



AmericasBarometer
Canadian Survey

2023 SERIES

01

Trust in Elections

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The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established by Michael Adams in 2006 with a mandate to conduct in-depth public opinion and social research on the issues shaping Canada's future. It is through such research that Canadians can better understand themselves and their changing society.

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Trust in Elections in Canada:

A Report from the 2023 AmericasBarometer Survey in Canada

Political news headlines in 2023 have been dominated by concerns about potential interference by foreign governments in recent Canadian elections, with opposition parties calling for a public inquiry into the matter. Against this backdrop, the 2023 AmericasBarometer Survey in Canada finds that most Canadians continue to have trust in elections in their country, with very few expressing low trust. However, a growing number of Canadians say that foreign governments may sometimes influence Canada's election results.

Key findings

- In 2023, 42 percent of Canadians express a high level of trust in elections, 47 percent express some trust, and only 10 percent have a low level of trust. The proportion with high trust in elections is five points lower than that recorded in 2021, but similar to 2017 and 2019, and higher than in 2014.
- Since 2021, the proportion saying that foreign governments may sometimes influence our election results has increased by 10 percentage points, from 56 percent to 66 percent. The proportion that says this never happens in Canada dropped by an equal amount, from 25 percent to 15 percent.
- A majority (60%) of Canadians say that votes are always counted correctly and fairly in elections in Canada, and 33 percent say this sometimes happens; only five percent say this never happens. The proportion saying that votes are always counted correctly and fairly is down very slightly (by 4 points) since 2021.

About this survey

These results are from the Canadian portion of the 2023 AmericasBarometer, a biennial comparative survey of democratic values and behaviours that covers countries in North, Central and South America, as well as a significant number of countries in the Caribbean (the 2023 survey covers 25 countries). The project is led by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University.

The 2023 AmericasBarometer in Canada survey was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with LAPOP at Vanderbilt University. It was conducted online with a representative sample of 2,500 Canadians (aged 18 and over) between July 20 and August 4, 2023.

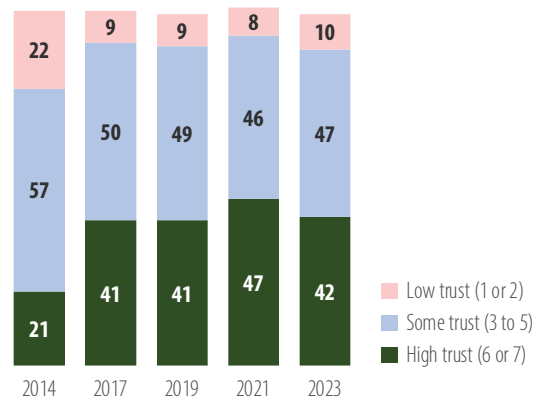
To what extent do you trust elections in Canada?

Nine in ten Canadians express either a high degree of trust or some trust in elections. The proportion of Canadians with high trust in elections is slightly lower than that recorded in 2021, but similar to 2017 and 2019, and higher than in 2014.

Canadians were asked about the extent to which they trust elections in this country, answering on a scale of one to seven, where one means “not at all” and seven means “a lot.” In 2023, 42 percent express a high level of trust in elections (6 or 7 on the scale), 47 percent express some trust (3 to 5 on the scale) and only 10 percent have a low level of trust (1 or 2 on the scale).

The proportion with high trust in elections is five points lower than that recorded in 2021, but similar to 2017 and 2019, and higher than in 2014.¹ The proportion expressing low trust in elections – roughly one in ten – has remained more or less unchanged since 2017, but is lower than in 2014.

To what extent do you trust elections in this country? 2014 – 2023



Q.B47a

To what extent do you trust elections in this country? (Using a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 means “not at all” and 7 means “a lot.”)

Answers along the seven-point scale can be grouped in different ways. In addition to reporting that 42 percent express a high level of trust in elections (6 or 7 on the scale), it is also possible to say the following:

- 64 percent have “positive trust” (5 to 7 on the scale), 16 percent are neutral (at the mid-point (4) on the scale), and 19 have “negative trust” (1 to 3 on the scale).
- 81 percent have trust in elections (scoring at the mid-point of the scale or higher), and 19 percent do not trust elections (1 to 3 on the scale).

The remainder of this report will use the following groupings for analysis: high trust (6 or 7 on the scale), some trust (3 to 5 on the scale) and low trust (1 or 2 on the scale).

¹ The 2014 survey took place several weeks after the start of the trial of the former political staffer who had organized “robocalls” to impede voters during the 2011 election campaign.

Trust in elections varies among Canadians in a number of ways.

