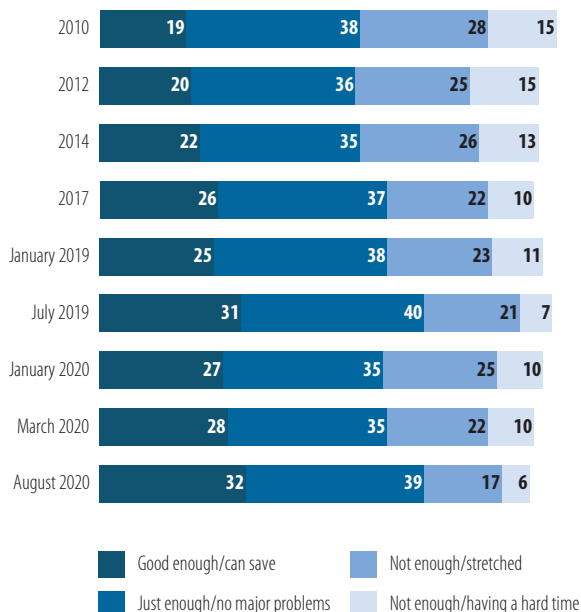


Q.13

Are you very, somewhat, not very, or not at all worried about you or a member of your immediate family finding or keeping a stable, full-time job?

CHART 3

### Perception of household income 2010 – 2020



Q50

Would you say your total household income is: good enough for you, and you can save from it; just enough for you, so that you do not have major problems; not enough for you and you are stretched; or not enough for you and you are having a hard time?



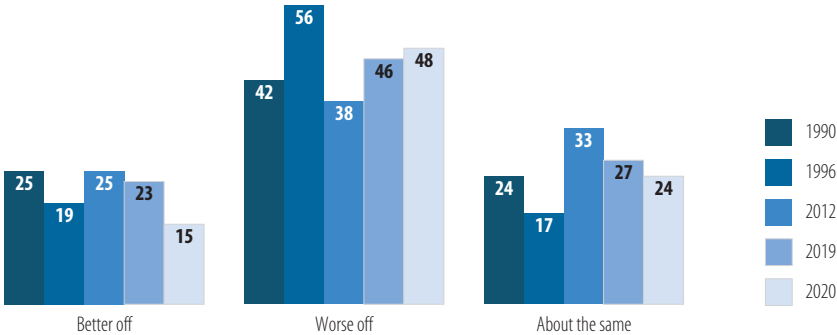
# The next generation

Many Canadians are concerned about the prosperity of the next generation, but the level of concern is lower than it was in the mid-1990s.

- About one in two Canadians (48%) expect that, financially speaking, the next generation will be worse

off when they become adults; only 15 percent think the next generation will be better off, 24 percent think they will do about the same, and 13 percent cannot say. The proportion expecting the next generation to be worse off is about the same as in 2019 (46%), higher than in 2012 (38%) but lower than in 1996 (56%).

CHART 4  
Will next generation be better or worse off?  
1990 – 2020



Q.37  
Financially speaking, do you think the next generation — for example your children, nieces or nephews — will be better off, worse off, or about the same when they become your age?

## Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic represented an immediate health risk to Canadians, while the measures taken to restrict the spread of the virus caused widespread disruption and hardship. Despite this, since the onset of the pandemic, there has been no significant change in how Canadians feel about their ability to deal with adversity, and their outlook for the future.

A *Better Canada* finds that:

- 64 percent of Canadians are always or often **confident in their own abilities**, even when faced with challenges, while only seven percent rarely or never feel this way;
- 61 percent say they always or often **have people they can depend on** when they really need it, while 13 percent say this is rarely or never the case;
- 59 percent always or often feel they can **bounce back quickly after hard times**, while only eight percent rarely or never feel this way;
- 49 percent always or often have a **hopeful view of the future**, while 13 percent say they rarely or never feel this way.

In each case, these figures are either unchanged since March of this year, or are slightly more positive. For instance, in March 2020, as the pandemic began to take hold in this country, 49 percent of Canadians said they always or often have a hopeful view of the future – the exact same proportion as in August. And a higher proportion of Canadians (59% in August, compared with 51% in March) now say they always or often feel they are able to bounce back quickly after hard times.

Two further points about these results are worth emphasizing. First, while there is little evidence that Canadians have grown *more* pessimistic since the onset of the pandemic, at any given point in time, many Canadians do feel insecure. The survey finds, for instance, that 14 percent of Canadians are very worried about job security, 23 percent find that their household income is not enough for them to get by, and 13 percent rarely or never feel hopeful about the future. The fact that these figures are *no higher* than they were prior to the pandemic does not diminish their significance as part of a balanced portrait of the state of Canadian society.

## CHART 5 Facing adversity

2020

Are confident in your abilities, even when faced with challenges



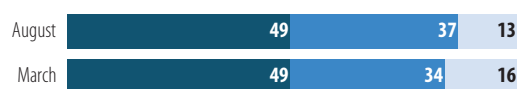
Have people you can depend on to help you when you really need it



Are able to bounce back quickly after hard times



Have a hopeful view of the future



Always or often    Sometimes    Rarely or never

Q.6

Thinking about your life in general, how often would you say you ... ?

