

# A BETTER CANADA

## Community, Citizenship and Engagement

### Second Report

DECEMBER 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**

Vancity is a values-based financial co-operative serving the needs of its more than 543,000 member-owners and their communities, with offices and 60 branches located in Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, Victoria, Squamish and Alert Bay, within the unceded territories of the Coast Salish and Kwakwaka'wakw people. With \$28.2 billion in assets plus assets under administration, Vancity is Canada's largest community credit union. Vancity uses its assets to help improve the financial well-being of its members while at the same time helping to develop healthy communities that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

**Vancity**

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# Executive Summary

The events of 2020 have disrupted every aspect of Canadians' daily lives. What has been less clear is the extent to which they have also changed their longer-term outlook. What are Canadians' hopes for their country and how it might realize its future potential? What types of changes do they think are needed in Canadian society, and how hopeful are they that these changes will happen? And how do they think those changes are most likely to be brought about?

We set out to explore these questions in *A Better Canada*, a survey conducted by the Environics Institute and Vancity in August 2020. In September, we published the first report based on the research. *A Better Canada: Values and Priorities after COVID-19* found most Canadians seeking fundamental change to how the economy works, as well as a green recovery that combines an economic restart with action on climate change. It also documented widespread public support for a range of reforms, including measures to reduce inequality, improve services for children and the elderly, expand care for the sick and the vulnerable, and protect the environment.

The present report, *Community, Citizenship and Engagement*, explores Canadians' thinking about whether and how the country can achieve these goals, and move toward a better, post-pandemic future. The survey offers a mixed portrait: most Canadians express confidence in some types of leaders and institutions, but not others; most Canadians think it's likely that the country will make progress in addressing some forms of inequality, but not all forms; and while a majority thinks that citizens, working together, can reverse an unpopular government decision, a significant minority does not. More encouragingly, however, the survey indicates that younger Canadians (those between the ages of 18 and 34) remain more hopeful about the prospects of achieving a better Canada.

## Community and citizenship

By and large, Canadians find community in interpersonal connections, and in shared experiences and perspectives. This begins with family and friends, which – for more than

nine out of ten Canadians – are important to their own sense of community. For about six in ten Canadians, community also means neighbours, people with similar opinions on important issues, people they work or study with, and people they share leisure activities with. And for majorities of newcomers to Canada, people who share their culture or faith are also important for their sense of community.

Moreover, helping one another and engaging with the community are among the attributes that Canadians are most likely to identify as the hallmarks of good citizenship. Answers to the question of what makes someone a good citizen tend to cluster under one of four main themes: following the rules, community engagement, caring for others and being respectful of others. Canadians from different backgrounds generally have similar views on what makes someone a good citizen; notably, immigrants and non-immigrants, as well as white and racialized Canadians, are equally likely to mention respect for others as part of what it means to be a good citizen.

## Confidence in leaders and institutions

In terms of the confidence that Canadians hold in leaders and institutions, a mixed picture emerges. First, Canadians express a great deal of confidence in those at the forefront of handling the response to the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. Nine in ten Canadians say they have confidence in doctors and nurses, while eight in ten say the same about scientists. And at a time of significant economic hardship, seven in ten Canadians, including majorities in all income brackets, say they have confidence in their bank or credit union.

Confidence in political leaders and governments is less widespread, but while it has declined in recent years, it is not at an all-time low. In fact, Canadians are almost twice as likely to express confidence in political leaders today than they were in 1992, when the country was gripped both by an economic recession and constitution deadlock. Confidence has dropped more sharply in the case of business leaders – and in this case, confidence has reached

a new low. In fact, for the first time, Canadians are more likely to have confidence in governments than in business leaders. Confidence is also lower in the case of leaders of not-for-profit organizations. And while roughly seven in ten Canadians continue to express confidence in the police, this level of confidence has also declined, possibly as a result of growing concerns about discriminatory policing practices.

## Making change and future outlook

Canadians have many aspirations for the kind of country they want to live in. But at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic remains top-of-mind for most Canadians, confidence about making progress is uneven. A majority of Canadians are optimistic about making real progress to address pandemics like COVID-19, gender inequality, and racism and discrimination. But they are less sure that we will make real progress in addressing economic inequality, or in raising the standard of living for Indigenous Peoples. And while nearly one in two Canadians are optimistic about making real progress in addressing climate change over the next decade, two in five say such progress is unlikely.

Canadians look both to governments and to themselves as individual citizens to drive change, depending on the issue. Three in five Canadians believe that reducing economic inequality depends more on government action. In the case of ending racism and discrimination, views swing the other direction, with seven in ten Canadians saying progress is more likely to be made through the actions of individual citizens. Notably, just as Canadians are evenly divided on the likelihood of making progress to address climate change over the next decade, they are also fairly evenly divided as to whether progress in this area depends more on government action, or whether it is more likely to come through the actions of individual citizens.

At the same time, a slim majority of Canadians believe that citizens, working together, can achieve change, even when this means persuading the government to change its mind. Just over one in two Canadians believe that citizens working together can change an unpopular government decision, although one in three thinks this is unlikely. In terms political

activities, Canadians are most likely to say that voting for a different party during the next election, calling or writing an elected representative, joining a community group, and signing a petition are the best ways to make sure an unpopular government decision is changed.

Although one in two Canadians have in fact engaged in at least one form of these or other political activity in the 12 months prior to the survey (aside from voting), an equal number have not. Among age groups, middle-aged Canadians (those between the ages of 35 and 54) are the least likely to have participated in the past year in any of the activities mentioned in the survey.

Political activity is not the only way Canadians are prepared to pursue change; many are also willing to vote with their dollars, by favouring products and services that align with specific goals. One in two Canadians would pay a little more than they do now for a product that they need, if that product was made in Canada, or by a company that reinvests its profits in their community. And around a third would be willing to pay a little more to buy a product that was made by a company that is significantly reducing its carbon emissions; or if that company were owned by a woman, an Indigenous person or a person from a racial minority.

Perhaps most encouragingly, confidence in the prospects of achieving a better Canada is generally stronger among younger Canadians. Young adults (ages 18 to 34) are more likely than average to be optimistic about the prospect for progress in addressing a range of issues, including inequality and climate change. They are much more likely to believe that citizens working together can change an unpopular political decision. And they are also more likely to have participated in some types of political activity in the past year, including signing a petition and taking part in a peaceful demonstration. Older Canadians, however, share some of the younger generation's more positive outlook: those age 55 and over are also generally more optimistic and active than average. It is the middle generations (those between the ages of 35 and 54) that stand out as the most pessimistic and least engaged.

# Introduction

Western democracies appear to have come under pressure from all sides. They are said to be confronted by long-term trends, including decreased confidence in public institutions and leaders, lower voter turnout, and declining participation in community activities and organizations. There is concern that they're being fractured by divisions among population segments defined by generation (age), ethnicity and race, gender or class. These and other divisions are thought to be exacerbated by the effects of digital communications channels, which in principle promise greater connection and exchange of ideas, but in practise allow for citizens to isolate themselves within clusters of prejudice. The COVID-19 pandemic that erupted in 2020 has only added new pressures, ranging from eroding income security stemming from the economic shutdown, to new strains on citizens' level of trust in the experts advising decision-makers, to new targets for disinformation spread through social media.

There is ample evidence to suggest, however, that in the case of Canada, these various concerns are overstated. Until the pandemic hit, the past decade in Canada was characterized by improving economic conditions, including reductions in official unemployment and poverty rates (even if poverty remained a reality for too many people). The country welcomed more and more immigrants, and responded by becoming more supportive of immigration than ever before. Concerns about declining

civic engagement were countered by the emergence of re-energized movements to oppose racism, and demands for more action to address climate change. Many of these pushes for change were led by a new generation of citizens, who used new communications technologies, not to misinform – but to organize, inform and inspire.

Experts have differing views about the relative importance of these various developments. Yet, it's also important to consider what Canadians themselves think: whether they feel a sense of engagement with a political system that in turn is responsive to their concerns – or instead, find themselves left on the outside looking in.

To understand more about how Canadians see themselves as citizens, and their relationship both to one another and to their political system, the Environics Institute for Survey Research and the Vancouver City Savings credit union joined forces to conduct a comprehensive study of public opinion in Canada, called *A Better Canada*. The survey explores Canadians' attitudes on a wide range of topics, including citizenship, the role of government, and the functioning of the economy – all in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The research also addresses the relationship between citizens and their democratic political system, encompassing questions about political efficacy and participation, leaders and institutions, and the prospects for change.

## About this Report

This report – *Community, Citizenship and Engagement* – is the second of two that presents the results from *A Better Canada*. The first report, *Values and Priorities after COVID-19*, was published in September 2020, and focused on the impact of COVID-19 on Canadians' day-to-day lives; on their current economic situation and outlook on the future; on their expectations of governments and corporations; and their aspirations for Canada in areas such as health care, child care and the environment. This second report examines how Canadians think about ideas such as citizenship and community, how confident they are in a range of leaders and institutions, how they view political participation, and how hopeful they are about the future.

*A Better Canada* consists of a survey of 3,008 Canadians, carried out online between August 17 and 24, 2020. Results are weighted by age, gender and region, to be representative of the Canadian population as a whole. 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.

Many of the questions included from the survey were previously asked in earlier studies. This allows for a comparison of results over time, to see if and when changes in attitudes have occurred. Information about the sources of previous results cited is listed under Source Material at the end of this report.

## Acknowledgements

This research was made possible with the support of Vancity and the Environics Institute for Survey Research. The Environics Institute would like to acknowledge Vancity for its substantial financial and intellectual contributions to the study. In particular, the Institute would like to thank Scott Perchall, Reuven Shlozberg, Selin Oguz and Nora Eastwood from Vancity for their collaboration throughout the project. We would also like to thank Keith Neuman from the Environics Institute for his input into the development of the questionnaire and the analysis of the data; the research team at Maru/Blue (Tara Caughlin, Rachel Spence and Chris Andaya), who managed the data collection; and Steve Otto and Cathy McKim for their work in designing and producing this report. Finally, Vancity and the Environics Institute would like to thank the 3,008 survey participants across Canada for taking the time to share their perspectives and experiences.



