



# 2020 Survey of Canadians

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES on the  
ECONOMY and CLIMATE CHANGE

**Final Report**

JULY 2020

**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

**CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION**

  
CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE  
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

**IRPP**  
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH  
ON PUBLIC POLICY



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER  
UNIVERSITY  
BRIAN MULRONEY  
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

This study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the following organizations:

### **THE CANADA WEST FOUNDATION**

The Canada West Foundation focuses on the policies that shape the West, and by extension, Canada. Through independent, evidence-based research and commentary, the Canada West Foundation provides practical solutions to tough public policy challenges facing the West at home and on the global stage. <http://cwf.ca>

### **LE CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE – CONSTITUTION ET FÉDÉRALISME (CAP-CF) À L'UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL (UQAM)**

CAP-CF's mission is to stimulate research on constitutional politics and federalism, and to advance in innovative ways the analysis and understanding of contemporary constitutional issues in Canada and other federations.

<https://capcf1.wixsite.com/accueil>

### **INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY**

Founded in 1972, the Institute for Research on Public Policy is an independent, national, bilingual, not-for-profit organization. The IRPP seeks to improve public policy in Canada by generating research, providing insight and informing debate on current and emerging policy issues facing Canadians and their governments. <http://irpp.org>

### **THE BRIAN MULRONEY INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT**

Established in 2018, the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at St. Francis Xavier University aims to find creative solutions to complex national and global public policy and governance questions. Its public outreach activities, combined with its four-year undergraduate program in Public Policy and Governance, are intended to inform and shape national and international discourse on political, economic, security, and social issues.

[www.bmig.ca](http://www.bmig.ca)

---

### **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.



# Contents

- Introduction ..... 1
  - Background ..... 1
  - About this report ..... 2
  - Technical note ..... 2
  - Acknowledgements ..... 2
- Executive Summary ..... 3
- Outlook on the country and the economy ..... 5
  - Satisfaction with direction of the country ..... 6
  - Most important problem ..... 7
  - Job security ..... 9
- Addressing climate change ..... 10
  - Protecting the environment or projecting jobs? ..... 11
  - Phasing out the use of fossil fuels ..... 12
  - Priorities in fighting climate change ..... 13
  - Managing energy and climate change policies ..... 15
- Federalism, regionalism and nationalism ..... 19
  - Respect and influence ..... 19
  - Federalism: advantages vs. disadvantages ..... 24
  - Leaving the federation ..... 26
  - Resolving our differences ..... 28
- Appendix: Source material ..... 29

# Introduction

## Background

Strains within the Canadian federation are nothing new. For over 150 years, questions have been raised about the fairness of the country's federal system of government, whether viewed in terms of the balancing of diverse provincial and territorial interests in national decision-making, the equitable sharing of the country's wealth and resources, or the respectful treatment of different cultures and peoples.

In the last few months of 2019 and the first few of 2020, however, a number of familiar fissures appeared to widen. The October 2019 federal election resulted in a government caucus and cabinet with no representatives from Saskatchewan and Alberta; an official opposition that was all but shut out in central Canada's two metropolises; and a resurgent Bloc Québécois as the third largest party in the House of Commons. This, combined with the lingering economic crisis affecting the oil and gas industry, and related frustrations about the slow progress in pipeline construction and a perceived disproportionate focus on climate change mitigation, fuelled suspicion among many Albertans in particular that the federal system was rigged against their province's interests.

By the start of 2020, discontent was growing among a number of First Nations as well. While the autumn election campaign had featured some discussion of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and while legislation implementing UNDRIP was adopted later in 2019 in the province of British Columbia, these steps proved unable to forestall the eruption in early 2020 of a conflict over plans to complete construction of a natural gas pipeline through the traditional territories of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. When the police attempted to dismantle a blockade erected in Wet'suwet'en territory, other First Nations and their supporters established their own blockades of railway lines in other parts of Canada, disrupting the movement of passengers and goods for

several weeks, and highlighting conflicting interpretations within Canada of what exactly was required to advance reconciliation between the country's Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

It was against this backdrop that the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 Survey of Canadians was conducted. The survey builds directly on the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 Survey, conducted roughly 12 months earlier, by exploring the attitudes of Canadians toward the practice of federalism and their federal community. The study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with four leading public policy organizations across the country: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, the Canada West Foundation, the Centre D'Analyse Politique – Constitution et Fédéralisme, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at Saint Francis Xavier University.

The study consists of a national public opinion survey of 5,152 Canadians (aged 18 and over) conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories) between January 13 and February 20, 2020. Most responses were collected in the last week of January, prior to the escalation of the conflict over pipeline construction through Wet'suwet'en territory into a national crisis and, even more importantly, prior to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic to Canada.

The survey sample was stratified to provide for meaningful representation in all 13 provinces and territories, as well as the country's Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit). Results are weighted by several factors including age, gender, region, home language, immigration status and Indigenous identity, to provide results that are representative of the Canadian population as a whole. Many of the questions included on the survey were asked in 2019, as well as in previous national surveys stretching back to the 1980s. This provides the basis for identifying how public opinion has changed (or not) over time.

## About this report

This report is the first in a series that presents the results of this research. It focuses on the evolution of attitudes related to federalism, regionalism and nationalism, and more specifically on the related issues of energy and climate change policies in Canada. It also reviews levels of satisfaction with the economy and the country's overall direction. All the reports in this series will be available on the website of the Environics Institute at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org). Detailed data tables are also available on the website, presenting the results of each survey question. All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

## Technical note: data for the three territories

In order to better present the survey results for each individual territory and for the North as a region, the survey sample for the three territories was weighted separately on the basis of gender, age, territory, education and Indigenous identity. When the results for the territories are combined with those for the provinces, the national survey weighting is used; however, results for individual territories or the North, when shown separately, are generated using the territorial weighting. This same territorial weighting was applied to data from the 2019 survey. Readers should note that, for this reason, territorial results for 2019 in this report may differ slightly from those found in the 2019 survey reports. This version should be treated as more authoritative.

## Acknowledgements

This research was made possible with the support of a number of organizations and individuals. The Environics Institute would like to thank all of its partners on the project, and in particular Keith Neuman and Charles Breton for their assistance with question wording and methodology. The study partners would like to acknowledge the contributions of Darcy Zwetko and Rick Lyster at Elemental Data Collection Inc., Saif Alnuweiri for research assistance, and Steve Otto and Cathy McKim for their excellent work in the final report production. Finally, much appreciation is expressed to the 5,152 Canadians who took the time to share their perspectives on the Confederation of Tomorrow.

# Executive Summary

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey was conducted several months following the October 2019 federal election. That election appeared to leave the country divided along regional lines, with a government with no representatives from Saskatchewan and Alberta; an official opposition all but shut out in central Canada's two metropolises; and a resurgent Bloc Québécois. By the start of 2020, discontent was growing among many Indigenous communities as well – the most notable example being the conflict over plans to complete construction of a natural gas pipeline to the Pacific coast through the traditional territories of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.

While the 2020 survey confirms that there are many differences in opinion among Canadians in different parts of the country, it also shows that these are sometimes not as widespread as might be expected, and that they are not necessarily widening.

## Outlook on the country and the economy

Perceptions of the country's top problem vary considerably from region to region, with some regions focused more on the environment and climate change, some focused more on the economy or unemployment, and others more concerned about the cost of living or healthcare. Those living in Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan are both more likely to see the economy as the country's most pressing problem, and more likely to be concerned about job security. Satisfaction with the way things are going in the country today is also much lower than average in Saskatchewan and Alberta – in fact, these are the only two jurisdictions in the country where majorities of residents are dissatisfied. The level of dissatisfaction in Alberta is now twice as high as that in Quebec.

## Addressing climate change

In the wake of the 2019 federal election, Canadians appeared deeply divided over the question of whether an adequate response to climate change can be reconciled with the goal of protecting jobs in the country's oil and gas sector. On this issue, however, the *regional* differences of opinion may not be as widespread as expected.

On the question of whether protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs, for instance, regional differences are not especially large. Across the provinces, agreement is either just below or just above 50 percent, rather than heavily weighted to one side or the other (opinions are more weighted toward agreement in the North). Canadians are also less *regionally* divided than might be expected on the question of how quickly the country should move to phase out the use of fossil fuels like oil and gas in order to replace them with more renewable sources of energy. In every jurisdiction, a plurality favours a gradual phase-out of fossil fuels so as to avoid a sudden loss of jobs in the oil and gas industry. Canadians are divided – as there is no consensus or even a majority favouring any of the three options presented in the survey – but this division exists *within each province*. It is not a schism that pits one province or region against another.

When it comes to developing a strategy to fight climate change, Canadians across all regions also have similar priorities – with some exceptions. The item most likely to be seen as a high priority for Canada's climate change strategy is *ensuring that all regions of Canada benefit from a strong economy*. In each of the 13 provinces and territories, more people list this item as a high priority than any other – meaning that, not only do Canadians in all provinces agree on which item is the top priority, but that item is itself the one that underlines the importance of regional fairness.

In Alberta, however, the second most often mentioned high priority is *preventing job losses in the oil and gas industry* – this is also the third most often mentioned high priority in Saskatchewan. Albertans are much more likely than Canadians outside of that province to mention this as a high priority.

Finally, when it comes to addressing climate change, the proportion of Canadians that trust the federal government more to make the right decisions remains greater than the proportion that trust their provincial or territorial government more – with little overall change in responses since 2019. While there is little change at the national level, there was some change in Alberta. Between 2019 and 2020 – a period

that saw the election of a new provincial government with a more confrontational approach toward Ottawa on the climate change issue – the proportion of Albertans trusting the federal government more to address climate change increased.

## **Federalism, regionalism and nationalism**

The 2020 survey asked Canadians about whether they felt their province or territory is treated with the respect it deserves in Canada, and whether it has its fair share of influence on important national decisions. While, overall, there was little change between 2019 and 2020, changes have emerged in some jurisdictions: feelings of lack of respect or influence grew in New Brunswick, attenuated slightly in Alberta (while remaining pronounced by historical standards), continued to decline in B.C., and fluctuated somewhat across the three Northern territories.

The survey also shows that the proportion of Canadians agreeing that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their jurisdiction has fallen to the lowest level since the question was first asked more than two decades ago. This does not mean, however, that the level of disagreement has increased – rather, the proportion saying they don't know or cannot say has risen. It seems that, over time, Canadians have become less convinced or certain

about the advantages of federalism, without necessarily becoming more adamant about its disadvantages.