Second, the trends in views on issues such as income and employment, again, cannot be viewed in isolation from the emergency measures enacted by governments across Canada in response to COVID-19. The finding that the proportion of Canadians who feel that their household incomes are either “good enough” or at least “just enough” for them has continued to gradually increase does not necessarily mean that the pandemic itself had less of an impact than might have been expected – it could simply indicate that the emergency measures had their intended effect.

# Expectations of Governments and Corporations

The COVID-19 pandemic has not triggered a consistent or comprehensive shift in public attitudes about the role of governments and businesses in society. The proportion seeing governments as having a positive impact has increased, but modestly; and the proportion preferring a larger government with more services is slightly lower than previously recorded. While Canadians recognize the need for corporations to serve their shareholders, a number of other objectives are seen as equally or more important, such as paying employees a wage that is sufficient to allow them to make ends meet, and keeping the salaries of senior executives under control.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted dramatic action from government, including emergency income support and wage subsidy programs that shattered all prior assumptions as to acceptable levels of government borrowing and spending. It required businesses to react as well, not only

to develop new ways to continue operations in the context of an economic shutdown, but also to retain the loyalty of both employees and customers over the long term. Those slower to rethink the meaning of good corporate citizenship in the context of the pandemic – by, for instance, raising prices of essential products, restricting employee use of sick days, or showing inflexibility to employees juggling working from home and child care – risked damage to their reputations.

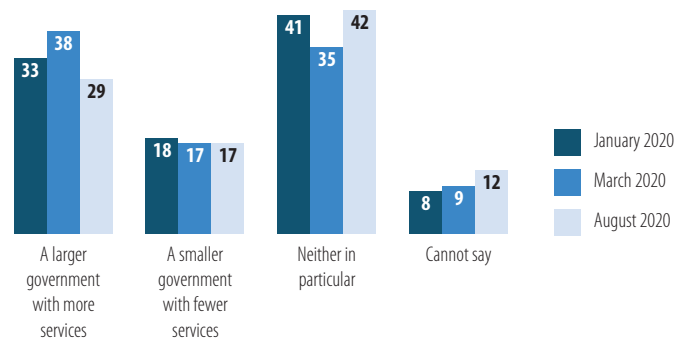
What is not yet clear, however, is whether there is deeper change underway in public attitudes about the role of governments and businesses in society. Support for specific measures enacted in response to the COVID-19 emergency may be having a “spill over” effect on the public’s expectations of government and corporations more generally.

## The role of government

There has been no consistent shift in Canadians' broad preferences about the role of government. While the proportion seeing governments as having a positive impact has increased modestly, the proportion preferring a larger government with more services is slightly lower than previously recorded, as is the proportion seeing taxes as mostly positive.

- At the beginning of 2019, one in three Canadians (33%) preferred a larger government with more services. This edged upward in March 2020 to 38 percent, but fell back to 29 percent by August 2020 (by which time government spending had increased significantly). The proportion favouring a smaller government remained unchanged over this same period (17% in August 2020). A little more than one in two Canadians favour no change (42%) or cannot say (12%).
- At the beginning of 2019, Canadians were more likely to see governments as having a negative impact than a positive impact on most people's lives; however, this has now been reversed – and Canadians are now more evenly divided. The proportion seeing governments as having a positive impact on most people's lives has gradually increased, from 29 percent in January 2019, to 36 percent in August 2020, while the proportion seeing the impact as negative fell from 44 percent to 34 percent over the same period.

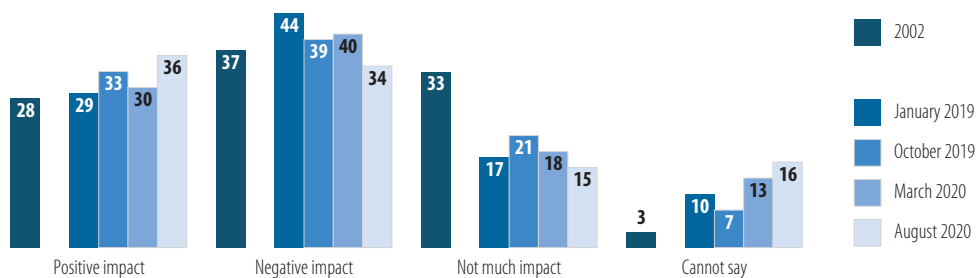
CHART 6  
The appropriate size of government



Q.28  
Generally speaking, would you say you favour ... ?

- While the proportion of Canadians with a positive view of the impact of governments has increased, the proportion seeing taxes as mostly positive has fallen – although Canadians remain almost three times more likely to see taxes as mostly positive than mostly negative. Almost two in three (64%) Canadians say they think of taxes as mostly a positive thing because they're how we pay for the important things that make our quality of life good, such as health care, education and roads – down 11 points since the question was last asked in 2011. About one in four (24%) say they think of taxes as mostly a negative thing because they take money out of people's pockets, and hold back economic growth and the creation of wealth – up 5 points since 2011.