# Community and Citizenship

## Highlights

- *Family and friends stand out as being the most important to Canadians' own sense of community.*
- *Connecting with others of a similar ethnic, cultural or religious background is much more important for new arrivals to Canada, but its importance diminishes over time as the process of integrating into Canadian society unfolds.*
- *Canadians' sense of what makes someone a good citizen clusters around four main themes: following the rules; engaging with the community; caring for others; and being respectful of others.*
- *Other aspects of good citizenship beyond these four groupings include the notion of self-reliance and respect for the environment.*

## The meaning of community

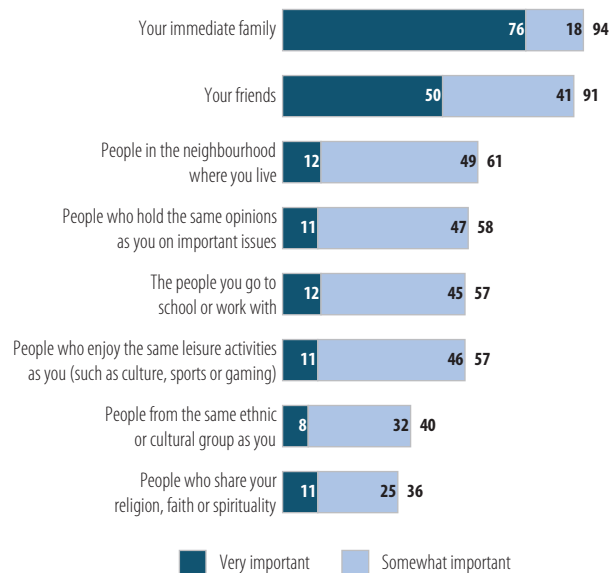
The idea of “community” can mean different things to different people. For some, it refers mainly to a local geographic area, like a neighbourhood. To others, it’s more about a group of people that they feel some connection to, who may or may not live in the same area. This connection may stem from a common background, such as a shared ethnicity or religion, or simply from common interests.

To explore how Canadians think about the subject, the survey asked how important each of eight different items are to their own sense of community. Of these items, family and friends stand out as the most important. For more than nine in ten Canadians (94%), their immediate **family** is important to their own sense of community; this includes three in four (76%) who say their family is very important, and 18 percent who say it’s somewhat important. Almost as many (91%) say their **friends** are very (50%) or somewhat (41%) important to their own sense of community.

About three in five say that four other items are important to their own sense of community: people in the **neighbourhood** where they live (61%); people who hold the **same opinions** on important issues (58%); the people they go to **school or**

How important are each of the following to your own sense of community?

2020 Very or somewhat important



Q.9

The idea of a community can mean different things to different people. How important are each of the following to your own sense of community?

**work** with (57%); and people who enjoy the same **leisure activities** (such as culture, sports or gaming) (57%). In each case, though, only about one in ten see these as being *very important* – far fewer than is the case with friends and family. Despite the similarity in the proportion of Canadians who see these four items as being important to their own sense of community, the items themselves are quite different, combining elements of geography (neighbourhood), activities (work, school and leisure) and outlook (opinions).

Finally, of the eight items mentioned, ethnicity, culture and religion are the least important: only about two in five Canadians say that people from their own **ethnic or cultural group** (40%), or people who share their **religion, faith or spirituality** (36%) are very or somewhat important to their own sense of community.

Family and friends are important to Canadians from all backgrounds, although there are some modest differences in terms of the proportion that say they are *very*, and not just somewhat, important. Older Canadians are somewhat more likely than younger generations to say that family is very important; and both older and younger Canadians are somewhat more likely than their middle-aged counterparts to say that their friends are very important. Women are somewhat more likely than men to say that their friends are very important to their own sense of community.

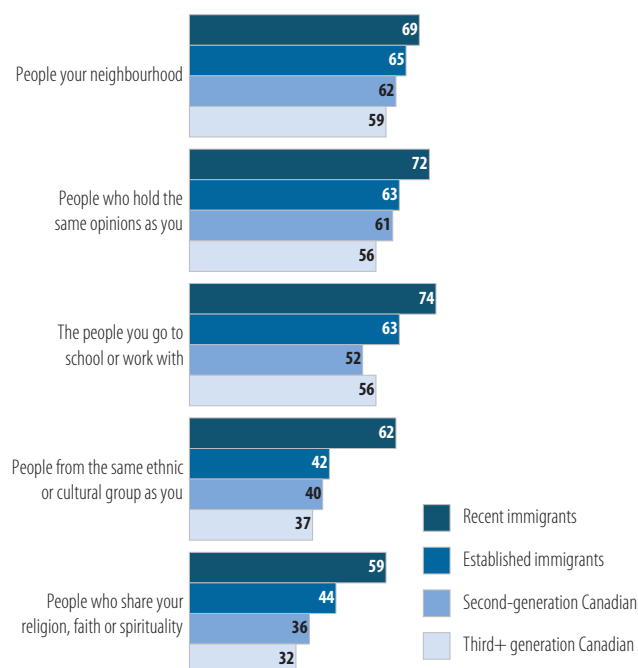
In the case of the other six items, there are some notable variations in opinions by age and immigration background; and, to a lesser extent, by racial identity and by region.

**AGE.** As mentioned, younger Canadians are more likely than average to say that friends are very important to their own sense of community; this is also the case with the people they meet at school or work, as well as the people in the neighbourhood where they live, and people who enjoy the same leisure activities as they do. Each of these is a natural reflection of younger adults' stage of life and lifestyles. Perhaps less expected is the absence of any significant difference across age groups on the importance of religion. While it's sometimes assumed that older generations are much more religious than are younger ones, the reality is that, across all age groups relatively few say that people of the same faith are important to their own sense of community. In fact, if anything, younger adults are slightly more likely to say that religion is important, although the difference is very small. Shared opinions are also more important for younger adults, especially for those age 18 to 24 (68% say that people who hold the same opinions are important to their sense of community) compared to those age 35 to 44 (46% of whom hold this view).

**GENERATION IN CANADA.** Aside from family and friends – which are equally important to Canadians from all backgrounds – each of the other items mentioned are significantly more important to first generation immigrants' sense of community than to either second generation or third generation-plus Canadians. The differences are even greater in the case of recent immigrants (those who have lived in Canada for no more than 10 years). People from one's own ethnic or cultural group are very or somewhat important for 62 percent of recent immigrants, compared to 42 percent of established immigrants (who have been

## How important are each of the following to your own sense of community?

2020 Very or somewhat important, by immigration background



Q.9

*The idea of a community can mean different things to different people. How important are each of the following to your own sense of community?*

in Canada for more than 10 years), 40 percent of second-generation immigrants and 37 percent of third generation-plus Canadians. In the case of people of the same faith, the figures are 59 percent for recent immigrants, compared to 44 percent of established immigrants, 36 percent of second-generation immigrants and 32 percent of third generation-plus Canadians. The significant difference between the results for recent immigrants, compared to established and second-generation immigrants, suggests that connecting with others of a similar ethnic, cultural or religious background is important for new arrivals to Canada, but their importance diminishes over time as the process of integrating into Canadian society unfolds.

**RACIAL IDENTITY.** Racialized Canadians are more likely than those who identify as white to say that people from their own ethnic or cultural group, and people who share their religion, faith or spirituality, are important to their own sense of community. In the case of people from the same ethnic or cultural group, 52 percent of those who are racialized say it's very or somewhat important, compared to 37 percent of those who identify as white. In the case of people of the same faith, the figures are 47 percent and 33 percent, respectively. (This is likely related to the fact that racialized Canadians are much more likely to be recent immigrants to Canada than are those who identify as white.)

**REGION.** In general, the meaning of community does not vary significantly across the country's regions. One exception to this rule is that Quebecers (51%) are less likely than Canadians outside of Quebec (65%) to say that people in their own neighbourhood are important to their sense of community. Other than this, it is the absence of differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada that is striking, including in the cases of ethnicity and culture – which is no more important to Quebecers than to other Canadians – and religion, which is not significantly less important to Quebecers than to other Canadians.

## Defining good citizenship

A community is comprised of its citizens. They are the community's established members and ultimate decision-makers. In one sense, citizenship is a status that is defined legally through rules set by the government. But the public also has its own sense of what it means to be a citizen, especially a *good* citizen – one who lives up to their ideal. The survey asked what is it that makes someone a good citizen, in terms of what they do and believe. This was an open-ended question, meaning that survey participants could answer in their own words, and more than one answer was permitted (so the total of all answers adds to more than 100%).

The answers cluster around four main themes: following the rules; engaging with the community; caring for others; and being respectful of others. It is notable that the specific attributes that are associated with each of these themes are

## Attributes of a good citizen (by theme)\*

2020

<b>Follows the rules</b>	<b>38</b>
Obeys laws and rules	32
Pays taxes and bills	11
<b>Is engaged with the community</b>	<b>36</b>
Active/participates in/contributes to their community	26
Votes in elections	6
Donates to charities/gives back	5
Does volunteer work	3
Follows or participates in politics	3
Follows the news/is informed	1
<b>Cares for others</b>	<b>30</b>
Helps other people/neighbours/those in need	17
Is fair, honest or does good deeds	10
Polite to others/nice/compassionate	4
Helps family and friends	3
Helps people in other countries/makes world a better place	1
<b>Shows respect for others</b>	<b>25</b>
Shows tolerance or respect for others	19
Does not discriminate/is not racist	7
Respect for/tolerant of other religions	2

\* The sum of the responses for all four themes exceeds 100% because some respondents mention more than one attribute; for the same reason, the sum of the responses for the attributes within each theme exceeds the total for that theme.