In Quebec, there has again been no significant change in identification with either federalism or sovereignty since last year. About one in five Quebecers see themselves as mainly federalist, while the same proportion sees themselves as mainly sovereigntist. Among francophone Quebecers age 45 or under, only 15 percent see themselves as mainly federalist.

In the West, the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey reported that a record number agreed with the proposition that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own.” The 2020 survey finds that, rather than continuing to grow, support for the West going it on its own actually decreased over the year. The drop was slightly larger in Alberta and Saskatchewan. However, the level of agreement with the idea of the region “going it alone” remains relatively high by historical standards.

Finally, the 2020 survey finds that the economic and political events of 2019 – including the continuing economic downturn in the oil and gas industry, an intensified debate about how to address climate change, the spring Alberta provincial election and the October federal election – ultimately did not erode the confidence that Canadians have in their ability to overcome their differences.

# Outlook on the country and the economy

## Highlights

- *The level of dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the country is now twice as high in Alberta as in Quebec.*
- *Perceptions of the top problem facing the country vary from region to region, with some regions focused more on the environment and climate change, some focused more on the economy or unemployment, and others more concerned about the cost of living or healthcare.*
- *Higher concern about the economy in Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan is reflected in higher concern about job security in those provinces.*

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey was conducted several months following the federal election that took

place the previous autumn. That election featured heated debates both on policy issues such as climate change and government support for families, and on qualities of political leadership. The election ended with no party attracting the support of more than one in three voters, and a parliament with no party holding an overall majority of seats. The incumbent government continued in power, but with a smaller share of the popular vote. And the electoral map revealed that each of the main federal parties attracted concentrated regional, rather than broad national, support. In the wake of these developments, the 2020 survey included a number of questions on Canadians' overall outlook on the country's current direction.



## Satisfaction with direction of the country

Canadians remain divided as to whether the country is headed in the right direction: about one in two (49%) are satisfied with the way things are going in the country today, but almost as many (41%) as dissatisfied. Satisfaction is up very slightly (by 2 points) compared to 2019, while dissatisfaction has dropped by four points.

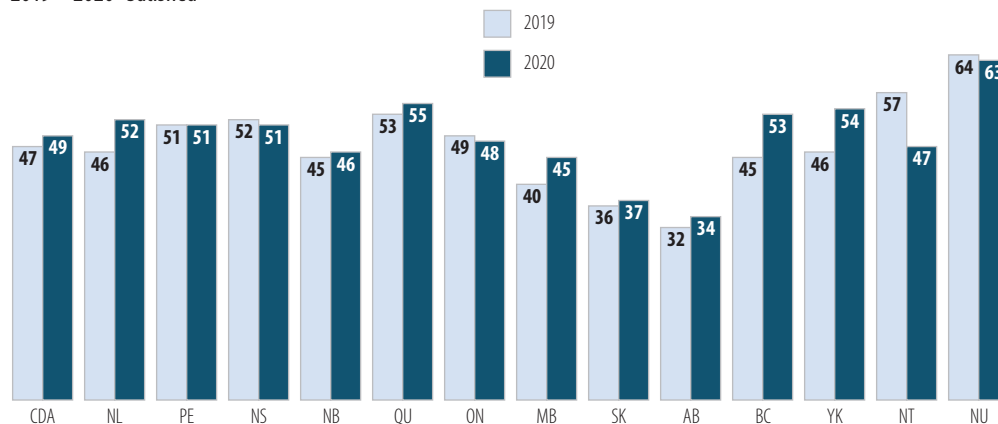
Regionally, satisfaction is higher in the territories (55%), especially in Nunavut (63%) and Yukon (54%), and also in Quebec (55%) and British Columbia (53%). Levels of satisfaction are slightly above the national average in Newfoundland and Labrador, PEI and Nova Scotia, and

slightly below in Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba. Satisfaction is much lower than average in Saskatchewan (37%) and Alberta (34%). These are the only two jurisdictions in the country where majorities of residents are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country today.

The level of dissatisfaction in Alberta (59%) is now twice as high as that in Quebec (30%).

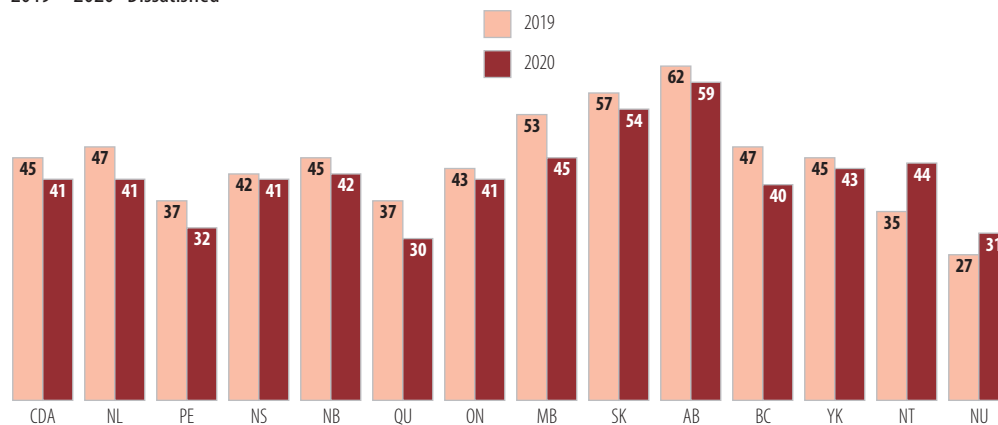
Compared to 2019, satisfaction improved the most in B.C. (up 8 points) and declined the most in the Northwest Territories (down 10 points).

Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?  
2019 – 2020 Satisfied



Q.1. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?  
2019 – 2020 Dissatisfied



Q.1. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

## Most important problem

The Confederation of Tomorrow survey asks Canadians to say what they think is the most important problem facing Canadians today. This is an open-ended question, and only one answer is permitted.

In 2019, Canadians most frequently cited the economy or unemployment<sup>1</sup> (16%) as the most important problem facing the country, followed by the quality of government leadership (9%), the environment or climate change (8%), the cost of living (8%), immigration (7%) and healthcare

(7%). This year’s survey shows that these concerns have shifted somewhat, with the environment or climate change (12%) and the economy or unemployment (12%) now equally likely to be seen as most important. Healthcare (9%) and the cost of living (8%) continue to be mentioned as the country’s most important problem by just under one in ten Canadians, while the proportion mentioning the quality of government leadership (7%) and immigration (5%) have each dropped slightly.

### Most important problem facing Canadians today

2020 Top mentions

	Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	BC	North
Environment/pollution	<b>12</b>	11	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	5	11	<b>18</b>
Economy/unemployment	<b>12</b>	12	7	11	<b>24</b>	8	8
Poverty/homelessness / affordable housing	9	7	3	12	5	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>
Healthcare	9	<b>17</b>	11	8	5	6	4
Cost of living/personal finances	8	8	5	8	6	12	7
Government representation	7	8	7	6	12	6	8
Immigration/refuges	5	2	6	5	4	3	3
Taxes/carbon tax	3	3	2	4	3	3	2

Q.2

*In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing Canadians today?*

<sup>1</sup> Responses for the economy and for unemployment can be reported separately – but in this report, they are combined, as they express closely related concerns. The category of environment and climate change includes pollution; the category of cost of living includes personal finances; the category of government representation includes mentions of the Prime Minister.

Perceptions of the country's top problem, however, vary considerably from region to region, with some regions focused more on the environment and climate change, some focused more on the economy or unemployment, and others more concerned about the cost of living or healthcare. This regional variation in concerns and priorities shapes the context in which the practice of federalism in Canada unfolds.

- In **Atlantic Canada**, healthcare is the most frequently cited top problem in 2020 (17%). Healthcare is especially likely to be singled out by Nova Scotians (in 2020, 27% say this is the country's most important problem). It is less likely to be mentioned in Newfoundland and Labrador (10%), where the economy or unemployment tops the list (19%).
- In 2019, **Quebecers** stood out as the only jurisdiction in which the environment and climate change (17%) was the most frequently mentioned top problem. The environment and climate change continues to top the list of concerns in Quebec (14%) in 2020, but the province is no longer on its own in this regard.
- Last year, **Ontarians** were more concerned with the economy or unemployment (18%) than with the environment and climate change (5%); but in 2020, the environment and climate change (13%) takes the top spot. The economy or unemployment remains the top concern for 11 percent of Ontarians, while 12 percent point to poverty, inequality and housing.<sup>2</sup>
- In **the Prairie provinces**, the economy or unemployment (24%) overshadows other concerns, although the quality of government leadership remains the top concern for just over one in ten (12%) in the region. These results were similar to those in 2019 (the figures for these two most frequently mentioned problems were 26% and 13%, respectively). Concern about the economy or

unemployment in 2020 is particularly high in Alberta (31%). Within the region, concern about government leadership is highest in Saskatchewan (13%), where it almost matches concern about the economy and unemployment (15%). In Manitoba, there is less agreement about the top problem, with healthcare (9%); government leadership (9%); poverty, inequality and housing (9%); the economy or unemployment (8%); and the cost of living (8%) all being mentioned by just under one in ten residents.

- In **British Columbia**, poverty, inequality and housing is most likely to be seen as the country's top problem (18%), driven by a concern about housing affordability in particular. This is followed by the related problem of the cost of living (12%), and the environment or climate change (11%). Poverty, inequality and housing was also the most often cited top problem in the province in 2019.
- In 2019, Canadians in **the North** were most likely to identify poverty, inequality and housing as the country's top problem. This remains a top concern (18%), but in 2020 it has been joined by the environment and climate change (18%). However, within the region, Nunavut is somewhat distinct. In Yukon and the Northwest Territories, the most likely mentioned top problem in 2020 is the environment and climate change (30% and 20%, respectively – the highest proportions in the country). In Nunavut, the most mentioned top problem is poverty, inequality and housing (27%).

The choice of which issue is the most important varies in ways other than by region. For instance, there are differences among age groups that reflect the life cycle, with older Canadians being more likely to mention healthcare, and those in their late 20s and early 30s being more likely to mention the cost of living or affordable housing. There are, however, no significant differences across age groups in the proportions mentioning the environment and climate change.

---

<sup>2</sup> This category includes mentions of both affordable housing and homelessness.