CHART 7  
The impact of government  
2002 – 2020



Q.29  
These days, what kind of impact do you think governments have on most people's lives – a positive impact, a negative impact, or don't governments have much impact on most people's lives?

## Addressing poverty and inequality

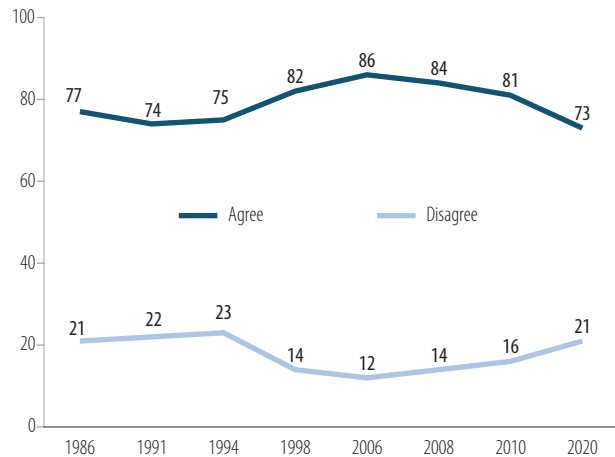
A majority of Canadians continue to support government action to reduce income inequality, though the public remains split on the question of whether hunger and homeless are “a fact of life” that must be accepted.

- Over the past 35 years, roughly three in four Canadians have consistently agreed with the notion that the government should reduce the gap between the rich and the poor; currently, 73 percent agree, which is lower than the proportion found in the mid-2000s, but the same as that in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- Canadians remain split on whether hunger and homeless are “a fact of life” that must be accepted, or whether they could be eliminated with enough determination. Currently, 46 percent agree that *there will always be people in society who will be hungry and homeless; it may be regrettable, but it is a fact of life*. But an equal proportion (46%) disagrees, siding instead with the proposition that *there is no excuse for hunger and homelessness in a prosperous society like ours; we could eliminate poverty if we really wanted to*. These figures are comparable to those recorded in two previous surveys conducted roughly 20 years ago.

CHART 8

### The government should reduce the gap between the rich and the poor

1986 – 2020



Q.14b

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: The government should reduce the gap between the rich and the poor?

## The role of corporations

Most Canadians continue to see corporations as having responsibilities that go well beyond that of looking after their bottom lines.

- Four in five Canadians (82%) favour the idea that corporations have to be responsible to their employees and communities, and that this is as important as profits. Only one in ten (11%) think instead that companies and corporations have to put profits ahead of everything else because they have to operate in the interests of their shareholders. There has been no change in the extent to which Canadians believe that corporations have social responsibilities that go beyond their obligations to their own bottom lines. These figures are in line with those recorded in two previous surveys conducted roughly 15 and 25 years ago.
- While many Canadians recognize the need for corporations to provide a good return for those who've invested in the company, a number of other objectives are seen as equally or more important. Currently, 85 percent of Canadians say it is either very or somewhat important for corporations in Canada to provide a good return for people who have invested in the company, but only 31 percent say this is very important. Canadians are more likely to say it's very important for Canadian corporations to pay employees a wage that is sufficient to allow them to make ends meet (70%), keep the salaries of senior executives under control (70%), provide employee benefits such as drug and insurance plans (59%), provide a pension plan for employees (59%), and provide employees with paid sick days when needed (54%). However, an emphasis on these corporate responsibilities is not new; similar proportions of Canadians saw these actions as very important when the question was last asked almost 25 years ago, in 1996.

TABLE 4

How important do you think it is for corporations to do each of the following?

STATEMENT	1996	2020	1996	2020
	VERY IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	VERY OR SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	VERY OR SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT
Provide their employees with training opportunities so they can improve their skills*	75	66	97	96
Pay employees a wage that is sufficient to allow them to make ends meet*	59	70	92	95
Provide employee benefits such as drug and insurance plans	57	59	89	94
Keep the salaries of senior executives under control*	73	70	92	92
Provide a pension plan for employees	71	59	95	91
Provide employees with paid sick days when needed	(not asked)	54	(not asked)	88
Allow flexibility for employees for child care and family responsibilities	51	43	87	87
Put in place programs and policies to support local businesses	(not asked)	40	(not asked)	85
Provide a good return for people who have invested in the company	50	31	92	85
Put in place programs and policies to protect the environment	65	48	96	84
Put in place programs and policies to promote women and minorities in the workplace	42	43	80	83
Hire more young people to try to reduce youth unemployment	50	31	88	81

\* Indicates minor wording changes since 1996

Q.22

Thinking about corporations in Canada today, how important do you think it is for them to do each of the following?