Q.24

*In your opinion, what is it that makes someone a good citizen, in terms of what they do and believe?*

*Please share as much information as you can on this topic.*

not ones that pertain only to people from certain ethnicities or religions, or to those who were born in Canada. Canadians' ideal of good citizenship is one that anyone can embrace, regardless of their origins or background.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is consistent with the finding from the Environics Institute's 2011 survey on citizenship, that nine in ten Canadians agree that someone who was born outside Canada is just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born here. See *Canadians on Citizenship* at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadians-on-citizenship>.

Just under two in five (38%) Canadians associate good citizenship with **following the rules**. For about one in three (32%), this means obeying the law or the constitution. One in ten (11%) also mention that a good citizen is someone who pays their taxes.<sup>2</sup>

Almost as many Canadians (36%) see a good citizen as someone who is actively **engaged with the community**. This includes one in four (26%) who say that a good citizen is someone who is active in or who contributes to their community or to the country, as well as six percent who mention voting in elections, five percent who mention donating to charities, three percent who mention volunteering, three percent who mention participating in politics, and one percent who mention following the news and being informed.

Three in ten (30%) think of a good citizen as someone who **cares for others**. This includes 17 percent who say it is someone who helps their neighbours or helps to care for others, 10 percent who say it is someone who is fair and honest and does good deeds, four percent who mention qualities such as being nice and compassionate, three percent who mention helping family or friends, and one percent who mention helping people in other countries and making the world a better place.

One in four (25%) say a good citizen is someone who has **respect for others**, which for 19 percent means being tolerant and respectful of others; while seven percent mention *not* discriminating or being racist, and for two percent means being respectful of other beliefs or religions.

Other aspects of good citizenship beyond these four groupings include the notion of self-reliance (14% mention working and not relying on government handouts) and respect for the environment (mentioned by 7%).

These answers are very similar to those from previous surveys in 2016 and 2011, suggesting that people's idea of what makes someone a good citizen do not fluctuate very much over the short-term. One change that has taken place, however, relates to respect for the environment, which appears in the responses for the first time in the 2020 survey. While this is now mentioned by only seven percent of Canadians, it is now nonetheless one of the 10 most frequently mentioned attributes of a good citizen.

Canadians from different backgrounds generally have similar views on what makes someone a good citizen, although there are some modest differences. Older Canadians place more emphasis on following the rules; whereas younger Canadians place more emphasis on respect for others, as well as the environment. Those with higher incomes and education are more likely to mention community engagement. Immigrants and those born in Canada have similar opinions, although immigrants – and especially recent immigrants – are more likely to mention obeying the law as an aspect of good citizenship. Notably, immigrants and non-immigrants, as well as white and racialized Canadians, are equally likely to mention respect for others as part of what it means to be a good citizen.

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<sup>2</sup> These separate figures may add up to more than the total for the category because some respondents may mention more than one of the individual items.

# Confidence in Leaders and Institutions

## Highlights

- *Nine in ten Canadians say they have confidence in doctors and nurses, and eight in ten say the same about scientists.*
- *Seven in ten say they have a lot or some confidence in their bank or credit union. The level of confidence is slightly lower for those in low-income households, but is similar among those in lower-middle, middle- and upper-income households.*
- *Over the past decade, confidence in political leaders has declined, yet Canadians remain almost twice as likely to express confidence in political leaders today than they were in 1992.*
- *Confidence in business leaders fell significantly at the time of the last financial crisis, and has now fallen even further. For the first time, Canadians are now more likely to have confidence in governments than in business leaders.*
- *Confidence in the leaders of not-for-profit organizations, such as charities, has dropped significantly. Whereas Canadians previously were much more likely to express confidence in the leaders of charities than in governments, this is no longer the case.*
- *Almost one in two Canadians say that it's likely that the government would offer them financial support if they found themselves in hard times, but an equal proportion think it's unlikely. Those who are less financially secure – and who therefore would be more in need of support in hard times – are less likely to expect an offer of financial support from any of the institutions mentioned in the survey.*

It is often assumed that the public's confidence in their political leaders and public institutions is steadily declining and has never been lower. This is not necessarily the case. It may be true that confidence in some leaders and institutions is lower today than in previous eras, such as in the first decades following the Second World War. But over the past 40 years, levels of confidence have fluctuated – increasing in some years and declining in others – rather than consistently falling to new lows. What's more, the overall trend is different for different types of leaders or organizations.

The current survey set out to take stock of the public's confidence in different types of leaders or organizations, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, the new results update previous ones that go back several decades. In other cases, the public's perspective was measured for the first time.

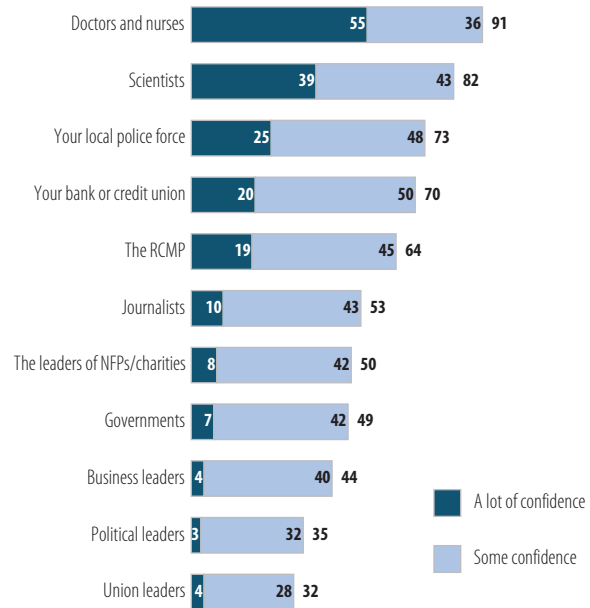
## Current levels of confidence

In the midst of a pandemic that has shone the light on the contributions of health care workers and scientific experts, these professionals stand out as attracting greater public confidence than any other group.

- Nine in ten Canadians (91%) say they have a lot or some confidence in **doctors and nurses**, and eight in ten (81%) say the same about **scientists**. Looking only at those who express a *lot* of confidence in these two groups, the figures are 55 percent and 39 percent, respectively. This level of confidence is much greater than that expressed for any other group asked about in the survey.
- Almost three in four Canadians (73%) have a lot or some confidence in their **local police force**, while somewhat fewer – almost two in three (64%) – say the same about **the RCMP**.
- Seven in ten (70%) say they have a lot or some confidence in their **bank or credit union**. Confidence is slightly lower for those in low-income households, but does not rise steadily as income increases thereafter (i.e., there are no significant differences among those in lower-middle, middle- and upper-income households). Confidence is also lower among those who describe their incomes as being “not enough” (57%), compared to those who describe them as “just enough” or “good enough” (75%). Confidence is especially low among younger Canadians (age 18 to 34) who describe their incomes as being “not enough”: only 44 percent of this group have a lot or some confidence in their bank or credit union, while 52 percent have little or no confidence.
- About one in two Canadians have a lot or some confidence in **journalists** (53%), in leaders of **not-for-profit organizations** (50%) and in **governments** (49%). In the case of governments, confidence is higher in Quebec (55%), and notably lower in Saskatchewan (32%) and Alberta (30%).
- Slightly fewer express this degree of confidence in **business leaders** (44%). In fact, Canadians are slightly more likely to say they have little or no confidence in business leaders (49%) than to say they have a lot or some confidence in them.

## Confidence in leaders and institutions

2020



Q.11

*In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?*

- Canadians are least likely to express confidence in **political leaders** (36%) and **union leaders** (33%). Majorities have little or no confidence in each of these types of leaders (61% and 56%, respectively). As was the case with governments, confidence in political leaders is higher in Quebec (43%) and notably lower in the Prairies (22%).

It is notable that, in every case – apart from doctors and nurses, and scientists – the extent of confidence that Canadians express in leaders and institutions is not especially strong: those who express confidence are much more likely to say they have *some* confidence rather than *a lot* of confidence. Fewer than one in ten Canadians say they have *a lot* of confidence in leaders of not-for-profit organizations, governments, political leaders, and leaders of business and unions.

## Trends over time

In many cases, a comparison with results from previous surveys makes it possible to say whether confidence has been rising or falling over time.<sup>3</sup>

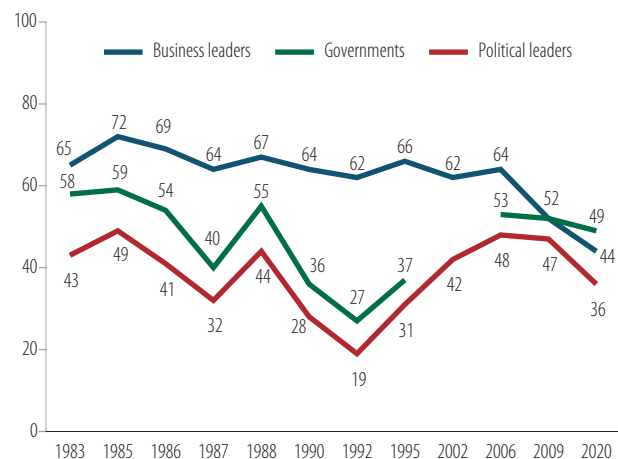
**POLITICAL LEADERS AND GOVERNMENTS.** Public confidence in both political leaders and governments in Canada hit a low point in 1992, amid the combination of an economic recession and a national unity crisis. In the roughly 15 years that followed, confidence grew steadily: the proportion of Canadians expressing a lot or some confidence in political leaders increased from 19 percent in 1992 to 48 percent in 2006; in the case of confidence in governments, it increased from 27 percent to 53 percent over the same period. Confidence levels then held steady over the next few years. Over the past decade, however, confidence has declined again, although more so in the case of political leaders than of governments. Despite this decline, Canadians remain almost twice as likely to express confidence in political leaders today than they were in 1992.