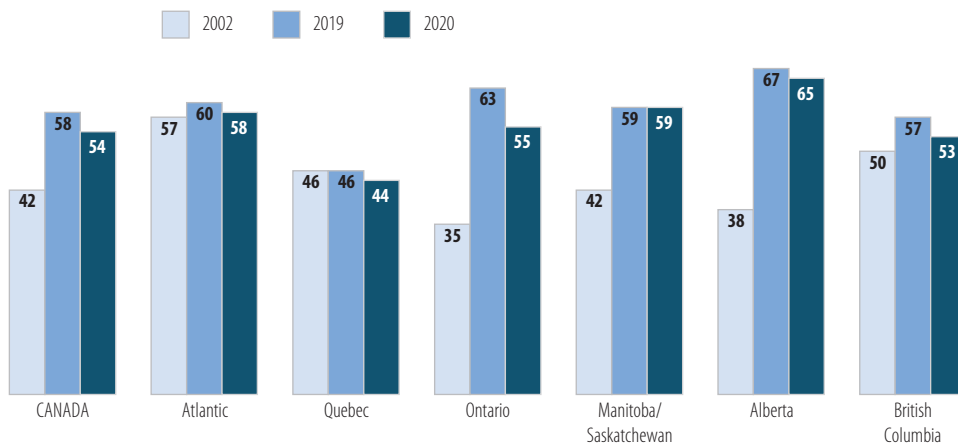
## Job security

Higher concern about the economy in Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan is reflected in higher concern about job security in those provinces.

- Over half (54%) of Canadians are very (24%) or somewhat (30%) concerned about themselves or a member of their immediate family finding or keeping a stable, full-time job – just slightly lower than the 58 percent who felt that way a year ago.

- Concern in 2020 is much higher than average in Alberta (65%), Newfoundland and Labrador (63%), Nunavut (62%) and Saskatchewan (60%), and much lower than average in Quebec (44%) and Yukon (35%).
- Since 2019, the level of concern about job security has risen significantly in Nunavut, fallen significantly in Yukon, fallen more modestly in Ontario and B.C., and remained more or less unchanged in the other jurisdictions.

Concern about job security  
2002 – 2020 Very or somewhat concerned



Q76.

*How concerned are you about yourself or a member of your immediate family finding or keeping a stable, full-time job?*

# Addressing climate change

## Highlights

- *A slight majority of Canadians agree that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs, while two in five disagree. But while Canadian society as a whole is somewhat divided on this question, regional differences are not especially large.*
- *Canadians are also less regionally divided than might be expected on the question of how quickly the country should move to phase out the use of fossil fuels like oil and gas in favour of more renewable sources of energy. Overall, about one in two Canadians favour a gradual phase-out, with the remainder split between an accelerated or delayed phase-out. Pluralities in every jurisdiction favour a gradual phase-out of fossil fuels.*
- *The item most likely to be seen as a high priority for Canada's climate change strategy is ensuring that all regions of Canada benefit from a strong economy. In each of the 13 provinces and territories, more people list this item as a high priority than any other.*
- *In Alberta, the second most often mentioned high priority for Canada's climate change strategy is preventing job losses in the oil and gas industry. Albertans are much more likely than Canadians outside of that province to mention this as a high priority.*
- *The proportion of Canadians that trust the federal government more to make the right decisions on climate change policy is greater than the proportion that trust their provincial or territorial government more. Since last year, the proportions of Albertans trusting the federal government more to address climate change and to manage energy resources have both increased.*

Countries around the world face the challenge of adopting measures to address the threat of climate change in a way that does not undermine the economy. In Canada, this challenge is especially acute because of the dependence of regional economies in the Prairies, on the Atlantic coast, and to some extent in the Arctic on the production of oil and gas. Recently, the country has appeared deeply divided, along both ideological and regional lines, over the question of whether an adequate response to the climate emergency can be reconciled with the goal of protecting jobs in the country's oil and gas sector. The suspicion in provinces such as Alberta and Saskatchewan that the federal government is reluctant to act to protect and promote their resource-based economies, in order to curry favour with central Canadian voters more concerned with climate change, is seen as a major factor fueling regional discontent.

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 Survey of Canadians addresses this issue by asking a number of questions relating to climate change and energy policy.

## Protecting the environment or projecting jobs?

To begin with, Canadians were asked whether they agree or disagree that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs.

A slight majority of Canadians (52%) agree that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs, while 38 percent disagree and 10 percent cannot say. While Canadian society as a whole is somewhat divided on this question, regional differences are not especially large.

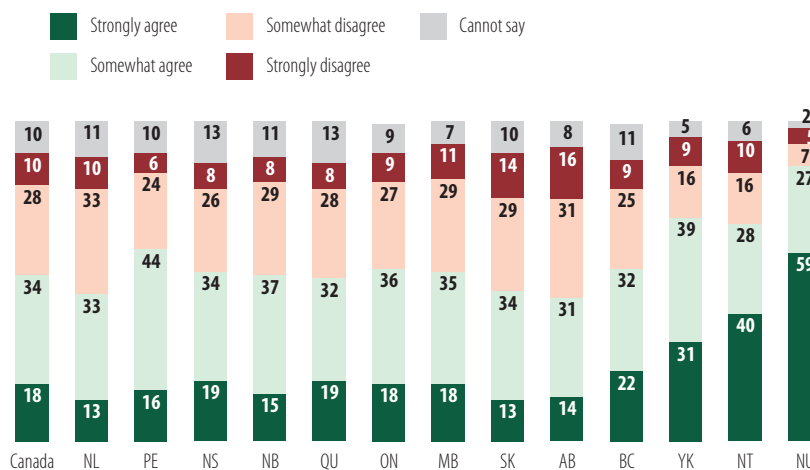
- Among the provinces, agreement is lowest in Alberta (45%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (46%), and highest in Prince Edward Island (60%); but this means that across the country, agreement is either just below or just above 50 percent, rather than heavily weighted to one side or the other. In fact, in the nine provinces outside of P.E.I., agreement ranges between 45 and 55 percent.
- In only one province – Alberta – does a plurality (47%) disagree with the notion that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs; but this result shows that Albertans, like Canadians in other parts of the country, are split on the issue.

- Agreement that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs is more widespread in the territories than in the provinces; agreement ranges from 68 percent in the Northwest Territories to 86 percent in Nunavut.

Overall agreement with this statement is slightly lower than when the question was previously asked in 2003. At that time, 60 percent of Canadians agreed that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs, compared with 52 percent in 2020 (disagreement rose from 34% to 38%). The level of disagreement increased most sharply in Alberta (rising from 28% in 2003 to 47% in 2020). It would appear, then, that it is not the case that the recent focus on the effects of climate change has led Canadians outside Alberta to prioritize the environment *more* (as it was already a concern in 2003), but rather that the recent economic downturn in Alberta has led Albertans (and some other Canadians) to prioritize the environment somewhat *less*.

Beyond regional differences, agreement that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs is also higher among Indigenous Peoples (62%) compared to non-Indigenous people (51%), and Canadians age 34 and under (60%) compared to those age 35 and older (49%).

### Is protecting the environment more important than protecting jobs? 2020



Q.5d.  
[Agree/Disagree]: Protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs

## Phasing out the use of fossil fuels

Canadians are also less *regionally* divided than might be expected on the question of how quickly the country should move to phase out the use of fossil fuels like oil and gas in order to replace them with more renewable sources of energy. Canadians are divided – as there is no consensus or even a majority favouring any of the three options presented in the survey – but this division exists *within each province*. It is not a schism that pits one province or region against another.

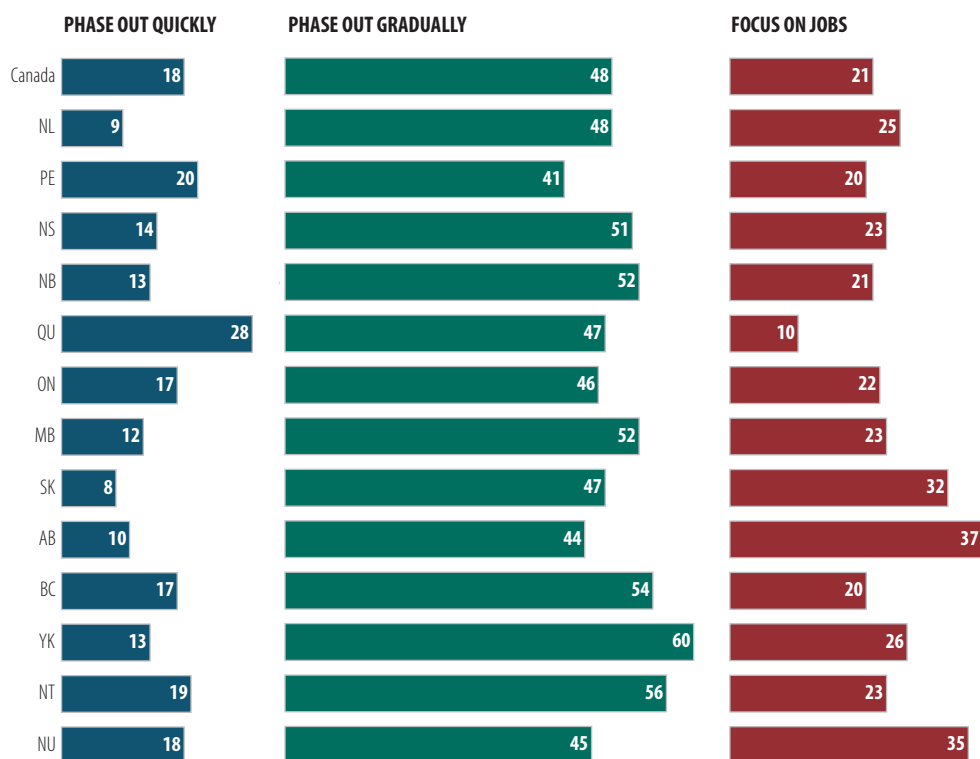
- Overall, about one in two Canadians (48%) favour a gradual phase-out, so that people who work in industries like oil and gas are not suddenly put out of work.
- The remainder are split between an accelerated or delayed phase-out. Twenty-one percent say that Canada should not worry so much about phasing out the use of fossil fuels and should focus on protecting the jobs of people who work in industries like oil and gas; whereas 18 percent say that Canada should phase out the use of fossil fuels as quickly as possible, even if that means putting people who work in industries like oil and gas out of work (13% cannot say).