# A Better Canada

The results for *A Better Canada* reviewed in the previous sections show that, with respect to Canadian attitudes about government, corporations and the economy, the situation is more one of continuity than change. This is not to suggest that nothing has changed; agreement with certain propositions (such as government having a positive impact) has edged upwards; while, in other cases (such as taxes being mostly a positive thing), there has been a slight decline in agreement. But these modest variations notwithstanding, it's fair to say that the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada has so far not upended the prevailing patterns of Canadian public opinion on these kinds of issues.

The fact that there is considerable continuity in attitudes since the onset of the pandemic, however, does not mean that Canadians favour the *status quo*. Indeed, as the remainder of this report will show, the opposite is the case: there is widespread public support for change. The point to note at the outset, however, is this support is part of a longstanding pattern of Canadian public opinion, and not a sudden reaction to the dramatic changes associated with COVID-19.

*A Better Canada* asked Canadians for their views on a broad range of economic and social policy objectives relating to issues such as health and pharmacare, child care and care for the elderly, employee benefits, the environment and economic inequality.

## Social policy

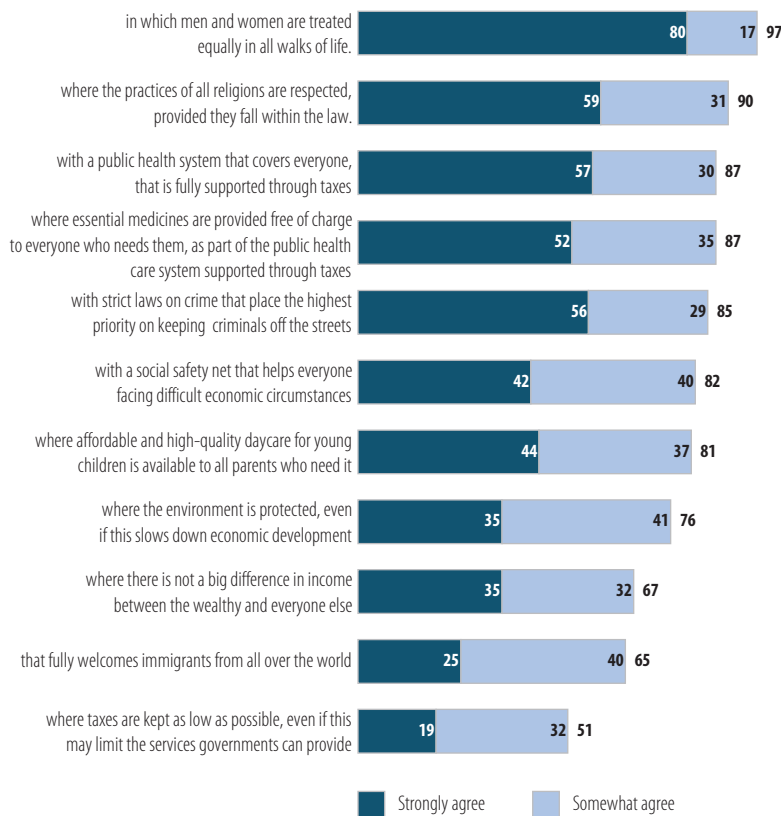
There is widespread public support for improvements in a number of policy areas, such as the inclusion of essential medicines under the rubric of the Canada’s public health care system, easier access for parents to child care, the provision of adequate sick leave, and the reduction of income inequality.

## Health care and pharmacare

There is widespread support for the inclusion of essential medicines under the rubric of the Canada’s public health care system.

- Nine in ten (90%) Canadians agree that *government drug plans should provide coverage for any medications that a patient and their doctor agree are the most effective treatment*, including 60 percent who strongly agree. Nine in ten also agreed with this policy when the question was asked previously in both 2007 and 2012.
- Nine in ten also include **the free provision of essential medicines** through the health care system as part of their own vision for Canada. When asked to describe the kind of country they believe Canada should be, 87 percent agree that *Canada should be a country where essential medicines are provided free of charge to everyone who needs them, as part of the public health care system supported through taxes* – including 52 percent who strongly agree.

CHART 9  
What kind of country should Canada be?  
Canada should be a country . . .



Q.7  
For each of the following statements, please let us know whether you agree or disagree that it describes the kind of country you believe Canada should be.



Canadians also remain supportive of the country's universal, publicly-funded health care system, with almost nine in ten (87%) agreeing – including 57 percent who strongly agree – that Canada should be a country with a public health system that covers everyone, that is fully supported through taxes.

At the same time, there is less of a consensus on whether there's also a need for more private health care delivery; 47 percent of Canadians agree that *the best way to improve the quality of care in our health care system is to allow private companies to deliver more health care services*, while 40 percent disagree. Agreement is much higher in Quebec (58%) than in the rest of Canada (44%). Canadians, however, do not necessarily see a contradiction between these two

positions; in fact, the vast majority (84%) of those who agree that the best way to improve the quality of care in our health care system is to allow private companies to deliver more health care services also agree with the notion that *Canada should be a country with a public health system that covers everyone, that is fully supported through taxes*.