**BUSINESS AND UNION LEADERS.** For much of the past 40 years – roughly from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s – confidence in business leaders held steady at a relatively high level: around two in three Canadians said they had a lot or some confidence in business leaders. Confidence then fell significantly at the time of the last financial crisis, from 64 percent in 2006 to 52 percent in 2009 (in contrast, there had been no comparable drop in confidence around the time of earlier recessions in the 1980s and 1990s). Confidence in business leaders has now fallen even further, to 44 percent today – there has thus been a 20-point drop since 2006. For the first time, more Canadians now have confidence in governments (49%) than in business leaders (44%).

Opinions regarding union leaders mirror the recent trend for their business counterparts: since 2006, confidence in the union leaders fell 13 points, from 46 percent to 33 percent. Unlike the case with business leaders, however, the current level of confidence in union leaders does not represent a new low – the same proportion of Canadians had confidence in union leaders in the early 1980s. And while confidence in union leaders has fallen over the past decade, the gap in levels of confidence between business and union leaders has never been as narrow: the 34-point gap registered in the mid-1980s has been reduced to an 11-point gap today.

## Confidence in business leaders, political leaders and governments

1983 – 2020 A lot or some confidence



Q.11

*In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?*

<sup>3</sup> This is not possible in the case of doctors and nurses, scientists, and banks and credit unions, which were included in this survey question for the first time.

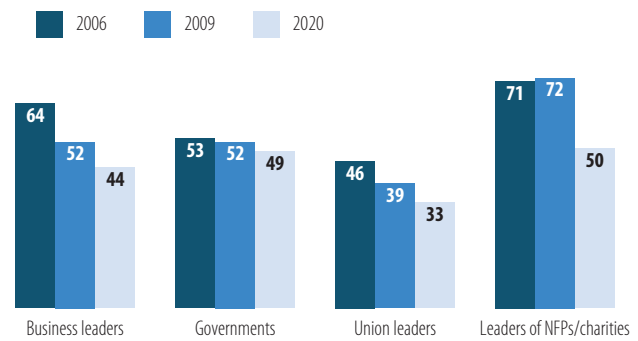


**JOURNALISTS.** Canadians are more likely to have confidence in journalists than in business or political leaders, but confidence is nonetheless somewhat lower than in was in the 1990s or 2000s: 53 percent of Canadians currently have a lot or some confidence in journalists, compared to 63 percent in 2006.<sup>4</sup> But, as with unions, this does not mean that confidence in journalists has reached a new low. A similar proportion of Canadians (50%) expressed a lot or some confidence in journalists when the question was first asked in 1983.

**NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS CHARITIES.** In 2006, Canadians were first asked about their views of leaders of not-for-profit organizations, such as charities. At that time, seven in ten said that they had a lot or some confidence in the leaders of these organizations. Since then, confidence has dropped significantly, to 50 percent (the proportion expressing *a lot* of confidence fell from 22% to 8% over the same period). Whereas Canadians were previously much more likely to express confidence in the leaders of charities than in governments, this is no longer the case. This is likely related to the media coverage of the controversy involving the WE Charity and its political connections, which peaked shortly before the survey took place.

## Confidence in leaders and institutions

2006 – 2020 A lot or some confidence



Q.11

*In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?*

<sup>4</sup> In some of the previous surveys, the question referred to “newspaper journalists.”

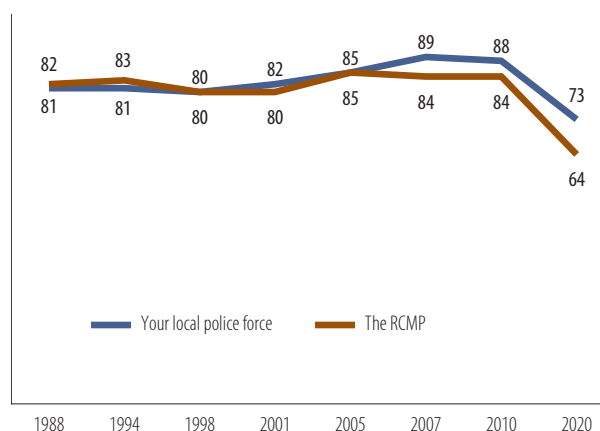


**LOCAL POLICE AND THE RCMP.** For much of the last three decades, at least four in five Canadians have expressed either a lot or some confidence in the police. Over the past year, however, the police have been a focal point for anti-racism protests in United States, Canada and other countries. The most recent wave of protests in the spring and summer of 2020 were sparked by the killing in May of George Floyd, an African-American, by white police officers in the U.S.; and drew attention to similar incidents in Canada, including incidents of police brutality perpetrated against citizens who are Black and Indigenous.

The current survey suggests that these events have had an impact, as the public's level of confidence in the police has declined noticeably, for the first time in more than three decades. Confidence in one's local police force has fallen from 88 percent in 2010 to 73 percent today; in the case of the RCMP, confidence has fallen from 84 percent to 64 percent over the same period. The change has largely occurred more specifically in the proportion expressing *a lot* of confidence (and not just some confidence): from 43 percent to 25 percent in the case of the local police, and from 39 percent to 19 percent in the case of the RCMP.<sup>5</sup> Despite these changes, however, confidence in the police and the RCMP continues to be higher than that held by many other organizations and leaders, including journalists, governments and business leaders.

Canadians who identify as white are significantly more likely than those who are racialized to have a lot or some confidence in the police: 77 percent of white Canadians, compared to 58 percent of those who are racialized, say they have a lot or some confidence in their local police force. In the case of confidence in the RCMP, the figures are 68 percent and 50 percent, respectively. White Canadians are twice as likely as racialized Canadians to say they have a lot of confidence in either their local police force (28% vs. 14%) or the RCMP (21% vs. 11%).

**Confidence in the local police and the RCMP**  
1988 – 2020 A lot or some confidence



Q.11

*In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?*

<sup>5</sup> See also: Environics Institute, *Canadian Public Opinion about Racism and Discrimination* (October 24, 2020); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadian-public-opinion-about-racism-and-discrimination>.

## Generational differences

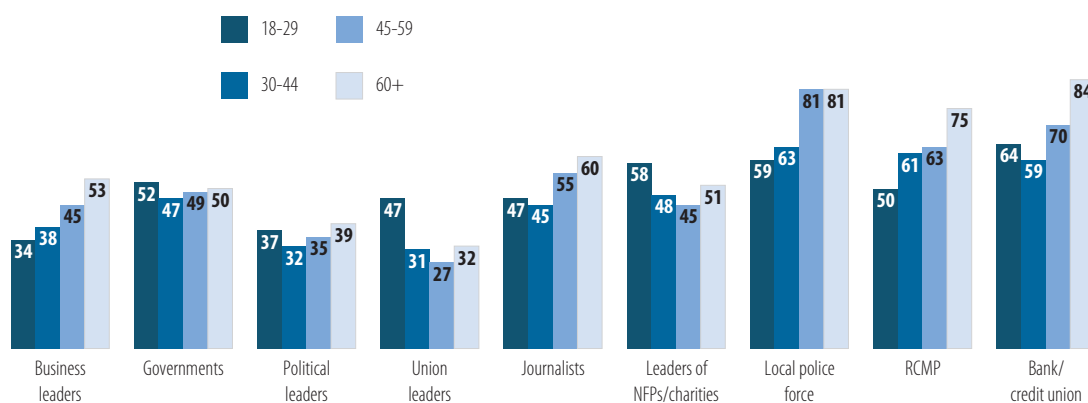
Do younger Canadians have less confidence in leaders and institutions? In some cases, yes: younger Canadians clearly have less confidence than their older counterparts in the local police and the RCMP, in business leaders, in banks and credit unions, and in journalists. But the pattern is different when it comes to governments, political leaders and charities: in these cases, the level of confidence is fairly uniform across age groups, though a little lower among the middle-aged group than among those either younger or older. In the case of union leaders, a third pattern emerges, with younger Canadians having more confidence. (In the case of doctors and nurses, and scientists, views are very positive across all age groups.)

In terms of changes over time, however, it is striking that the decline in confidence levels over the past decade is often more pronounced among younger age groups.

This is especially true in the case of the police: since 2010, confidence in local police forces has fallen by 27 percentage points among those age 18 to 29, compared to eight points among those age 60 and over. But the same general pattern also holds in other cases, such as in the case of business leaders, political leaders and journalists.

### Confidence in leaders and institutions

2020 A lot or some confidence, by age group

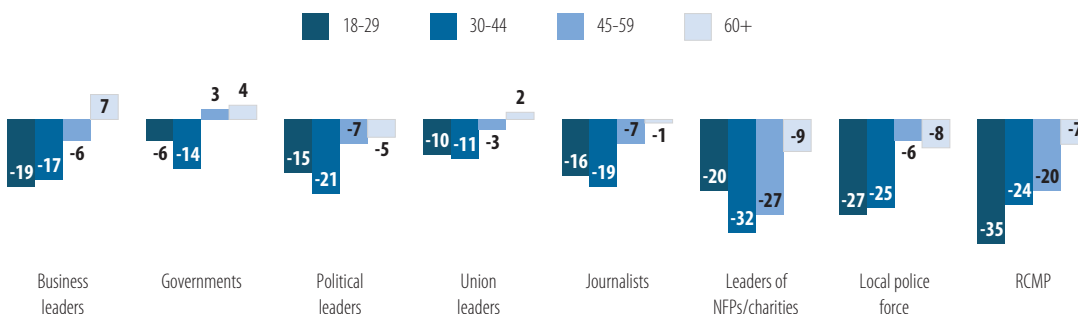


Q.11

In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?

### Confidence in leaders and institutions

2009 – 2020\* Change in “a lot or some confidence,” by age group



\* Journalists: 2006 – 2020; local police and RCMP: 2010 – 2020

Q.11

In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?