What is more significant from the perspective of the federation, however, is that in every jurisdiction, a plurality favours a gradual phase-out of fossils fuels so as to avoid a sudden loss of jobs in the oil and gas industry. Among the provinces, agreement with this compromise option ranges from 41 percent in PEI to 54 percent in B.C. (in the North, agreement ranges from 45% in Nunavut to 60% in Yukon). In Alberta, 44 percent favour this option, which is only slightly lower than the national average.

Where there is greater variation is on the second preference. Twenty-eight percent of Quebecers favour a more rapid phase-out, even at the cost of jobs in the oil and gas sector, compared to only 10 percent in Alberta, nine percent in Newfoundland and Labrador, and eight percent in Saskatchewan. Conversely, 37 percent of Albertans, 35 percent of those in Nunavut and 32 percent of Saskatchewanians say we should focus on protecting the jobs of people who work in industries like oil and gas, compared with only 10 percent of Quebecers.

### Options to fight climate change: should we phase out the use of fossils fuels?

2020



Q.28.

Some people say that in order to fight climate change, countries like Canada should phase out the use of fossil fuels like oil and gas, and should replace them with more renewable sources of energy. Thinking about this, which of the following three options do you prefer?

## Priorities in fighting climate change

When it comes to developing a strategy to fight climate change, Canadians across the country's different regions also have similar priorities – with some exceptions.

When asked to indicate whether each of 10 items should be a high, medium or low priority for Canada's climate change strategy (or not a priority at all), the item most likely to be seen as a high priority is **ensuring that all regions of Canada benefit from a strong economy** (60% of Canadians say this should be a high priority). On this point, the similarity in responses across the country is striking: in each of the 13 jurisdictions, more people list this item as a high priority than any other. It is worth emphasizing the two related aspects of this finding: not only do Canadians in all provinces and territories agree on which item is the top priority, but that item is itself the one that underlines the importance of regional fairness.

The second and third items most likely to be seen by Canadians as a high priority in the context of a climate change strategy are also economic in nature: **keeping taxes low** (seen as high priority by 50% of Canadians) and **making sure our businesses stay competitive** with businesses in the United States (seen as a high priority by 46%). These two items are also the second and third most often cited high priority in six of the 10 provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba and B.C.).<sup>3</sup>

In Alberta, however, the second most often mentioned high priority is **preventing job losses in the oil and gas industry** (54%) – this is also the third most often mentioned high priority in Saskatchewan. Albertans are much more likely than Canadians outside of that province (30%) to mention this as a high priority.

There are three other items that, in the context of fighting climate change, are deemed a high priority by about two in five Canadians; these are: making sure that **the premiers of all the provinces and territories are in agreement** with Canada's climate change strategy (43%); **meeting the greenhouse gas reduction targets** that Canada agreed to in international agreements like the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (40%); and **setting a good example for other countries**

## Climate change strategy: priorities

2020

	High Priority	High/Medium Priority
Ensuring that all regions of Canada benefit from a strong economy	60	86
Keeping taxes low	50	81
Making sure our businesses stay competitive with businesses in the United States	46	78
Making sure that the premiers of all the provinces and territories are in agreement with Canada's climate change strategy	43	74
Setting a good example for other countries around the world	40	73
Meeting the greenhouse gas reduction targets that Canada agreed to in international agreements like the Paris Agreement on Climate Change	40	70
Preventing job losses in the oil and gas industry	33	70
Increasing Canadian exports of resources like natural gas to other countries so they can phase out their use of less clean energy sources like coal	32	68
Ending our reliance on fossil fuels like oil and gas as quickly as possible	28	62
Minimizing government interference in the free market economy	22	58

Q.33.

*In developing a strategy to fight climate change, do you think that each of the following should be a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority or not a priority at all for Canada?*

around the world (40%). Making sure that the premiers are all in agreement is somewhat more likely to be mentioned as a high priority in Nunavut (55%), Quebec (49%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (48%). Meeting greenhouse gas reduction targets and setting a good example are both more likely to be mentioned as a high priority in the territories (54% and 53%, respectively) and less likely to be mentioned in the Prairies (30% and 34%, respectively).

<sup>3</sup> Some may interpret the relative importance attached to keeping taxes low as a repudiation of the federal carbon tax; but this is not necessarily the case, as this policy was not explicitly mentioned in the survey question, and its proponents would argue that the carbon tax rebates provided to households mitigates its effect on incomes.



Finally, three items are cited as a high priority by fewer than one in three Canadians: **increasing Canadian exports of resources like natural gas** to other countries so they can phase out their use of less clean energy sources like coal (32%); **ending our reliance on fossil fuels** like oil and gas as quickly as possible (28%); and **minimizing government interference** in the free market economy (22%). Increasing natural gas exports to replace less clean energy sources is *more* likely than average to be mentioned as a high priority in Alberta (45%), but not in B.C. (31%), from where such exports might originate. Quickly ending our reliance on fossil fuels is *more* likely to be mentioned in Quebec (38%).

There are also notable differences across the country in the proportions saying that ending our reliance on fossil fuels like oil and gas as quickly as possible is either a low priority or not a priority at all. In both Alberta and Saskatchewan, 47 percent hold this view, compared to 29 percent in B.C., 28 percent in Ontario, 27 percent in Atlantic Canada, 26 percent in the territories and 17 percent in Quebec.

Overall, the responses to this question on what to prioritize when addressing climate change point to both areas of agreement and disagreement across the country. Significant numbers of Canadians in all regions share a concern with keeping all regional economies strong, taxes low and businesses competitive; at the other end of the scale, comparatively few Canadians – again in all regions – are concerned about minimizing government interference in the free market economy. At the same time, there are notable differences about the priority that should be accorded to preventing job losses in the oil and gas industry or, relatedly, to the pace at which Canada should end its reliance on fossil fuels. Furthermore, these results expose the very conundrum that lies at the heart of the issue in Canada. In principle, Canadians in all parts of the country wish to see the economy of each region thrive as the country combats climate change. In practice, in the current context, most Albertans believe that this includes protecting jobs in the oil and gas sector, while Canadians in other parts of the country are less sure.

## Managing energy and climate change policies

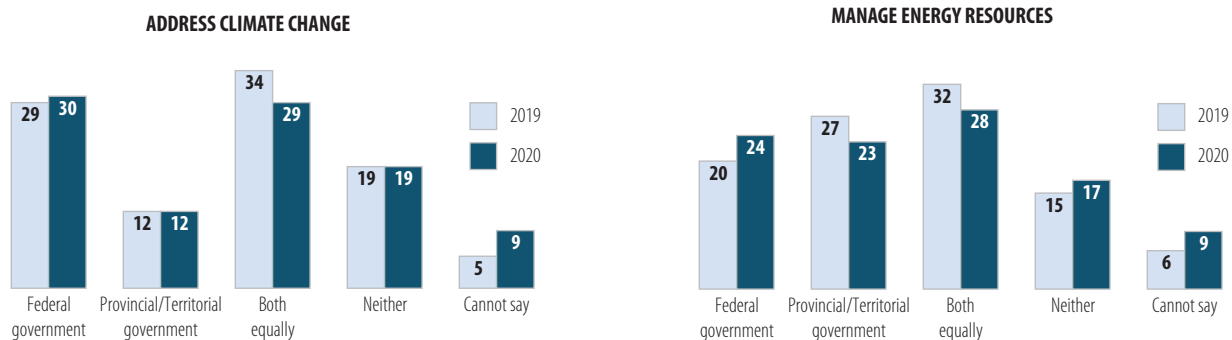
The past year saw the continuation of a series of conflicts between the federal government and a number of provincial governments over the direction of energy and climate change policies. Several provincial governments pursued court cases seeking to have the federal carbon tax overturned as unconstitutional. At the same time, the Alberta and Saskatchewan governments vocally opposed new federal legislation regulating resource development, and laid the blame for slow progress in pipeline construction at Ottawa's feet.

The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey shows, however, that, at the national level, this year of

intergovernmental wrangling had little impact on public attitudes about the management of these issues within the federation.

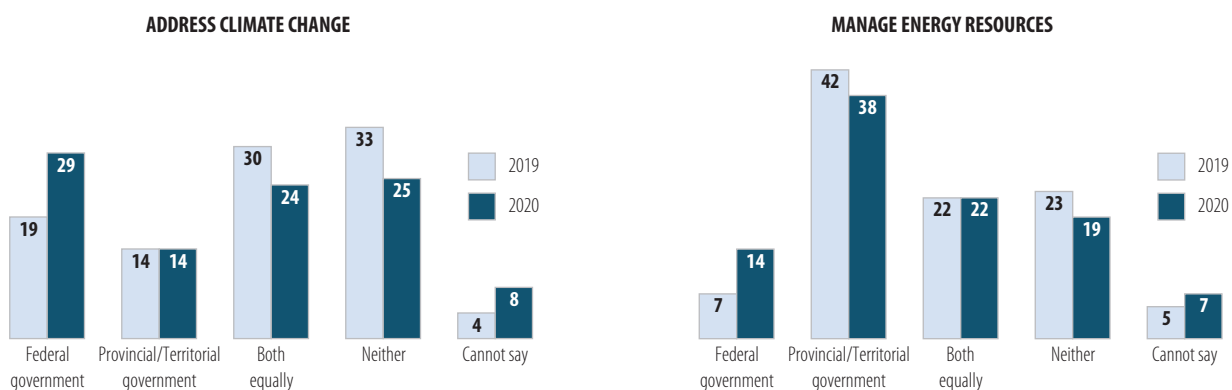
When it comes to **addressing climate change**, for instance, the proportion of Canadians that trust the federal government more to make the right decisions (30%) is greater than the proportion that trust their provincial or territorial government more (12%). About three in ten (29%) trust both governments equally, 19 percent trust neither, and nine percent cannot say. More importantly, for the purposes of this discussion, these figures are almost identical to those recorded a year ago in the 2019 survey.

### Which level of government is trusted to address key issues? 2019 – 2020 Canada



Q.25c & d.  
Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas?