Finally, given the efforts to have deaths due to drug overdoses (particular as a result of the use of opioids) also recognized as a public health emergency, it is notable that a majority of Canadians (69%) agree that people who are **addicted to drugs** should be provided with treatment by the public health care system and not treated like criminals, while only 24 percent disagree.

## Child care, care for the elderly and the social safety net

While Canada has been well-served by its public health care system in its response to COVID-19, the pandemic has nonetheless exposed a number of other weaknesses, particularly when it comes to care for children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups. The survey shows strong support for the provision of comprehensive services in these areas, including for actions by both governments and employers to make it easier for parents to access child care.

- Nine in ten Canadians (91%) agree that it's the government's responsibility to ensure that **quality long-term care for the elderly** is available to everyone who needs it. This includes 58 percent who agree strongly.
- Nearly nine in ten (87%) – including 94 percent of parents with young children – say that it's important for corporations to allow **flexibility for employees for child care** and family responsibilities. The same proportion held this view when this question was previously asked in 1996.
- When asked to describe the kind of country they believe Canada should be, four in five (81%) – including 93 percent of parents with young children – agree that Canada should be a country where **affordable and high-quality daycare** for young children is available to all parents who need it.
- Four in five (82%) Canadians also agree that Canada should be a country with a **social safety net** that helps everyone facing difficult economic circumstances. But there is also some doubt as to whether the country is currently doing a good enough job in this regard. Canadians are evenly split on the question of whether the country does a good job of caring for the more vulnerable in society, with 47 percent agreeing and 46 percent disagreeing (7% cannot say).

## Paid sick days

As workplaces begin to reopen, public health officials are emphasizing the importance of ensuring that employees do not come to work when they're not feeling well. But for some employees, this remains a challenge, either because they have access to only a limited number of paid sick days, or because they are not paid at all when they are unable to work. A large majority of Canadians, however, believe that the provision of adequate paid sick leave is important.

- Eighty-eight percent of Canadians say it's important for corporations to provide employees with **paid sick days** when needed.
- Seventy-three percent of Canadians *disagree* with the proposition that *employers should not have to pay their workers any wages when they miss a day of work because they are sick* – including 48 percent who strongly disagree.

## Reducing inequality

As mentioned earlier, roughly three in four (73%) Canadians agree that the government should reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. Measures related to salaries at both the top and bottom ends of the scale also figure prominently in the list of things Canadians expect of corporations (see Table 4); seven in ten (70%) say it's *very* important for corporations to both pay employees a wage that is sufficient to allow them to make ends meet, and to keep the salaries of senior executives under control.

- It is also the case that most Canadians (67%) agree that Canada should be a country where there is not a big difference in income between the wealthy and everyone else. Agreement is slightly higher than when the question was last asked, in 2012. However, only about one in three (35%) strongly agree, which is lower than the proportion agreeing with previously mentioned items, such as the free provision of essential medicines or accessibility to affordable and high-quality daycare. Among those whose annual household income is under \$100,000, agreement stands at 72 percent – including 40 percent who strongly agree.

## The environment and climate change

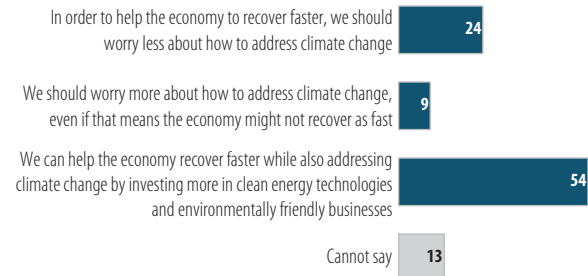
Asked to think about the need for an economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, just over one in two say that we can help the economy recover faster while also addressing climate change, by investing more in clean energy technologies and environmentally friendly businesses. Nova Scotians and Quebecers are much more likely than Albertans and Saskatchewanians to support this option.

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the environment had emerged as the issue that Canadians viewed as the most important.<sup>6</sup> While the issue may have since been overshadowed in the short term by the onset of a public health emergency, this does not necessarily mean that Canadians no longer support action on the environment or climate change. While the survey finds some evidence that, in the current context, the environment may be somewhat less of a priority that it was previously, it also shows that, for many Canadians, a focus on the environment is seen as part of an effective economic recovery strategy.

- Three in four (76%) Canadians agree that Canada should be a country where the environment is protected, even if this slows down economic development. This is down slightly from the 87 percent who held this view when the question was last asked in 2012. However, the extent of the change varies across the country: agreement is more or less unchanged since 2012 in Quebec, but has dropped by 30 points (from 82% to 52%) in the Prairies.
- Eighty-four percent of Canadians say that it's important for corporations to put in place programs and policies to protect the environment, including about one in two (48%) who say this is very important. Again, the proportion taking this view was higher when this question was previously asked, in this case in 1996: at that time, 96 percent said it was important for corporations to put in place programs and policies to protect the environment (including 65% who said it was very important). In this case, while the proportion seeing this as important has dropped in all regions of the country, it has dropped more acutely in the West, and particularly in Alberta, where the proportion seeing this as very important fell from 66 percent in 1996 to 37 percent today.