## Sources of support

Institutions can also play an important role in society as potential sources of support, especially in hard times. Only a minority of Canadians, however, think it's likely that they'd be offered financial support from one of a number of institutions, if they found themselves in hard times.

Canadians are most likely to expect financial support in these circumstances from the government: 46 percent say it's very or somewhat likely that **the government** would offer them financial support if they found themselves in hard times, although very few think this is very likely (8%), while 37 percent think it is somewhat likely. An equal proportion (47%) thinks it's somewhat (23%) or very (24%) unlikely that the government would offer them financial support.

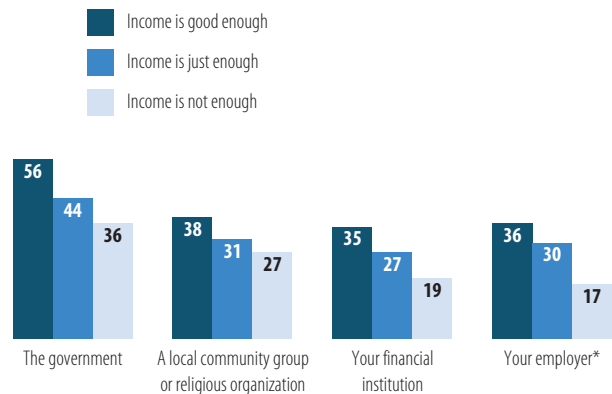
One in three (32%) think it's likely that they would get an offer of financial support from a **local community group or religious organization**, compared to 54 percent who say this is unlikely. Fewer (28%) say it's likely that **their financial institution** would offer them financial support; in this case, more than twice as many (62%) think this is unlikely. Among those who are employed, 29 percent say it is likely that **their employer** would offer them financial support if they found themselves in hard times. Again, more than twice as many (62%) say this unlikely.

Younger Canadians are somewhat more optimistic about the prospect of receiving financial support in hard times, particularly in the case of support from government; 53 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 34 think it's likely they would get government support, compared to 42 percent of those between the ages of 35 and 54, and 43 percent of those age 55 and over. Recent immigrants are more likely to expect financial support from the government; 66 percent say it's likely, compared to 45 percent for Canadians who are not recent immigrants. Recent immigrants are also more likely to expect financial support from their employer and their financial institution.

Those who are less financially secure, however – and who therefore would be more in need of support in hard times – are *less likely* to expect an offer of financial support from all four institutions mentioned in the survey. For instance, those who describe their incomes as “not enough” are 20 percentage points less likely to say that the government would offer them support, compared to those who say their income is “good enough.”

## Financial support in hard times

2020 Very or somewhat likely, by income group



\* Subsample: those who are employed.

Q.34

How likely is it that each of the following would offer you financial support if you found yourself in hard times?

# Making Change

## Highlights

- *There is no consensus on the question of how much change is needed in the way government works: one in two say that the government needs to do a better job of how it currently operates; but a sizeable minority goes further, saying that the government needs to fundamentally change the way it operates.*
- *In a case where the government is about to make a decision that many citizens disagree with, just over one in two Canadians think it's likely that these citizens, working together, could get that decision changed. About one in three disagree.*
- *Younger Canadians are much more optimistic about the power of citizens, while it is those in the middle-aged group, rather than older Canadians, who are most pessimistic.*
- *Three in ten Canadians believe that voting for a different party during the next election is the best way for citizens like them to make sure an unpopular government decision is changed. The next most frequently preferred types of activity are: calling or writing your elected representative; joining a community group working to change the decision; and adding your name to petition (including an online petition).*
- *Aside from voting, the most common political activity for Canadians is signing a petition (whether on paper or online), followed by contacting one's elected representative, and donating money to an organization or a campaign.*
- *Both younger and older Canadians are more politically engaged than their middle-aged counterparts.*
- *When it comes to reducing economic inequality, Canadians are most likely to think that progress depends on government action; in the case of ending racism, however, most think that progress is more likely to come through the actions of individual citizens. In the case of stopping climate change, opinions are evenly divided between the two options.*
- *Canadians are most likely to say they'd be willing to pay a little more than they do now to buy a product that they need, if that product was made in Canada, or if that product was made by a company that reinvests its profits in their community.*
- *Fewer say they'd be willing to pay a little more than they do now if that product was made by a company that is significantly reducing its carbon emissions; or if the product was sold by a small business owned either by a woman, by someone who from a racial minority or by an Indigenous person.*

## The need for change

Many citizens might believe that the way government works can be improved. What is less clear is whether most feel that only minor adjustments are needed, or that change needs to be much more substantial. In order to gauge this, the survey asked a general question about the magnitude of change that Canadians might feel is warranted, in terms of how the government serves the needs of the people who elect it to office.

On this question there is no consensus:

- One in two Canadians (49%) say that, in order to properly serve the people who elect them, the government needs to do a better job of how it currently operates;
- Somewhat fewer, but still a sizeable minority (39%), goes further, saying that the government needs to fundamentally change the way it operates.
- About one in ten (12%) do not make a choice between these two options.

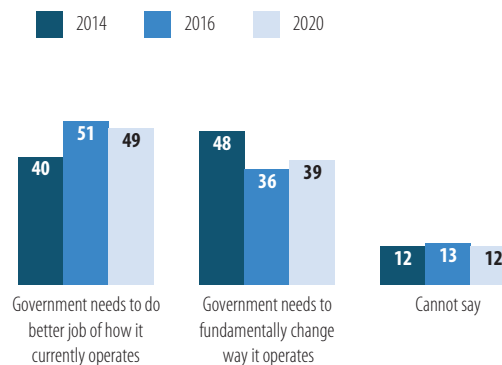
Opinions on this question have not changed significantly since the last time the question was asked in 2016. However, the results from the current survey and from 2016 differ from those in 2014, when the balance of opinion was reversed (in 2014, 48% favoured fundamental change versus 40% opting for doing a better job).

This lack of consensus characterizes all segments of the Canadian population, though there are some differences in the extent to which these two options are favoured. Residents of B.C. (35%) and Quebec (35%) are less likely to call for fundamental change, while those living in Alberta (50%) are more likely to do so. Immigrants (29%) are much less likely than those born in Canada (42%) to say that fundamental change is needed.

Those age 18 to 24, those with a university education, and those who describe their income as either good enough or just enough, are *more likely* than their older, less educated and less income-secure counterparts to say that government needs to do a better job of how it currently operates, rather than favouring fundamental change.

Not surprisingly, support for fundamental change in the way that the government operates is strongly linked to views about government in general. Those who lack confidence in governments, who feel that governments have a negative impact on most people's lives, who favour a smaller government, and who view taxes as mostly a negative thing are all more likely to think that change needs to be fundamental. Opinions on this question, however, are also linked to views about business and the economy. Those who have little or no confidence in business leaders, and those who think the way the economy works need to be fundamentally changed, are also more likely to favour fundamental change to the way government works.

## How much do governments need to change to serve the people who elect them? 2014 – 2020



Q.31  
In order to properly serve the people who elect them, do you think ... ?

## Citizens making change

Along with the question of what scale of political change is needed, it's important to consider whether citizens believe they have the power, either individually or collectively, to bring change about. The survey shows that a small majority feels that they do, when working together, with opinions being similar regardless of whether they're thinking about their local, provincial or federal government.

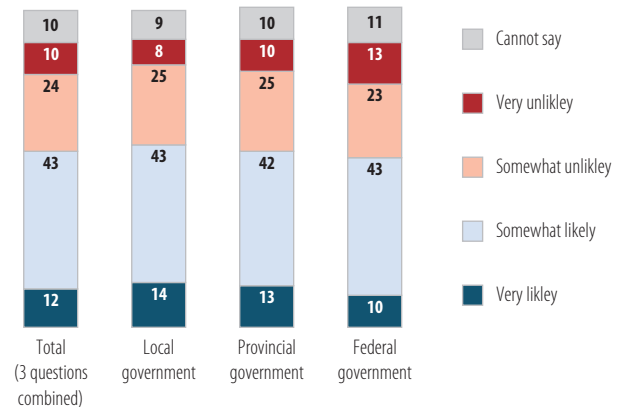
In a case where the government is about to make a decision that many citizens disagree with, just over one in two (55%) Canadians think it's likely that these citizens, working together, could get that decision changed. This includes 12 percent who say it's very likely, and 43 percent who say it's somewhat likely. About one in three (35%) say it's unlikely that citizens could change the decision, including one in four (24%) who say it's somewhat unlikely, and one in ten (10%) who say it's very unlikely. An additional 10 percent cannot say.

These results combine those from three different versions of the question, each asked to a third of survey participants, selected at random. One version specified that the decision was being made by their local government, the second referred to their provincial government, and the third referred to the federal government. It's possible that citizens might feel they have a better chance of reversing a decision of a government that is closest to them, such as their local government, but less chance of influencing decisions in Ottawa. However, this is not the case; while Canadians are slightly more likely to say that they could change the mind of their local government compared to the federal government, overall, the differences in responses to the three versions are very small. Specifically:

- 58 percent say it's likely that citizens, working together, could change the mind of their **local government**, compared to 33 who say it's unlikely;
- 55 percent say it's likely that citizens, working together, could change the mind of their **provincial government**, compared to 35 who say it's unlikely;
- 52 percent say it's likely that citizens, working together, could change the mind of the **federal government**, compared to 36 who say it's unlikely.

## Can citizens working together change a government's decision?

2020



Q.25

*If your local (ii) If your provincial (iii) If the federal government was about to make a decision that many citizens disagreed with, how likely is it that these citizens working together could get that decision changed:*

Because the responses to the three versions of the question are relatively small, the rest of the discussion in this section will consider responses to all three combined.