### Which level of government is trusted to address key issues? 2019 – 2020 Alberta

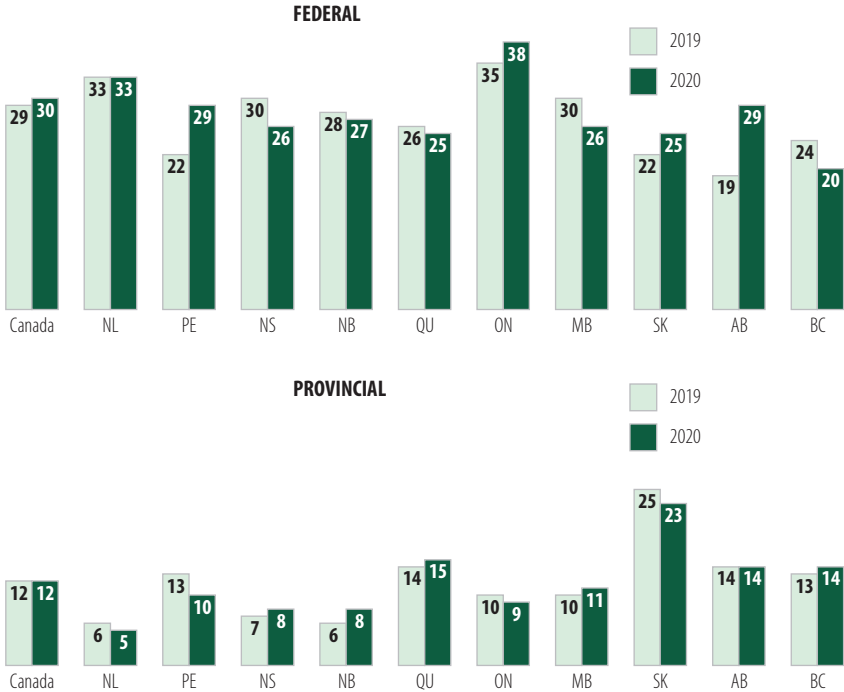


Q.25c & d.  
Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas?

While there is little change at the national level, there was some change in Alberta. Between 2019 and 2020, the proportion of Albertans trusting the federal government more to address climate change increased by 10 points, from 19 to 29 percent. The proportion trusting the provincial government more remain unchanged (14%),

while the proportions trusting both or neither government declined. This follows the spring 2019 provincial election, which saw the election of a new government with a more confrontational approach toward Ottawa on the climate change issue.

**Which level of government is trusted to address key issues?**  
2019 – 2020 Climate change



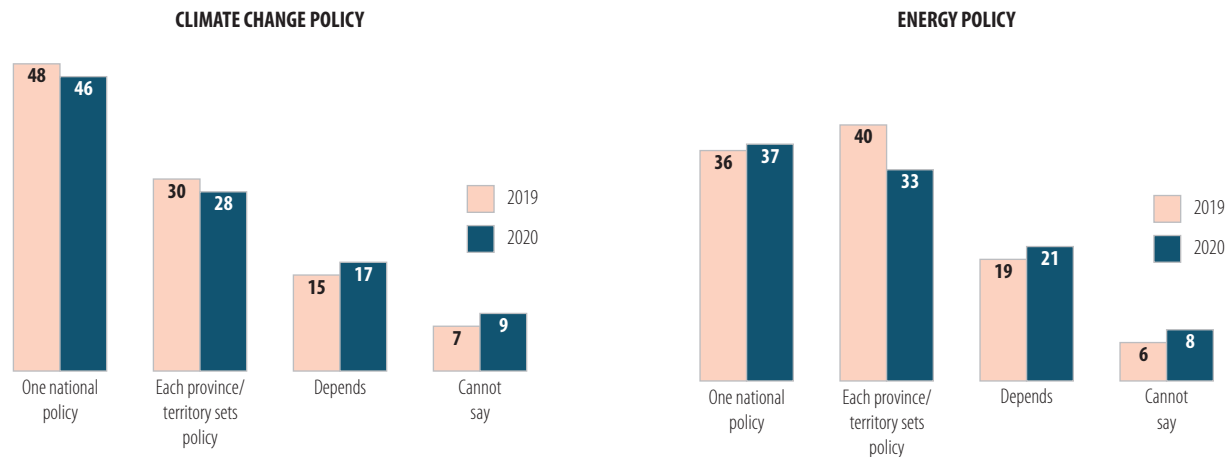
Q.25c. Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas?

The survey also asked Canadians about whether in the area of **climate change policy** – such as choosing whether to place a tax on carbon emissions – they prefer the federal government to set one national policy for Canada or whether they prefer having each province and territory set its own policy. There was no significant change over the course of the year in how Canadians responded. Just under one in two (46%) say that Ottawa should set one national

climate change policy for Canada, while 28 percent prefer that the provinces and territories set their own policies, 17 percent say it depends and nine percent cannot say. In 2020, Ontario (51%) and B.C. (51%) are the most likely jurisdictions to favour a uniform national approach to climate change, while the Prairie provinces (36%), especially Saskatchewan (30%), are the least likely to do so.

### Need for one national policy?

2019 – 2020

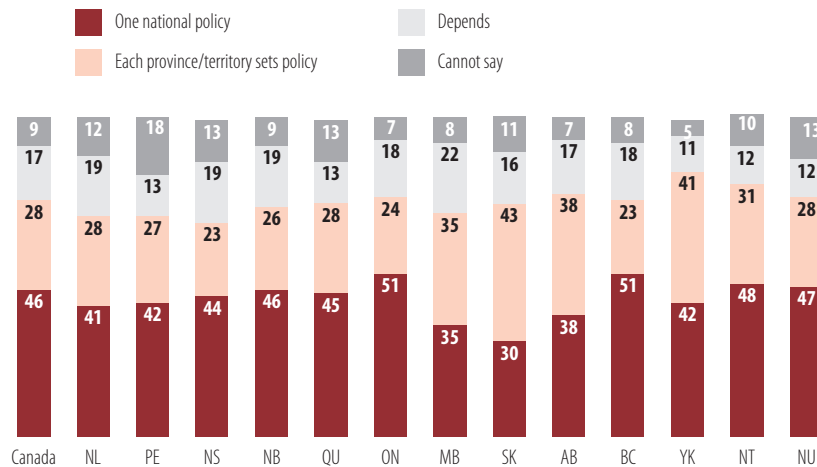


Q.26c & e.

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think the federal government should set one national policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, or whether there should be no national policy and that each province and territory should be able to set its own policy: c) Climate change policy, such as choosing whether to place a tax on carbon emissions; e) Energy policy, such as choosing which are the best sources of energy to develop

### Need for one national policy?

2020 Managing climate change policy



Q.26c.

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think the federal government should set one national policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, or whether there should be no national policy and that each province and territory should be able to set its own policy: c) Climate change policy, such as choosing whether to place a tax on carbon emissions

At the national level, there has also been relatively little change over the past year in how Canadians view the **management of energy resources** within the federation. Views are fairly evenly split between those trusting the federal government more to make the right decisions on this issue (24%), those trusting their provincial or territorial government more (23%) and those trusting both equally (28%) – with 17 percent trusting neither and nine percent not offering an opinion. The proportions trusting their provincial government more, however, are much higher in Saskatchewan (39%) and Alberta (38%), as well as in the territories (36%).

In terms of changes over time, there was a small increase in the proportion of Canadians trusting the federal government more (up 4 points) and a small dip in the proportion trusting provincial or territorial governments more (down 4 points). This shift was slightly larger in Alberta (where those trusting the federal government more doubled from 7% to 14%) and in Ontario (where those trusting the federal government more increased from 27% to 33%).

In terms of whether there should be a single federally-led **energy policy** for Canada (such as choosing which are the best sources of energy to develop) or whether each province or territory should set its own policy in this area, there has been a slight movement over the year in favour of the former option. Whereas in 2019 a plurality (40%) favoured individual provincial-territorial energy policies over a uniform federal one (36%), this is no longer the case in 2020 – the proportion favouring the provincial-territorial approach has dropped by seven points to 33 percent, and the proportion favouring the federal approach has edged up by one point to 37 percent (the remainder of respondents – 25% in 2019 and 29% in 2020 – say it depends or offer no opinion). Residents of Saskatchewan (45%), Alberta (44%), Quebec (40%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (40%) remain more likely than those in other provinces to favour provincial autonomy in this area (this view is even more strongly expressed in the territories: 47%). What is notable, however, is that the proportion preferring that there be no national energy policy and that each jurisdiction be allowed to set its own declined in two of these three provinces: Alberta (from 55% to 44%) and Quebec (from 49% to 40%).

# Federalism, regionalism and nationalism

## Highlights

- *Feelings of lack of respect or influence in the federation have grown in New Brunswick, attenuated slightly in Alberta (while remaining pronounced by historical standards), continued to decline in B.C., and fluctuated somewhat across the three territories.*
- *The proportion of Canadians agreeing that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their jurisdiction has fallen to the lowest level since the question was first asked more than two decades ago.*
- *Among francophone Quebecers age 45 or under, only 15 percent see themselves as mainly federalist.*
- *Support for the West going it on its own decreased in the region over the year, with the drop being slightly larger in Alberta and Saskatchewan. But the level of agreement with the idea of the region “going it alone” (about two in five) remains relatively high by historical standards.*
- *The economic and political events of 2019 ultimately did not erode the confidence that Canadians have in their ability to overcome their differences.*

One of the main purposes of the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey was to update the available information on the evolution of feelings of support for or disaffection with Canada’s federal system. The two most familiar forms this disaffection has taken over the past decades has been the support for sovereignty among Quebecers, and

feelings of “alienation” among those in the West (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia). The 2020 survey continues to track these attitudes by repeating a number of questions that were asked in 2019 and, in many cases, at regular intervals in prior years.

As the 2019 survey showed, dissatisfaction with how federalism works in Canada is not the exclusive prerogative of any one region. Many Canadians in the Atlantic provinces or in the North, for instance, feel no less frustrated than their counterparts in the West. At the same time, the usefulness of larger regional groupings such as “the West” or “Atlantic Canada” is increasingly questionable, as neighbouring provinces within these regions now have quite divergent views on the federation.