CHART 10

### Economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19: Preferred option



Q.42

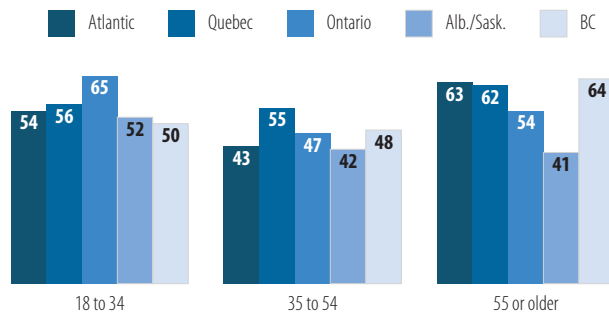
Thinking about the need for an economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which of the following is closer to your view ... ?

<sup>6</sup> See Environics Institute for Survey Research, *Regional Perspectives on Politics and Priorities* (November 2019); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/regional-perspectives-on-politics-and-priorities>.

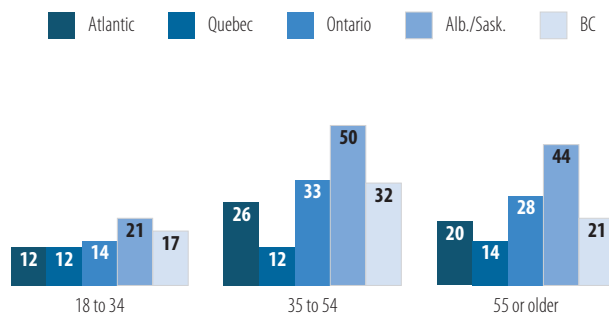
However, for many Canadians, the idea that there is a necessary trade-off between economic recovery and the protection of the environment may be becoming outdated. It may be possible to boost growth and employment through investments in the green economy that also serve to address challenges such as climate change. Indeed, this is the preferred approach for a majority of Canadians:

- When asked to think about the need for an economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, 54 percent say that we can help the economy recover faster while also addressing climate change, by investing more in clean energy technologies and environmentally friendly businesses. Fewer than half as many (24%) say that, in order to help the economy to recover faster, we should worry less about how to address climate change; and only nine percent say that we should worry more about how to address climate change, even if that means the economy might not recover as fast (13% cannot say).
- Support for the option of that combines economic recovery with the fight against climate change is higher among both younger and older Canadians (particularly those between the ages of 18 and 24 (67%)) and lower among middle-aged Canadians. It is also somewhat higher among women (58%) compared to men (50%).
- However, the biggest difference in opinion is among provinces: Nova Scotians (62%) and Quebecers (58%) are much more likely than Albertans (46%) or Saskatchewanians (42%) to support the option that combines economic recovery with the fight against climate change. It is notable, however, that regional differences are much more pronounced among older generations than younger ones. For instance, there is only a two-point difference in support for this option between younger Albertans and Saskatchewanians (taken together) and younger residents of B.C., compared to a 23-point difference among those age 55 and over.

**CHART 11**  
Economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19:  
Help economy recover while addressing climate change<sup>7</sup>



Help economy recover faster by worrying less about climate change



Q.42  
Thinking about the need for an economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which of the following is closer to your view ... ?

<sup>7</sup> Survey participants in Alberta and Saskatchewan are combined to increase the sample size of each group, and because overall opinions in the two provinces on this question are similar. Results from those Manitoba are not included, as the sample size for each age group in that province is too small, while overall views in the province differ from those of its neighbours.

## Changing the way the economy works

A plurality of Canadians say that the way our economy works today needs to be fundamentally changed, while only five percent think the economy is fine the way it is. The two most prominent types of reasons given by those seeking fundamental change are those related to inequality, fairness or the power of big business; and those related to government spending, taxation, mismanagement or corruption. The need to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor is the reason most likely to be mentioned by both higher and lower-income Canadians seeking fundamental change to the economy.

Further evidence that Canadians are looking for something other than a return to the *status quo ante* comes from a question relating to the way in which the economy works today. A plurality of Canadians (44%) say that the way our economy works today needs to be fundamentally changed. Slightly fewer (41%) say that our economy should be improved through minor changes. Taken together, a total of 85 percent are looking for some kind of change to the way the economy works, compared to only five percent who think that the way our economy works is fine the way it is (an additional 10% cannot say).

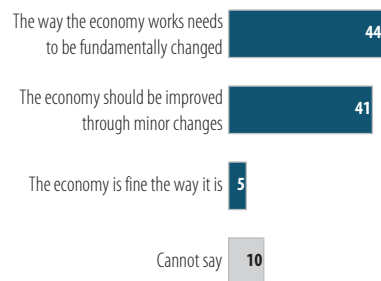
Older Canadians are more likely to say that the way our economy works today needs to be fundamentally changed, whereas younger Canadians are more likely to say it should be improved through minor changes. Similarly, lower-income Canadians are more supportive of the option of fundamental change, while higher-income Canadians tend to prefer minor changes. It is notable, however, that few higher-income Canadians favour the *status quo*: only eight percent of Canadians living in households with annual incomes of at least \$100,000, and only seven percent of those who describe their incomes as good enough to allow them to save, say that the economy is fine the way it is.