Opinions on whether citizens, working together, could change their government's mind vary in some ways across the population. The most significant difference is by age group. Younger Canadians are much more optimistic about the power of citizens, while those in the middle-aged group, rather than older Canadians, are most pessimistic. Thus, 69 percent of those age 18 to 24 think that citizens can get the government decision changed, compared to only 43 percent of those age 35 to 44 – but 58 percent of those age 55 and older also take the more optimistic view.

Immigrants are also more optimistic about the prospect of influencing government than are non-immigrants, but the main difference is between recent immigrants and all other groups. Four in five (81%) recent immigrants say that citizens working together could get the government decision changed, compared to 56 percent of established immigrants, 55 percent of second-generation Canadians and 53 percent of those who are third generation-plus. Racialized Canadians (61%) are also more likely than those who identify as white (53%) to think that citizens, working together, could change their government's mind – a difference that likely stems from the fact that those who are racialized are more likely to be recent immigrants.

Finally, there are only modest differences in views across the country's regions, with those in the Atlantic provinces being the most likely to think that citizens working together could change the government's mind (61%), and those in Alberta being the least likely (47%).

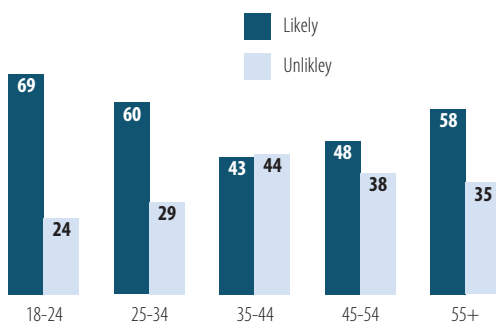
## Most effective political activities

There are variety of activities that citizens can engage in to persuade the government to reverse an unpopular decision, such as voting, joining or supporting a community group, demonstrating or even engaging in civil disobedience. The survey asked which of these is the best way for citizens like them to make sure the government's decision was changed (only one answer was permitted).

According to three in ten (30%) Canadians, voting for a different party during the next election is the best way for citizens like them to make sure an unpopular government

## Can citizens working together change a government's decision?

2020 By age group



Q.25 (i)

*If your local (ii) If your provincial (iii) If the federal] government was about to make a decision that many citizens disagreed with, how likely is it that these citizens working together could get that decision changed:*

decision is changed. The next most frequently selected types of activity are: calling or writing your elected representative (mentioned by 19%); joining a community group working to change the decision (13%); and adding your name to petition (including an online petition) (11%).

Eight percent think that the best way to change the decision is to participate in a peaceful demonstration. Far fewer think that the best way is to donate money to an organization or a campaign that is championing their position (2%), or to engage in civil disobedience (2%). Three percent name another type of activity, and 11 percent say that none of the activities mentioned is the best way to get the government to change its mind.

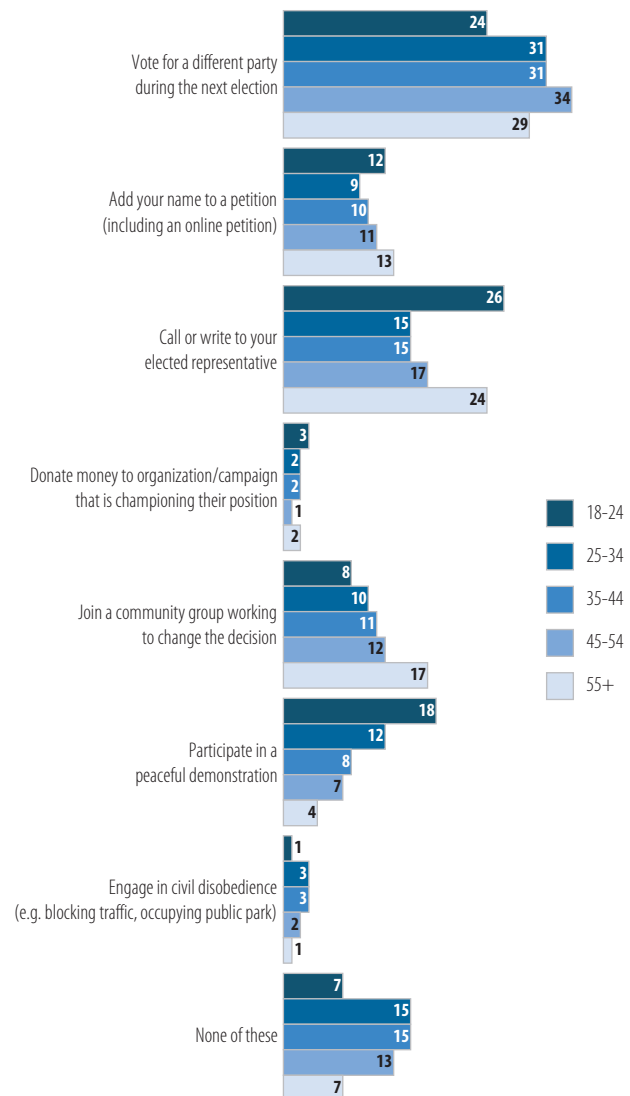
It is notable that a greater sense of efficacy is associated with a greater emphasis on forms of political participation other than voting. The question about the most effective activity was asked both to those who think it's likely that citizens, working together, can change a government decision they disagree with, and to those who think it's unlikely – and these two groups have very different views on what types of political activities might be most effective.

- Those who think that it's *likely* that citizens can change the government's mind are less likely to say that voting is the best way to do this (24%), compared to those who think that it's *unlikely* that citizens can change the government's mind (42% of whom say that voting is nonetheless the best way to do this).
- Conversely, a total of 55 percent of those who think that it's *likely* that citizens can change the government's mind say that the best way to do this is either by contacting their representative, joining a community group, or adding their name to a petition – compared to 30 percent of those who think that it's *unlikely* that citizens can change the government's mind.
- Not surprisingly, those who think it's unlikely that citizens, working together, can change an unpopular government decision are more likely to say that none of the actions mentioned is the best way to do this (14%, compared to 5% who think that it's likely that citizens can change the government's mind.)

There are also some differences in opinion regarding the most effective form of political action among different population groups. Men (37%) are significantly more likely than women (24%) to favour voting as the best way of bringing about change; women are slightly more likely to favour adding their name to a petition and joining a community group, and also more likely to say that none of the activities mentioned is best. Those between the ages of

## Which is the best way for citizens to make sure an unpopular government decision gets changed?

2020 By age group



Q.26

Which of the following do you think would be the best way for citizens like you to make sure the decision was changed?

18 and 24 are less likely to favour voting, and more likely to favour contacting their representative and participating in a peaceful protest. Preference for joining a community group as a means of changing the government's mind increases with age, with those age 55 and over (17%) being twice as likely as those age 18 to 24 (8%) to favour this form of political participation.



## Forms of recent political participation

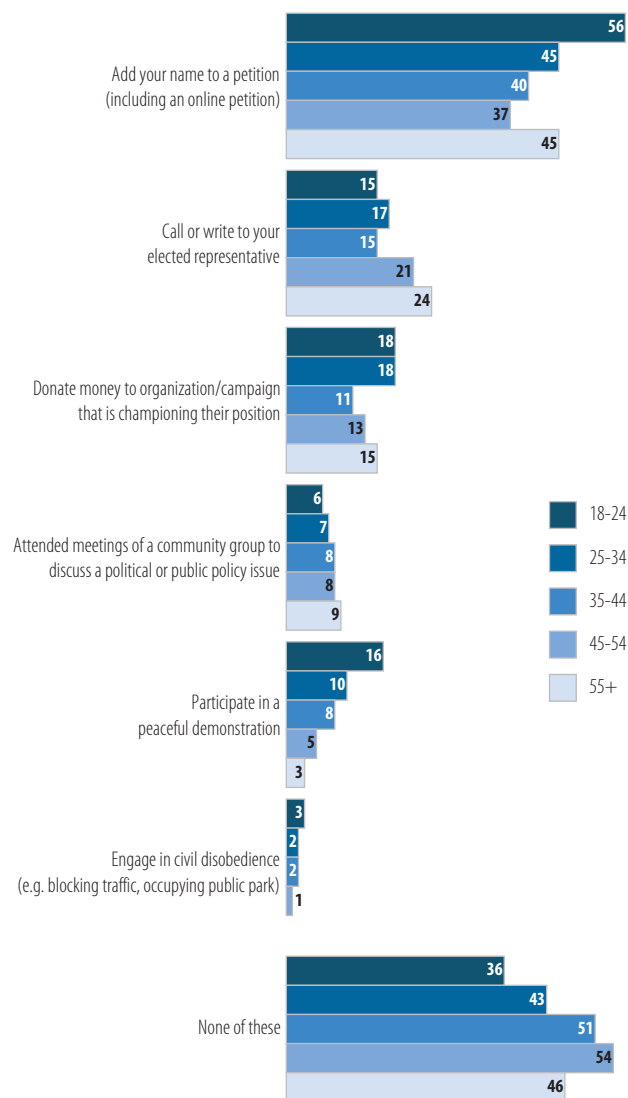
Regardless of which political activities Canadians think might be most effective, the survey asked which activities they had personally participated in over the past 12 months (other than voting). The most common activity is signing a petition (whether on paper or online): 44 percent of Canadians say they have done this in the past 12 months. One in five (20%) say they have contacted their elected representative, and 15 percent have donated money to an organization or a campaign. Fewer than one in ten have attended meetings of a group to discuss a political issue (8%) or participated in a peaceful demonstration (7%). Engaging in civil disobedience is very rare, with only one percent of Canadians saying they've done this in the past 12 months. Most notably, however, almost one in two Canadians (47%) say they haven't done any of these activities in the past year.

About one in two of those who are active in at least one of these ways has done only one of these activities over the past 12 months, while two in five have done two or three of them. Among those who have done at least one activity in the past 12 months, only eight percent have done four or more of the six activities mentioned.