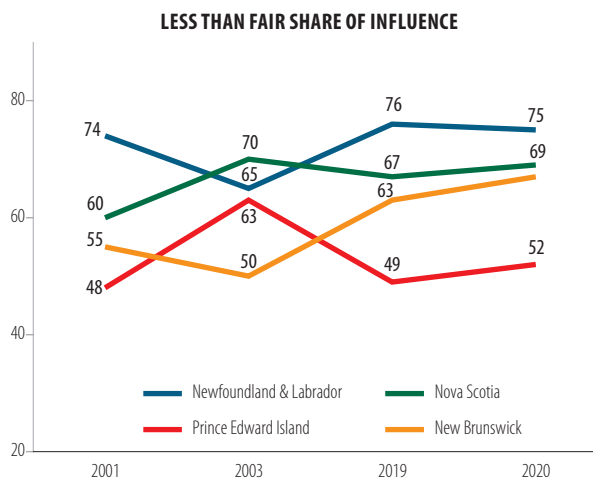
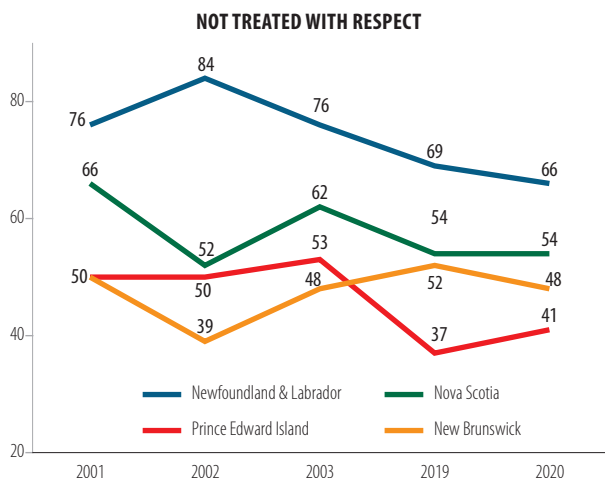
## Respect and influence

The 2020 survey asked Canadians about whether they felt their province or territory is treated with the respect it deserves in Canada, and whether it has its fair share of influence on important national decisions. While, overall, there was little change between 2019 and 2020, changes have emerged in some jurisdictions: feelings of lack of respect or influence grew in New Brunswick, attenuated slightly in Alberta (while remaining pronounced by historical standards), continued to decline in B.C., and fluctuated somewhat across the three Northern territories.

- Within **Atlantic Canada**, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia continue to stand out as the most aggrieved, with more than one in two residents saying their province is not respected, and around seven in ten saying their province does not have its fair share of influence. The most notable change over time, however, comes in the case of **New Brunswick**: whereas that province used to be

much less aggrieved than its regional counterparts, this is no longer the case. The proportion of New Brunswickers saying their province is treated with the respect it deserves fell from 60 percent in 2002 to 30 percent in 2020;<sup>4</sup> similarly, the proportion saying the province has about its fair share of influence on national decisions fell from 42 percent in 2003 to 16 percent in 2020.

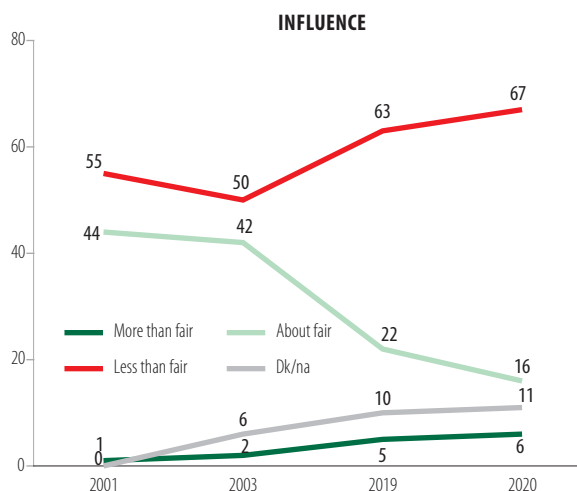
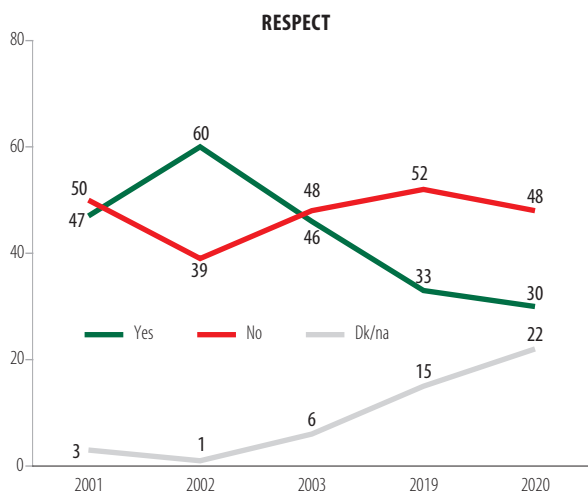
### Respect and influence: Atlantic Canada 2001 – 2020



Q.9.  
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

Q.10.  
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

### Respect and influence: New Brunswick 2001 – 2020



Q.9.  
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

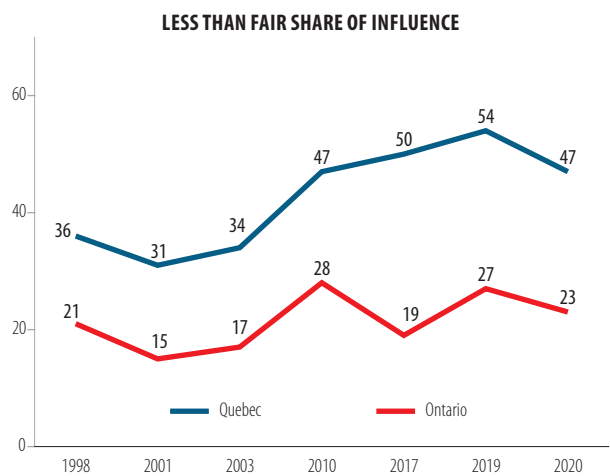
Q.10.  
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

<sup>4</sup> In New Brunswick, the proportion saying the province is not treated with respect did *not* increase to the same degree, as the proportion saying they cannot say has increased significantly.

- In **Quebec**, the proportion of saying their province is treated with the respect it deserves has been remarkably stable; currently at 38 percent, it has hovered just above or below 40 percent over the past two decades. But the proportion of Quebecers saying their province has about its fair share of influence on important national decisions continues to decline, falling from 50 percent in 2003 to 26 percent in 2020. This is an important trend to keep in mind when interpreting the gains made by the Bloc Québécois in the 2019 federal election.

- **Ontario** remains the only province where a majority (62%) say their province gets the respects it deserves. Many Canadians outside the province, however, might be surprised to see that the proportion of Ontarians saying the province has about its fair share of influence on important national decisions in Canada has steadily declined, from 57 percent in 2001 to 39 percent in 2020. This decline, however, is matched by an increase in both the proportion saying Ontario has *less* than its fair share of influence (up 8 points since 2001) and the proportion saying it has *more* than its fair share (up 7 points).

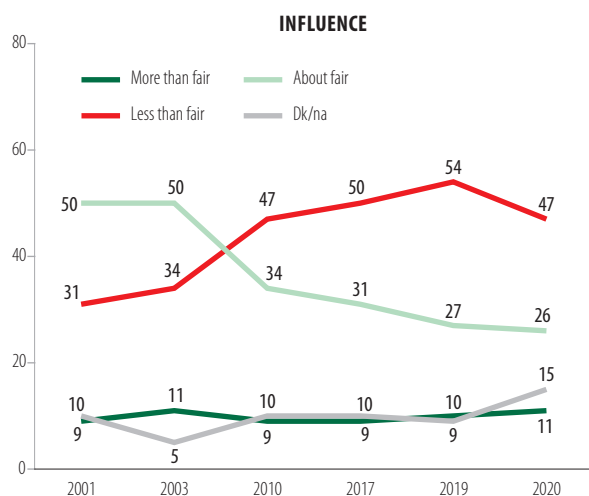
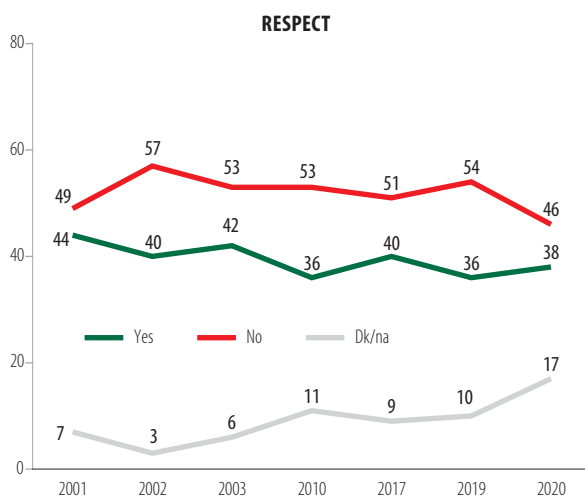
### Respect and influence: Quebec and Ontario 1998 – 2020



Q.9.  
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

Q.10.  
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

### Respect and influence: Quebec 2001 – 2020



Q.9.  
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

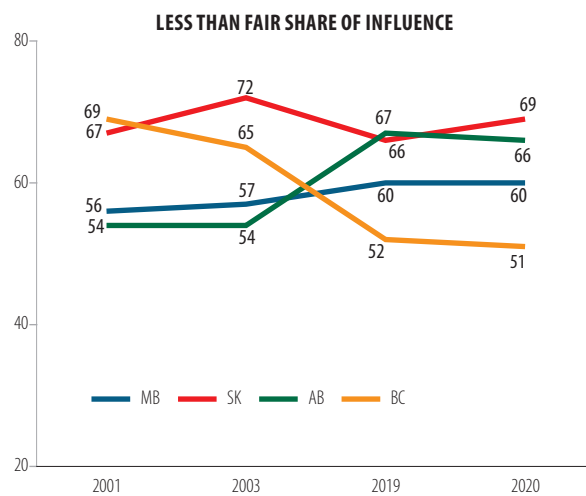
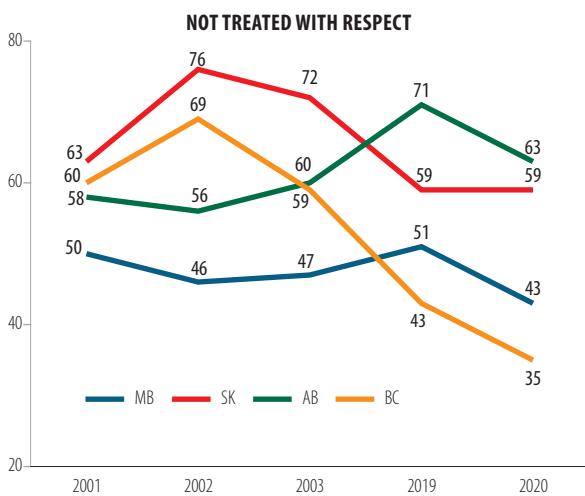
Q.10.  
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?