- While the proportion with high trust is similar across major regions of the country, it is higher in communities with populations over one million (45%) or between 100,000 and a million (44%), and lower in communities with populations under 100,000 (36%).
- High trust is more commonly expressed by men (48%) than women (37%).
- The proportion expressing high trust in elections is lowest among those age 18 to 29 and increases steadily with age.
- The proportion expressing high trust in elections is lower among those without a post-secondary education and higher for those with a college diploma or university degree.
- The extent of trust is also lower among those with annual household incomes of \$35,000 or less, and increases steadily as income increases.

Those who are less likely to express high trust are generally more likely to express some trust, while the proportion within each group expressing low trust remains close to one in 10.

In addition to these differences, trust in elections also varies among the supporters of the main federal political parties. High trust is highest among Liberal Party supporters (64%) and supporters of the Bloc Québécois (52%), and lower among supporters of the NDP (43%), the Conservative Party (36%) and the Green Party (29%).

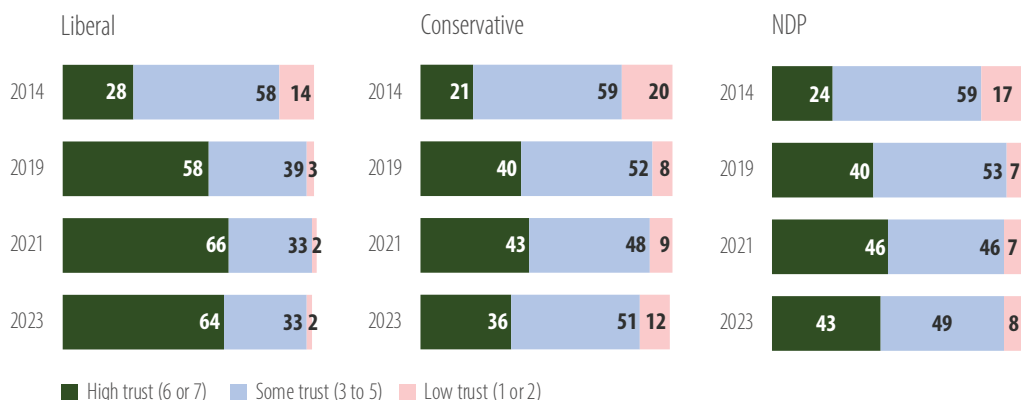
Again, those who are less likely to express high trust are generally more likely to express some trust, while across all partisan groups the proportion expressing low trust remains close to one in 10. Only 12 percent of Conservative Party supporters have a low level of trust in elections. Low trust is higher (20%) among those who are undecided about which party they would vote for.

It is possible to compare these results with opinions in the U.S. (from 2021).² The current 28-point gap between Liberal and Conservative party supporters expressing high trust in elections is much smaller than the 53-point gap between American Democratic and Republican party supporters in 2021 (the figures are 66% and 13%, respectively). In 2021, 43 percent of U.S. Republican party supporters had low trust in elections.

In Canada, there has been little change among party supporters since 2021. But the proportion with high trust in elections has fallen more among Conservative Party supporters (down 7 points) than among NDP supporters (down 3 points) or Liberal Party supporters (down 2 points).

To what extent do you trust elections in this country?

2014 – 2023 By federal vote intention



Q.B47a

To what extent do you trust elections in this country? (Using a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 means "not at all" and 7 means "a lot.")

² Data from the 2023 survey in the U.S. is not yet available.

To what extent do you trust elections in this country?

2023 By select demographics

		High Trust (6 – 7) (%)	Some Trust (3 – 5) (%)	Low Trust (1 – 2) (%)	Sample size
Total	Total	42	47	10	2,500
Community population size	Over 1 million	45	45	9	1,098
	100,000 to 1 million	44	46	10	667
	Under 100,000	36	51	13	714
Gender	Men	48	42	9	1,240
	Women	37	52	11	1,240
Age	18-29	31	55	13	583
	30-44	37	53	10	627
	45-55	42	46	12	642
	60+	55	38	7	648
Educational attainment	High school or less	36	48	16	654
	College	40	49	10	966
	University	52	43	5	880
Annual household income	\$35,000 or less	35	50	14	502
	\$35,001 to \$55,000	41	48	10	505
	\$55,001 to \$100,000	43	48	9	985
	More than \$100,000	51	40	9	505
Federal election vote intention	Liberal	64	33	2	626
	Conservative	36	51	12	639
	NDP	43	49	8	426
	Bloc Québécois	52	43	4	189
	Green Party	29	61	10	142
	Undecided	20	59	20	384

Q.B47a

To what extent do you trust elections in this country? (Using a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 means “not at all” and 7 means “a lot.”)

Foreign interference in Canadian elections

A majority of Canadians say that foreign governments may sometimes influence our election results. Since 2021, the proportion holding this view has increased, while the proportion that says this never happens in Canada has decreased.