Younger Canadians are more likely than their older counterpart to have added their name to a petition or participated in a peaceful demonstration; whereas the reverse is true in the case of contacting a representative. But the most notable difference among age groups is that middle-aged Canadians (those between the ages of 35 and 54) are less likely to have done any of the activities mentioned. Both younger and older Canadians are therefore more engaged politically in actions other than voting.

## Which activities have you participated in over the past 12 months?

2020 By age group



Q.27

Which of the following activities have you personally participated in over the past 12 months?

## How progress is made

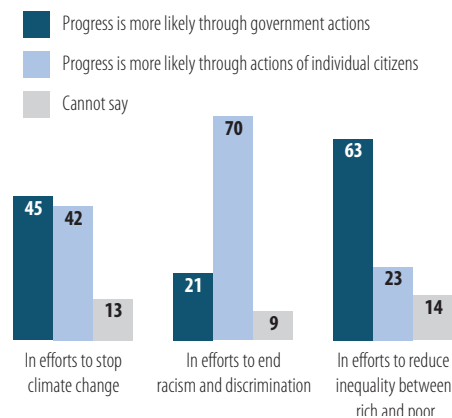
Engaging in political activity to influence government decisions is not the only way to bring about change. As often as not, political action is designed to influence the attitudes and behaviours of fellow citizens as well. Those working for change can seek to raise public awareness and highlight positive steps that individuals can take that do not depend on government, as well as (or instead of) lobbying for changes in policy or law.

The survey asked whether, in three different areas, Canadians think that progress is more likely to be made through government action or through the actions of individual citizens. The answers vary significantly across the three areas, indicating that Canadians do think that progress on some issues is more dependent on government, while in other cases it relies more on what citizens do.

- Canadians are most likely to think that progress depends on government action in the case of **efforts to reduce inequality** between the rich and the poor; 63 percent say that progress is more likely to be made through government action, compared to 23 percent who say it's more likely to be made through the actions of individual citizens (14% cannot say).
- Conversely, Canadians are most likely to think that progress depends on individual citizens in the case of **efforts to end racism and discrimination**; 70 percent say that progress is more likely to be made through the actions of individual citizens, compared to 21 percent say that it's more likely to be made through government action (9% cannot say).
- In a third area, opinions are evenly divided; in the case of **efforts to stop climate change**, 45 percent say that progress is more likely to be made through government action, compared to 42 percent who say it's more likely to be made through the actions of individual citizens (13% cannot say).

There are some modest variations in perspective among Canadians from different backgrounds. In all three areas, younger Canadians are more likely than their older counterparts to say that progress is more likely to be made through government action. While majorities of both racialized and white Canadians agree that progress to end racism is more likely to be made through the actions

## Progress made through government or citizen action? 2020



Q.30

For each of the following, do you think that progress is more likely to be made through government action, or through the actions of individual citizens?

of individual citizens, a larger minority of those who are racialized (28%, compared to 19% of those who are white) say that progress depends on government actions; the same is true of immigrants (28%), compared to those born in Canada (19%).

Finally, in the case of climate change, there is a difference among regions of the country; those in Saskatchewan and Alberta (taken together) are more likely to say that progress will be made through the actions of individual citizens (48%), and less likely to say that it will come from government action (35%). In the rest of the country, the opposite is the case, with a higher proportion saying progress will come from government action (47%) and fewer saying it will be made through the actions of individuals (41%). This reflects broader regional differences of opinion on the issue, with residents of Alberta and Saskatchewan being less welcoming of government intervention in the energy sector to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

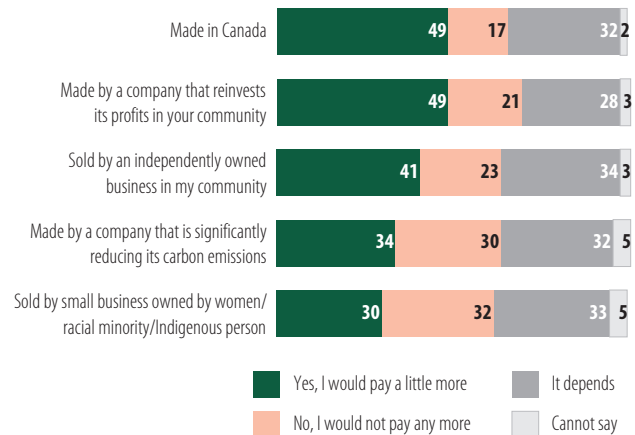
## Consumer activism

One way for individuals to promote social change is through exercising their power as consumers, to favour certain types of products or industries over others. Consumers can vote with their dollars by avoiding (or even boycotting) certain products or services, and opting for others, even in cases where they are more expensive.

In order to learn more about what might motivate Canadians to use their buying power to promote certain goals or values, the survey asked whether they'd be willing to pay more for a product they needed in five different circumstances. In each of the circumstances, only a minority said they would *not* pay more, though in all cases a significant minority was unsure.

- Canadians are most likely to say they'd be willing to pay a little more than they do now to buy a product that they need, if that product was **made in Canada** (49%), and if that product was made by a company that **reinvests its profits** in their community (49%). Only 17 percent and 21 percent, respectively, say they would not pay any more in these cases. While the "place" referred to in each of these scenarios is quite different, the two scenarios are also similar in that they both refer to companies that contribute to where people live (whether that is seen in national or local terms).
- Two in five (41%) Canadians also say they'd pay a little more to buy a product that is sold by an **independently owned** business in their community, while 23 percent say they would not. While a significant proportion of Canadians are prepared to support local businesses, the previous scenario that mentions the local reinvestment of profits is slightly more attractive than this scenario, which simply mentions local ownership.
- One in three (34%) Canadians say they'd be willing to pay a little more than they do now to buy a product that they need, if that product was made by a company that is significantly **reducing its carbon emissions**, but a similar proportion (30%) say they would not.
- Slightly fewer (30%) say they'd pay more for a product sold by a small business owned either **by a woman, by someone who from a racial minority or by an Indigenous person**, while just as many (32%) would not. In this case, separate groups of Canadians were asked

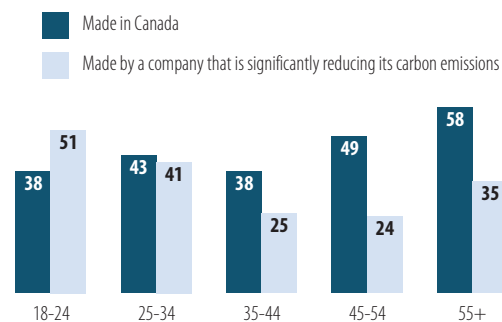
### Willing to pay more for a product, if that product was... 2020



Q.23

Would you pay a little more than you do now to buy a product that you need, if that product was...?

### Willing to pay more for a product, if that product was... 2020 By age group



Q.23

Would you pay a little more than you do now to buy a product that you need, if that product was...?

about one of the three types of business owner, and the answers were compared to see if any of the types attracted more or less support. In the end, the answers were virtually identical, with the same proportions saying they would pay more for a product sold by a small business owned by a woman (30%), by someone from a racial minority (29%) or by an Indigenous person (30%).

There are some differences in opinion among different population groups, but these do not tend to be consistent across all the scenarios (some groups may be prepared to pay more than others in some cases, but not all).

In some cases, Atlantic Canadians are the most likely to say that they'd pay more, and Quebecers are the least likely to do so. This includes paying more for a product made in Canada (55% of Atlantic Canadians would do this, compared to 43% of Quebecers), but more notably in the case of an independently owned business in their community (with the figures being 54% and 30%, respectively). But Atlantic Canadians and Quebecers are equally likely to be open to paying more for a product made by a company that is significantly reducing its carbon emissions.

Older Canadians are more willing than their younger counterparts to pay a premium for a product that is made

in Canada or made by a company that reinvests its profits in their community. But the reverse is true in the case of a product made by a company that is significantly reducing its carbon emissions: in this case, younger Canadians are more willing to pay a premium.

In the case of a product sold by a small business owned by a woman, women (34%) are more likely than men (26%) to say they would pay more; 39 percent of men say they would *not* pay more, compared to 27 percent of women. Canadians who are racialized (28%) and those who are white (29%) are equally likely to say they would pay more for a product sold by a small business owned by someone from a racial minority; however, those who identify as white are more likely to say they would *not* pay more in this case (32%), compared to those who are racialized (23%) (those who are racialized are more likely to say it depends).

# Outlook on the future

## Highlights

- Majorities of Canadians are optimistic about making real progress to address some forms of inequality, but not others. Majorities expect progress in addressing inequality between men and women, and in addressing racism and discrimination. But fewer say it's likely that the country will make real progress in addressing the standard of living of Indigenous Peoples and economic inequality.
  - Canadians are fairly evenly divided on the likelihood of making progress to address climate change over the next decade.
  - The level of optimism varies noticeably by age group. On most issues, both younger and older Canadians are more likely to say the country will make real progress over the next decade, while middle-aged Canadians are less likely to hold this view.
  - Canadians are much more optimistic than pessimistic about the role of new technologies in addressing disease, as well as climate change. In the case of the impact of technology on unemployment, however, opinions are more divided and lean toward pessimism.
- Canadians are the most optimistic about making progress in addressing **pandemics like COVID-19**; two in three (66%) say it's likely we'll make real progress over the next decade, compared to one in four (25%) who say it's unlikely. One in ten (10%) do not offer an opinion either way.
  - A majority of Canadian are optimistic about making real progress to address some forms of inequality, but not others. Three in five (61%) expect progress in addressing **inequality between men and women** (compared to 31% who think real progress is unlikely); and 55 percent think the country will do so in the case of addressing **racism and discrimination** (compared to 37% who think real progress is unlikely). But fewer say it's likely that the country will make real progress in addressing the **standard of living of Indigenous Peoples** over the next decade (44%, compared to an equal 44% who think progress is unlikely) and in addressing **economic inequality** (33%, compared to 59% who think progress is unlikely).
  - Canadians are fairly evenly divided on the prospects of addressing **climate change** over the next decade, with one in two (51%) saying real progress is likely, but almost as many (42%) saying it's unlikely.
  - Finally, Canadians are much less optimistic about addressing the **size of the federal deficit**, which jumped to record levels prior to the survey as the government increased spending to support Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only one in four (26%) say it's likely we'll make real progress on the deficit over the next decade, compared to 62 percent who say it's unlikely.