There is further evidence that it is not just those who are less satisfied with their current circumstances who are looking for change. As Table 5 shows, those who are worried about themselves or a family member finding or keeping a stable, full-time job, or who think their own financial situation will get worse in the next six months, are more likely to say the way the economy works needs to be fundamentally changed. But two in five of those who are not worried about their jobs, or who expect their financial situation to get better, also favour this option.

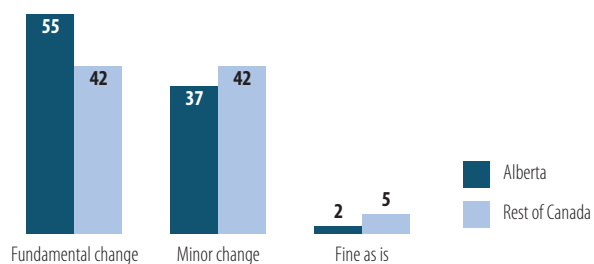
CHART 12

### Does the way the economy works today need to be changed?

The way the economy works today ...



Alberta / Rest of Canada



Q.17

Thinking about the way our economy works today, do you think it is fine the way it is, that it should be improved through minor changes, or that the way the economy works needs to be fundamentally changed?

Opinions on this question also differ significantly by region – more specifically, Albertans stand out as being the most likely to favour fundamental change. A majority of Albertans (55%) say that the way our economy works today needs to be fundamentally changed, while 37 percent say that it should be improved through minor changes. Outside of Alberta, Canadians are more evenly split, with 42 percent favouring each option.

In order to better understand why some Canadians feel the need for fundamental change to the economy, those who take this view were asked to say why (this was an open-ended question, and multiple responses were allowed). The most frequently mentioned reasons are:<sup>8</sup>

- The need to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor (16%)
- Because government spending is out of control (12%)
- Because of the effect of COVID-19 on the economy (10%)
- For environmental reasons (8%)
- Because wages are too low (8%)
- Because prices are too high or the high cost of living (7%)
- Because big businesses need to pay their fair share of taxes (6%)
- Because Canada has become too dependent on businesses outside of the country (6%)
- Because of government corruption (4%)
- Because governments need to reconsider their priorities or fund different priorities (4%).

**TABLE 5**  
Views on the way the economy works, by economic circumstances

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>THE WAY THE ECONOMY WORKS NEEDS TO BE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED</b>	<b>THE ECONOMY SHOULD BE IMPROVED THROUGH MINOR CHANGES</b>	<b>THE ECONOMY IS FINE THE WAY IT IS</b>
Total	44	41	5
Worried about job security	48	36	5
Not worried about job security	41	47	5
Expect own financial situation to get worse	45	40	4
Expect own financial situation to get better	39	46	9

<sup>8</sup> A total of 19 percent also mention one or more very general reasons (such as “it is just broken”) or say they don’t know or that there is no reason in particular.

While there is no single reason why many Canadians wish to see fundamental change to the economy, there are common themes. The two most prominent types of reasons (grouped together) are those related to inequality, fairness or the power of big business (with 40% giving one or more reasons of this type); and government spending, taxation, mismanagement or corruption (25%). Interestingly – given the focus in other Western countries on the ability of political parties or leaders with an anti-immigration agenda to build support among economically dissatisfied voters – only two percent of Canadians seeking fundamental change to the economy say that it’s because minorities or immigrants receive favoured treatment.

It’s also notable that the reason most likely to be mentioned<sup>9</sup> by both higher and lower-income Canadians is the same, namely the need to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor (this reason is mentioned by 15% of Canadians living in households earning less than \$30,000 per year, and 20% of those living in households earning at least \$100,000 per year). After that, however, there is a divergence. For

lower-income Canadians, the next most common reasons mentioned are that the cost of living is too high (15%) and that wages are too low (14%). For higher-income Canadians, the next most common reasons mentioned are ones related to the environment (13%) and excessive government spending (13%).

Finally, there are differences in the reasons given by those inside and outside of Alberta (where support for fundamental change is higher). As is the case with other Canadians, Albertans who support fundamental economic change are most likely to say that it’s because of the need to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor (this reason is mentioned by 13% of Albertans). In Alberta, however, the next most frequently mention reason is the environment – mentioned by 12 percent of Albertans, compared to eight percent of those living elsewhere in Canada. Albertans are also more likely than other Canadians to mention the need to diversify the economy as a reason why fundamental change is needed (7%, compared to only 1% outside of the province).

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<sup>9</sup> Excluding very general reasons (such as “it is just broken”).

## Taxation and government spending

In the context of thinking about what Canadians currently expect from their governments, it's also important to consider attitudes on taxes and government spending.