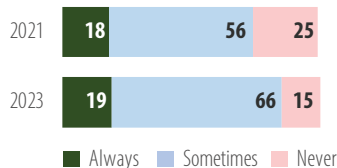
Concern about potential interference by foreign governments in Canadian elections has featured prominently in the political news headlines in 2023. But this is not the first time the issue has arisen. At many times in Canada's history, there have been suspicions that foreign governments – whether allies or rivals – had found ways to help the Canadian political parties or leaders they preferred or hinder the ones they disliked.

The AmericasBarometer survey presented Canadians with a list of several things that can happen during elections, and asked if they always, sometimes or never happen in Canada. In 2023, 19 percent say that it *always* happens that “some foreign governments may influence the election results of Canada.” This figure is almost identical to that seen in 2021 (18%), when this question was first asked.

However, since 2021, the proportion saying that foreign governments may *sometimes* influence our election results has increased by 10 percentage points, from 56 percent to 66 percent. The proportion that says this *never* happens in Canada dropped by an equal amount, from 25 percent to 15 percent.

Foreign influence of election results in Canada: *how often does this happen?*

2021 – 2023 Some foreign governments may influence the election results of Canada



Q.COUNTFAIR4

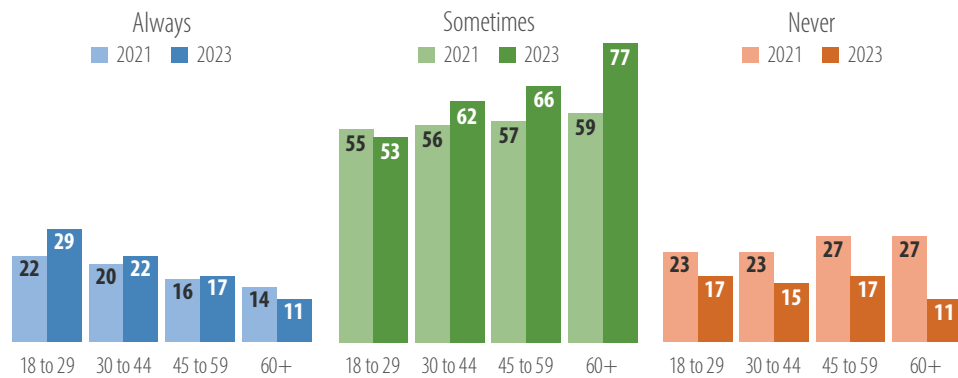
Here are some things that can happen during elections. Would you say the following happen always, sometimes or never in Canada? Some foreign governments may influence the election results of Canada.

Between 2021 and 2023, the proportions saying that foreign governments *never* influence our election results have declined in each age group. But whereas Canadians age 30 and older generally became more likely to say this sometimes happens, those age 18 to 29 became more likely to say this *always* happens: 29 percent of those age 18 to 29 now say that foreign influence in elections in Canada always happens – up seven percentage points since 2021.

Conservative Party supporters (24%) are more likely than those supporting the Liberal Party (14%) or the NDP (17%) to say that foreign governments *always* influence our election results, but each group of supporters is no more likely to hold this view than they were in 2021. But the proportions saying that foreign governments *never* influence our election results have declined among supporters of each of the main federal political parties, as well as among those who are undecided.

Foreign influence of election results in Canada: *how often does this happen?*

2021 – 2023 By age group

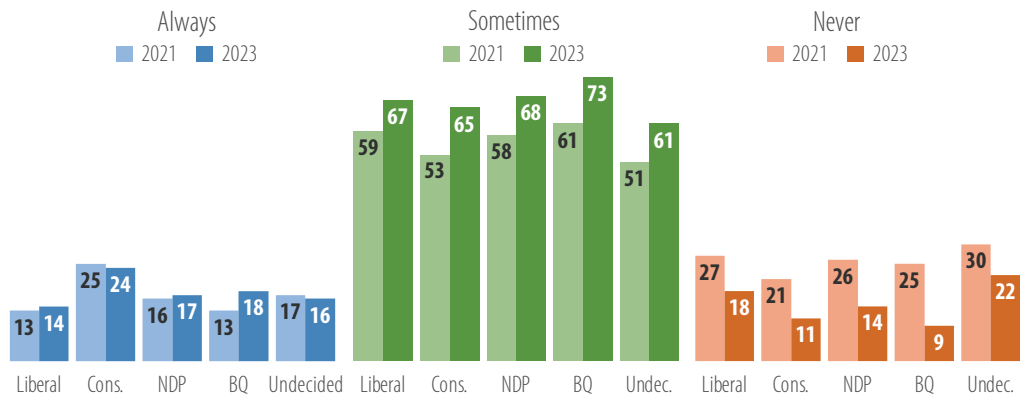


Q.COUNTFAIR4

Here are some things that can happen during elections. Would you say the following happen always, sometimes or never in Canada? Some foreign governments may influence the election results of Canada.