Canada is a country that holds considerable promise, but faces steep challenges. Over the past several decades, progress has been made in many areas, such as boosting educational attainment, reducing the proportion of seniors living in poverty, and improving life expectancy. But in other areas, such as the standard of living for many Indigenous Peoples, gains have been slower to come; while, in the case of the environment and climate change, it often seems like things are only getting worse. Looking to the future, Canadians arguably have grounds for both optimism and pessimism.

## Progress in addressing key issues

Canadians' outlook on the future was addressed in the survey by asking whether, over the next decade, they expect the country to make real progress in addressing a range of key issues.

In each of these cases, however, the degree of optimism expressed is not very strong; those who are optimistic are much more likely to say that change is *somewhat* likely rather than *very* likely.

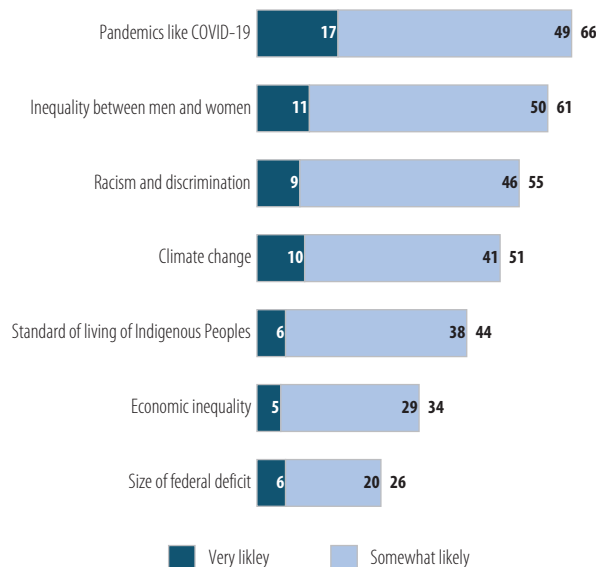
The level of optimism varies noticeably by age group. In most cases, both younger and older Canadians are more likely to say the country will make real progress over the next decade, while middle-aged Canadians are less likely to hold this view. In the case of climate change, for instance, 65 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 24, and 56 percent of those age 55 and over, say it's likely the country will make real progress, compared to 43 percent of those between the ages of 35 and 54. The one exception to this pattern is the federal deficit, where only about one in four across all age groups think it's likely that progress will be made in the next decade (although older Canadians are more likely to be sure that progress is *unlikely* – whereas younger Canadians are less likely to offer an opinion either way).

Differences between the opinions of men and women are relatively modest, but whereas women are slightly *more* optimistic than men about the likelihood of making progress in most areas, the pattern is reversed when it comes to gender inequality itself; in that case, women (58%) are slightly *less* likely than men (63%) to expect progress to be made over the next decade.

In the case of economic inequality, opinions do not vary significantly across income groups: Canadians from both lower and higher income households are more pessimistic than optimistic in this area. Immigrants, however, are more likely than those born in Canada to expect progress to be made in addressing economic inequality, but this is mainly due to the fact that a very large proportion of recent

## Will Canada make real progress in addressing the following issues over the next decade?

2020



Q.38

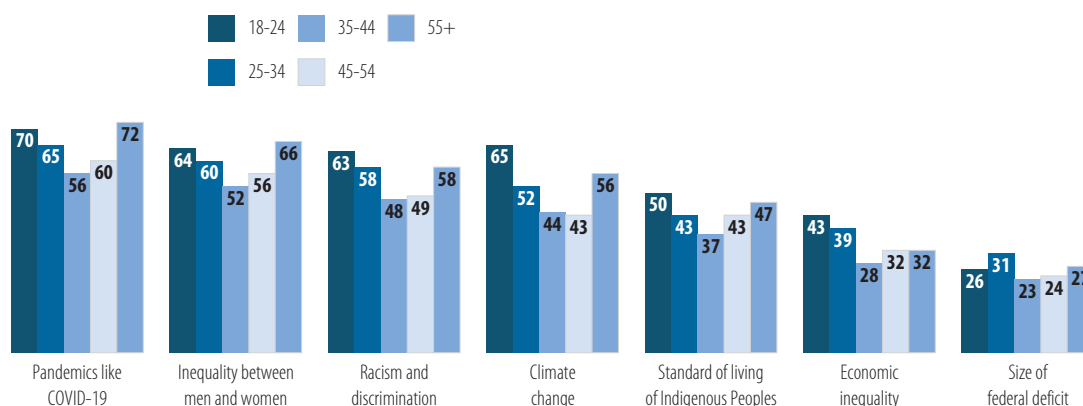
Thinking about Canada over the next decade, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that we will make real progress in addressing each of the following issues?

immigrants (61%) feel this way. The level of optimism among recent immigrants is almost twice as high as it is among other Canadians (32%).

In the case of racism and discrimination, those who identify as white (56%) are only slightly more optimistic than those who are racialized (52%) that real progress will be made.

## Will Canada make real progress in addressing the following issues over the next decade?

2020 By age group



Q.38

Thinking about Canada over the next decade, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that we will make real progress in addressing each of the following issues?

## The impact of new technologies

One reason to be hopeful that progress can be made in addressing certain intractable problems is the rapid advances in technology that characterize the digital age. But while new technologies can have a transformative impact on society, this impact is not always unequivocally positive. New digital technologies and artificial intelligence, for instance, may create new employment opportunities for high-skilled workers, while at the same time eliminating jobs for others.

In some cases, Canadians are much more likely to see the promise of new technologies, rather than the perils. In the case of **disease**, for instance, two in three Canadians (65%) think that new technologies will one day provide solutions, compared to only nine percent who think new technologies will make the problem of disease worse (26% adopt a neutral position or do not offer an opinion). Canadians are also much more optimistic than pessimistic about the role of new technologies is addressing **climate change**; 55 percent think that new technologies will one day provide solutions to climate change, compared to only 10 percent who think new technologies will make the problem worse (34% adopt a neutral position or do not offer an opinion).

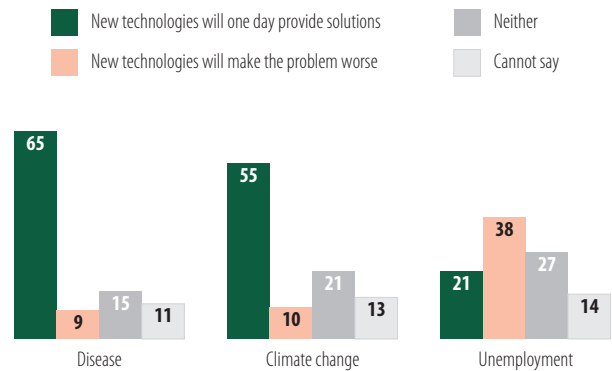
In the case of **unemployment**, however, opinions are more divided and lean toward pessimism. Only one in five (21%) think that new technologies will one day provide solutions to unemployment, while nearly twice as many (38%) think that new technologies will make the problem of unemployment worse. In this case, a plurality (41%) adopts a neutral position or does not offer an opinion.

As was the case with the previous question on the likelihood of making progress on different issues, opinions on the impact of technology vary by age group. In the cases of disease and climate change, the pattern again is one of more optimism among both younger and older Canadians, and less optimism among middle-aged groups. In the case of unemployment, only a minority in each age group thinks that new technology will make the problem better, but this proportion is somewhat higher among those age 18 to 24 (31%) than those age 55 and older (20%).

Apart from these differences among age groups, there is little variation across different population groups in their outlook on the impact of technology in these areas – with the exception that men (61%) are somewhat more optimistic

## Will new technologies provide solutions or make problems worse?

2020

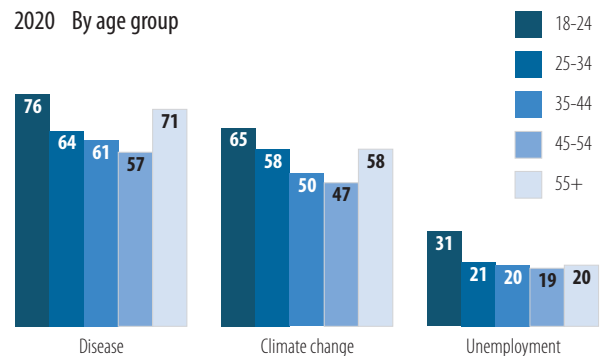


Q.39

Do you think new technologies will one day provide solutions to the following problems or will new technologies make these problems worse?

## Will new technologies provide solutions or make problems worse?

2020 By age group



Q.39

Do you think new technologies will one day provide solutions to the following problems or will new technologies make these problems worse?

than women (50%) about the potential for new technology to help solve the problem of climate change.

It is notable that there are no significant differences between the views of those who are employed and unemployed, or among those with different levels of education or income, about the potential impact of new technology on the problem of unemployment.



# 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.

**Canadians on Citizenship** was a study conducted by the Environics Institute, in partnership with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, Maytree Foundation, CBC News and RBC. It consists of a survey based on telephone interviews conducted between November 18 and December 17, 2011 with a representative sample of 2,376 Canadian residents (aged 18 and over) living in the 10 provinces.

**Canadian Public Opinion About Governance** comprises two national public opinion surveys on Canadian democratic governance and reform, conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the Institute on Governance. The 2016 survey was based on an online survey conducted February 1 to 10, 2016 with a representative sample of 2,000 Canadians aged 18 and over. The 2014 survey was based on an online survey conducted July 31 to August 9, 2014 with a representative sample of 2,000 Canadians aged 18 and over.





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