- In the **West**, there have been notable and contrasting evolutions in attitudes in Alberta and B.C. (the patterns in Manitoba and Saskatchewan are more stable). The 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey showed that **Albertans** had grown notably more aggrieved, with a jump in the proportion saying the province was not respected and had too little influence. The 2020 survey shows that these expressions of regional alienation are not quite as pronounced as last year, although they remain higher than historical norms. In 2020, 63 percent

of Albertans say their province is not treated with the respect it deserves in Canada, down from 71 percent last year. The 2020 survey also confirms that the trend toward less “alienation” is continuing in B.C. The proportion of **British Columbians** who feel their province is not respected has declined from 69 percent in 2002 to 35 percent in 2020 (with a drop of 8 points, from 43% to 35%, since last year). The proportion saying the province has less than its fair share of influence has also declined, from 69 percent in 2001 to 51 percent today.

### Respect and influence: the West 2001 – 2020



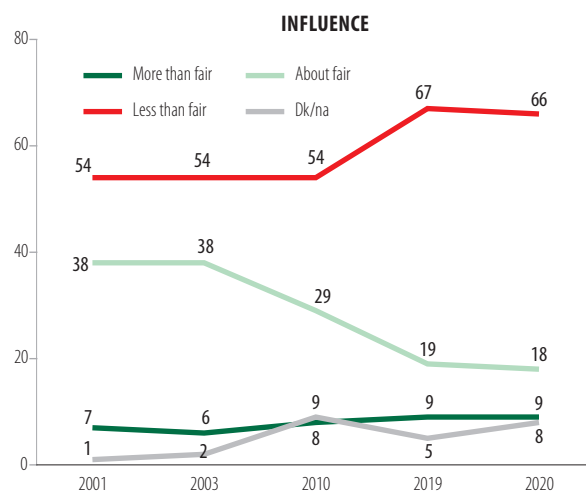
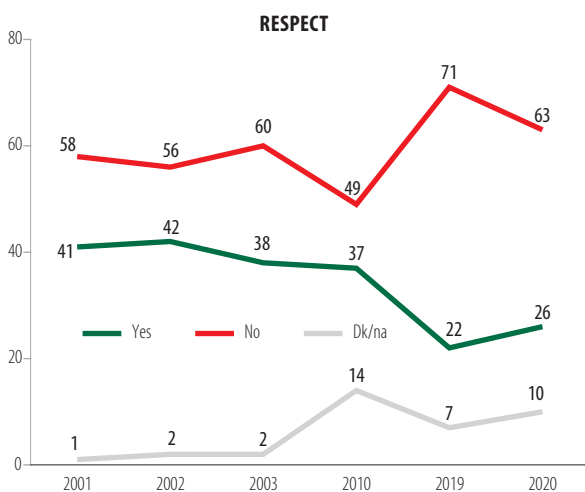
Q.9.

In your opinion, is [PROVINCE/ TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

Q.10.

In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE/ TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

### Respect and influence: Alberta 2001 – 2020



Q.9.

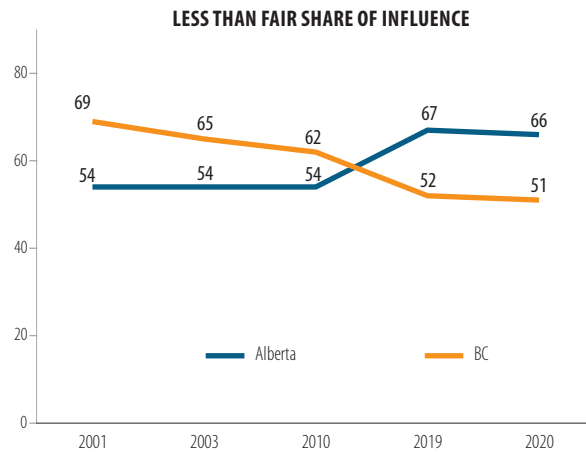
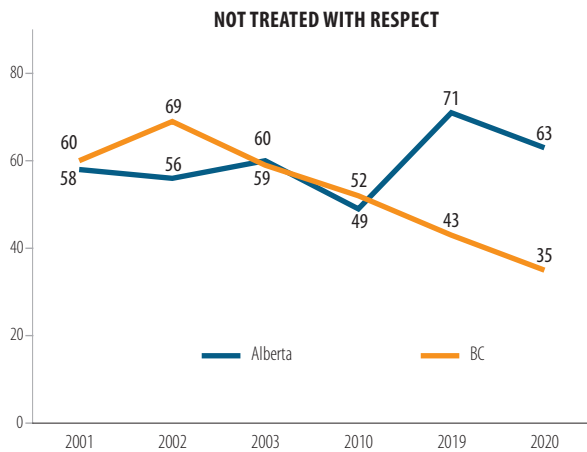
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE/ TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

Q.10.

In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE/ TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

## Respect and influence: Alberta and British Columbia

2001 – 2020



Q.9.

In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

Q.10.

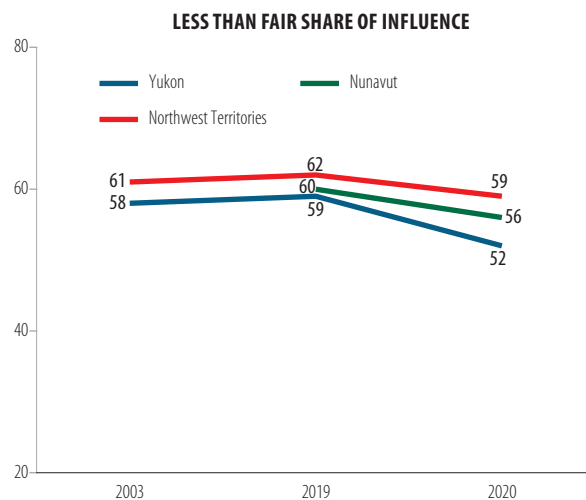
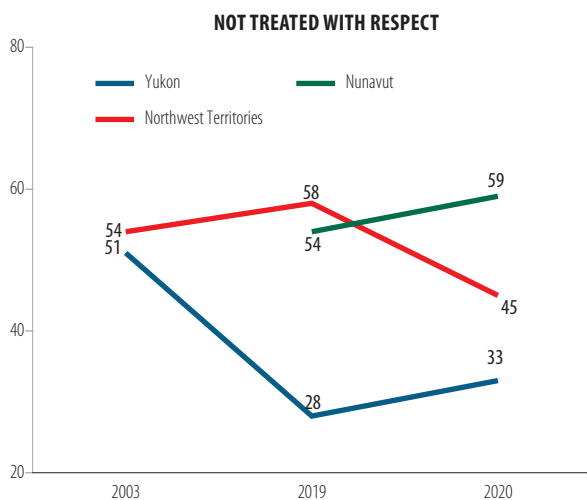
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

- There is a mix of patterns among the three territories. In terms of feelings of respect, views have improved in the **Northwest Territories** (with the proportion saying the territory is *not* respected dropping from 58% in 2019 to 45% in 2020), but soured slightly in **Yukon** and **Nunavut** (with 5-point increases among those holding that view in each territory). On this question, the two neighbouring territories of Yukon and the Northwest Territories were

far apart in 2019 (with a 30-point gap in the proportions saying their jurisdiction was not treated with the respect it deserves), but are now closer together (with only a 12-point gap). In terms of influence, views in the North have been more stable, though compared with last year, slightly fewer of those in Yukon feel they have less than their fair share of influence.

## Respect and influence: the North

2003 – 2020



Q.9.

In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

Q.10.

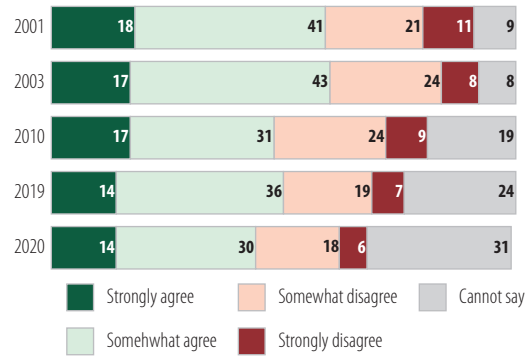
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

## Federalism: advantages vs. disadvantages

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey shows that the proportion of Canadians agreeing that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their jurisdiction has fallen to the lowest level since the question was first asked more than two decades ago. Whereas about 60 percent agreed with this statement in the early 2000s, and about 50 agreed in the late 2010s, the level agreement in 2020 is only 44 percent. This does not mean, however, that the level of *disagreement* has increased – in fact, the opposite is the case. Rather, it is uncertainty about this question that has grown. The proportion saying they *don't know* or *cannot say* (depending on the survey) increased from 19 percent in 2010 to 31 percent in 2020. Over the same period, the proportion *disagreeing* actually declined, from 33 percent to 24 percent. It is fair to say, then, that over time Canadians have become less convinced or certain about the advantages of federalism, without necessarily becoming more adamant about its disadvantages.

### Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for province/territory

2001 – 2020

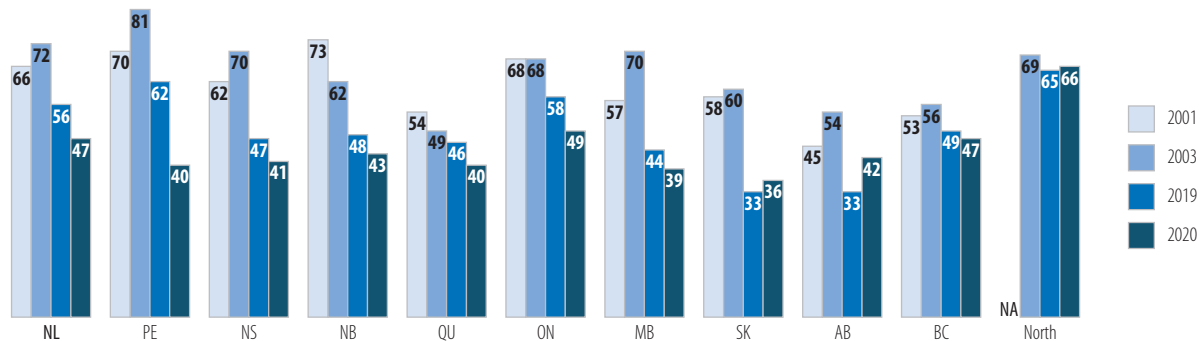


Q.22D.