Foreign influence of election results in Canada: *how often does this happen?*

2021 – 2023 By federal vote intention



Q.COUNTFAIR4

Here are some things that can happen during elections. Would you say the following happen always, sometimes or never in Canada? Some foreign governments may influence the election results of Canada.

Counting the votes

A majority of Canadians believe that votes in Canadian elections are always counted fairly and correctly, with very few saying this never happens.

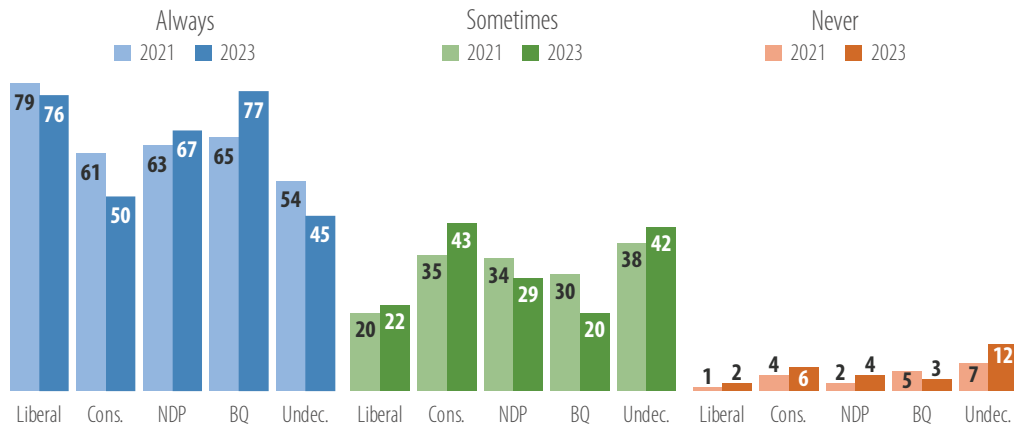
In addition to asking about the influence of foreign governments on elections, the survey also asked about the extent to which votes are counted fairly and correctly. A majority say this always happens in elections in Canada (60%) and 33 percent say this sometimes happens; only five percent say this never happens. The proportion saying this always happens has declined slightly since 2021 (by 4 percentage points, from 64%).

The small overall drop between 2021 and 2023 in the proportion saying votes are always counted correctly and fairly in Canada is greater among Conservative Party

supporters (down 11 points) and those who are undecided (down 9 points), compared with supporters of the Liberal Party (down 3), NDP (up 4) and BQ (up 12).

In Canada in 2023, there is a 26-point gap between the proportions of supporters of the governing Liberals (76%) and the opposition Conservatives (50%) who say that votes are always counted fairly and correctly. For comparison with the U.S., in 2021, the corresponding gap between supporters of the Democratic and Republican parties was 62 points (74%, compared to 12%). In 2021, 16 percent of U.S. Republican Party supporters said that votes are never counted fairly and correctly in their country. In 2023, the proportion of Conservative Party supporters who say this never happens in Canada is six percent.

Votes are counted correctly and fairly
2021 – 2023 By federal vote intention



Q.COUNTFAIR1

Here are some things that can happen during elections. Would you say the following happen always, sometimes or never in Canada? Votes are counted correctly and fairly.

Conclusion

A healthy democracy requires its citizens to believe in the integrity of the electoral process – the main mechanism through which they can express their political preferences and hold governments to account for their success or failures. It might seem ideal that all citizens hold very high levels of trust, but this is perhaps unrealistic. It is understandable for citizens to keep a watchful eye on their political institutions, especially as dishonesty can, in fact, happen from time to time (such as in the “robocalls” incident that took place in 2011). It also is to be expected that those whose preferred party is defeated will be less satisfied or more skeptical about the electoral process. But there is an important difference between these more muted feelings of support and an outright loss of trust.

In Canada, most people express some degree of trust in elections, and very few think elections are never fair. Those who support the current official opposition in Ottawa are more reserved in their support for elections than those who support the current government, but this difference is modest compared to the extreme polarization now evident in the United States.

The current controversy over potential foreign interference in aspects of Canada’s electoral process has had some impact on public opinion – compared to 2021, fewer Canadians now believe that such interference never happens here. But this impact has so far been modest, as the proportion of Canadians with low trust in elections is more or less unchanged. The ongoing response to these issues, however, will remain important in ensuring that trust in elections in Canada does not erode in the months and years to come.