As seen earlier, Canadians continue to be much more likely to see taxes as mostly positive rather than mostly negative. This doesn't mean that people enjoy paying them or wish to pay more. One in two Canadians, in fact, agree with the proposition that Canada should be a country where taxes are kept as low as possible, even if this may limit the services governments can provide (51%). Agreement with this statement, however, is lower than for any of the 11 statements included in this question (see Chart 9). Only 19 percent strongly agree that low taxes describe the kind of country they believe Canada should be.

In terms of the reasons given by those supporting fundamental economic change, excessive taxation of the average person is mentioned by four percent. As mentioned earlier, many more mention excessive government spending: 12 percent say the economy is in need of fundamental change because government spending is out of control, making this the second most often mentioned reason (after inequality). While not all Canadians share this view, most do agree that there is little chance that the federal deficit will be eliminated any time soon. When asked to think about Canada over the next decade, only one in four think it's likely that we'll make real progress in addressing the size of the federal deficit. More than twice as many (62%) say it's unlikely that we'll make progress in this area.



# Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic upended almost every facet of Canadians' daily lives. Remarkably, it doesn't appear to have upended many of the prevailing patterns of Canadian public opinion. Certainly, for many, the short-term economic outlook worsened as the pandemic took hold, before rebounding somewhat later in the summer. Other measures, relating to perceptions of job security or the adequacy of our incomes, or to self-confidence in dealing with adversity, have either hardly changed or slightly improved. At the same time, there have been some modest ups and downs in the public's views on the role of governments and corporations, but no wholesale rethink. Most Canadians, for instance, aspire to live in a country where both governments and corporations take steps to limit economic inequality. But these preferences are not the result of the hardships brought about by an unparalleled public health emergency. They have been expressed consistently for decades.

*A Better Canada* also finds widespread public support for a range of reforms, from providing quality long-term care for the elderly, to covering all essential medicines through public drug plans, to making sure employees can take paid sick days when they need to, to making affordable and high-quality daycare for young children available to all parents who need it. It also presents evidence to suggest that, for many, the eventual reopening of the economy should mean something better than going "back to normal." A majority think that investing more in clean energy technologies and environmentally friendly businesses can make it possible

to combine a faster economic recovery with action on climate change. And most Canadians think the way that our economy works needs to be changed, with a plurality saying that this change should be fundamental in nature.

To say that these hopes for change are not all new should not diminish their importance. In fact, the opposite is arguably a more apt conclusion. If the pandemic were to have jarred the public into supporting a novel and uncharacteristic agenda, then decision-makers might wish to proceed with caution, thinking that the public's support for change might eventually subside along with the number of new COVID-19 cases. But *A Better Canada* shows Canadians' current aspirations are not a product of sudden jumps or reversals in public opinion.

Of course, no government has *carte blanche*. Public support for a number of reforms should be read alongside the fact that, for a significant minority at least, the need for fundamental economic change is driven not so much by concerns about inequality as concerns about government overspending, over taxation or mismanagement. The extent of support for action on the environment continues to vary across regions. And if Canadians are pessimistic about anything at the moment, it is the likelihood of reducing the federal deficit. Governing in Canada continues to mean finding the appropriate balance between different priorities. This is one of many challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has only made more acute.



# Source material

This research references a number of previous public opinion surveys conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, from which the current survey draws comparisons. Reports and data tables for most of these surveys are available online at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org). Further information is available upon request.

**Focus Canada** is an ongoing public opinion research program that has been surveying Canadians on public policy and social issues since 1977. Between 1977 and 2009, Focus Canada was conducted on a quarterly basis as a syndicated research project by Environics Research (available to subscribers for an annual fee). Starting in 2010, Focus Canada has been conducted as a non-profit, public interest research study several times a year by the Environics Institute for Survey Research.

**The Confederation of Tomorrow** surveys of Canadians explore the attitudes of Canadians toward the practice of federalism and their federal community. The two studies were conducted in January of 2019 and 2020 by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with four leading public policy organizations across the country: the Canada West Foundation, the Centre D'Analyse Politique Constitution Fédéralisme, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government.

**The 2020 Survey on Employment and Skills** was conducted in March by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University. The survey explores the experiences of Canadians relating to education, skills and employment, including perceptions of job security, the impact of technological change, and the value of different forms of training.

**The Common Good: Who Decides?** was a national survey of Canadians on the theme of defining the common good, conducted in 2012 by the Environics Institute for Survey Research. The survey was commissioned by the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, in collaboration with the University of Alberta.

**The AmericasBarometer** is a recurring study conducted approximately every two years and covering 23 countries spanning the western hemisphere. In Canada, the surveys were conducted online five times over the past decade: in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2019. Since 2012, the surveys have been conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research.

In addition to surveys conducted by the Environics Institute, this report also cites data from surveys conducted by **the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC)**. Between 1998 and 2006, CRIC conducted a series of public opinion studies on a range of national unity issues. Many of the reports and questionnaires for these surveys are available online from the Carleton University library at <https://library.carleton.ca/find/data/centre-research-and-information-canada-cric>.

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