Agree/Disagree: Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for [PROVINCE / TERRITORY]

### Does Canadian federalism have more advantages than disadvantages for province/territory?

2001 – 2020 Strongly or somewhat agree



Q.22D.

Agree/Disagree: Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for [PROVINCE / TERRITORY]

The latest survey shows that the most recent drop-off in agreement as to the advantages of federalism is more pronounced in Atlantic and Central Canada than in the West. But this is only because agreement in the West fell earlier, prior to 2019.

- In 2019, only 35 percent of those in the **Prairie provinces** agreed that Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their province, down from 58 percent in 2003. Between 2019 and 2020, agreement rebounded by five points, to reach 40 percent. This change was driven by responses in **Alberta**, where agreement rose from 33 percent in 2019 to 42 percent in 2020 (although this level of agreement remains below the 54 percent recorded in 2003).
- In the late 1990s and early 2000s, about seven in ten of those in the **Atlantic provinces** and in **Ontario** agreed that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their jurisdiction. In Atlantic Canada, this had fallen to one in two by 2019, and in 2020 fell further to 43 percent.

In Ontario, the decline in agreement is similar, reaching 49 percent in 2020.

- In **Quebec**, the proportion agreeing that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for the province has declined steadily, from 54 percent in 2001 to 40 percent in 2020.
- The only region where agreement has held steady is the **North**, where roughly two-thirds continue to agree that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their jurisdiction.

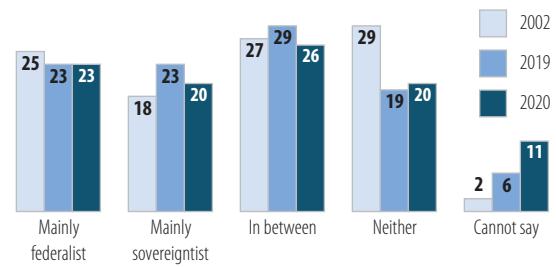
The end result of these various changes is that the differences between provinces in views on this question have narrowed significantly. In 2003, there was a 32 percentage-point difference between the provinces with the highest and lowest levels of agreement (PEI and Quebec, respectively). In 2020, the gap between the highest level of agreement (Ontario) and the lowest (Saskatchewan) is only 13 points.

## Leaving the federation

**Quebec sovereignty.** The 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey reported that, despite electoral setbacks for sovereigntist political parties in Quebec, there had been remarkably little change since the early 2000s in the proportion of Quebecers identifying as either federalist or sovereigntist – or as in between the two or neither. There has again been no significant change between 2019 and 2020. About one in five Quebecers see themselves as mainly federalist, while the same proportion sees themselves as mainly sovereigntist; a slightly higher proportion sees themselves as in between the two, and another one in five see themselves as neither. Among francophone Quebecers age 45 or under, only 15 percent see themselves as mainly federalist.

These results provide some context for analyzing the gains made by the Bloc Québécois in the October 2019 federal election. The return of the Bloc to official party status in the House of Commons was not accompanied by any change in the proportion of francophone Quebecers identifying as mainly sovereigntist. But, as was the case in 2019, the 2020 survey results also suggest that the absence of growing support for sovereignty in the province should not be confused with increased affinity for Canadian federalism.

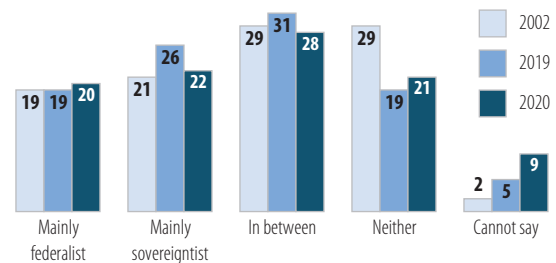
**Quebecers: federalist, sovereigntist, both or neither?**  
2002 – 2020 Total Quebec



Q.29.

*Do you consider yourself to be mainly a federalist, mainly a sovereigntist, someone who is in between the two, or someone who is neither one nor the other?*

**Quebecers: federalist, sovereigntist, both or neither?**  
2002 – 2020 Quebec Francophones only



Q.29.

*Do you consider yourself to be mainly a federalist, mainly a sovereigntist, someone who is in between the two, or someone who is neither one nor the other?*

**Wexit.** In the autumn of 2019, discontent with Canadian federalism in Western Canada appeared to reach new heights, as the prolonged economic downturn affecting the oil and gas industry, and ongoing delays in the construction of new or expanded pipelines to the Pacific coast combined with disappointment with the election outcome, which saw the re-election of a Liberal federal government whose basis of support was weighted in Eastern and Central Canada. This confluence of events brought into public view calls for some Western provinces, or the region as a whole, to contemplate independence from Canada – an option that some termed “Wexit,” after the United Kingdom’s pending “Brexit” from the European Union.

It is worth recalling, however, that the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey, conducted in January of that year, had shown that regional discontent was on the rise long before the October election. Notably, that survey reported that a record number of Westerners agreed with the proposition that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own.” In January 2019, 48 percent of those in the region agreed with this statement, including, for the first time, majorities of those in Alberta (56%) and Saskatchewan (53%).

The 2020 survey suggests that, rather than continuing to grow, support for the West going it on its own actually decreased over the year: there was a 10-point drop between 2019 and 2020 in the region in the proportion agreeing that the West should go it alone, from 48 percent to 38 percent. The drop was slightly larger in Alberta (down 13 points, to 43%) and Saskatchewan (down 12 points, to 41%). However, the level of agreement with the idea of the region “going it alone” (about two in five) remains relatively high by historical standards.

### Western alienation: West should go it alone

1987 – 2020 Agree, four Western provinces only

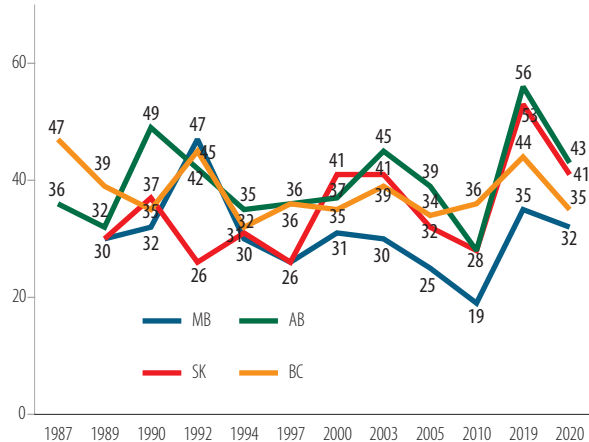


Q.22b.

Agree/Disagree: Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own

### Western alienation: West should go it alone

1987 – 2020 Agree, four Western provinces only



Q.22b.

Agree/Disagree: Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own

## Resolving our differences

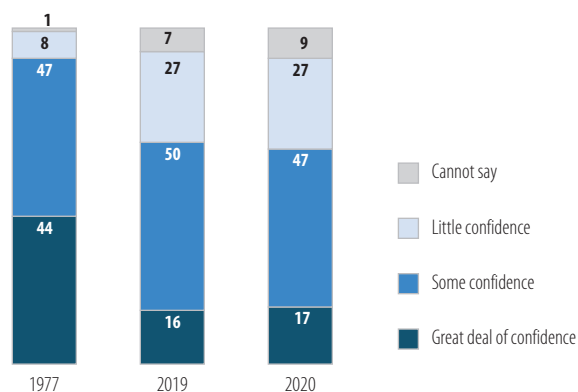
The economic and political events of 2019 – including the continuing economic downturn in the oil and gas industry, an intensified debate about how to address climate change, the spring Alberta provincial election and the October federal election – ultimately did not erode the confidence that Canadians have in their ability to overcome their differences.

In 2020, just under two in three Canadians (64%) express a great deal (17%) or some (47%) confidence in the ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences, a figure that is virtually unchanged from 2019 (66%). In both 2019 and 2020, 27 percent said they had little confidence in the ability of Canadians to resolve their differences.

The stability of the responses to this question holds for each region of the country. Confidence (whether a great deal or some) remains slightly higher than average in the North (72%) and Ontario (68%), and slightly lower in Quebec (60%) and the Prairies (58%); but in each case, the results in 2020 are almost identical to those of a year earlier.

As was the case last year, Indigenous (63%) and non-Indigenous (64%) people in Canada are equally likely to say that they have a great deal or some confidence in the ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences. Younger Canadians are also somewhat more optimistic: 22 percent of those age 34 and under have a great deal of confidence in the ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences, compared to 13 percent of those age 55 or older.

Confidence that Canadians can resolve internal differences  
1977 – 2019



Q32.

*Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, some confidence or little confidence in the capacity or ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences?*

# Appendix

## Source material

This research references a number of previous public opinion surveys, from which the current survey draws comparisons. The details of this previous research is presented below.

**Surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC).** Between 1998 and 2006, CRIC conducted a series of public opinion studies on a range of national unity issues, including the evolution of support for federalism and sovereignty in Quebec, regionalism, relations with Aboriginal Peoples, Canadian identity, bilingualism, multiculturalism, Canada-U.S. relations, globalization and civic engagement. The specific surveys cited in this report are Portraits of Canada, an annual survey on attitudes toward the federation, and the New Canada survey on Canadian identity, conducted in 2003. Many of the reports and questionnaires for these surveys are available online from the Carleton University library at <https://library.carleton.ca/find/data/centre-research-and-information-canada-cric>. Selected data tables are available upon request from the authors.

**Surveys conducted by Environics Research and the Environics Institute for Survey Research.** 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, and is available online at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org).

**Surveys conducted by the Mowat Centre.** The Mowat Centre conducted two studies on the evolution of attitudes toward the federation. The first, entitled *The New Ontario: The Shifting Attitudes of Ontarians Toward the Federation*, was a national survey conducted in 2010. The second, entitled *Portraits 2017*, was a survey of Ontario and Quebec that focused on a range of issues, including the federation. Survey reports are available from the Mowat Centre at: [www.munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre](http://www.munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre)

**The Searching Nation**, a national survey on attitudes toward federalism and national unity, conducted for Southam News in 1977 by Goldfarb Consultants Limited. A copy of the results of this survey was accessed through the University of Toronto library.



**Environics  
Institute**

**The Environics Institute  
for Survery Research**

900-33 Bloor Street East  
Toronto, ON M4W 3H1

416 969 2457  
[www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org)