

The Role of Governments and the Division of Powers:

FEDERALISM IN THE CONTEXT OF A PANDEMIC

A REPORT FROM THE CONFEDERATION OF TOMORROW
2021 SURVEY OF CANADIANS

Final Report

APRIL 2021

Environics Institute
For Survey Research

CANADAWEST FOUNDATION


CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

JOHNSON SHOYAMA
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
UREGINA ▽ USASK

IRPP
INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE EN POLITIQUES PUBLIQUES

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY

 **STFX**
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://capcf.uqam.ca/>

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.mulroneyinstitute.ca

THE JOHNSON SHOYAMA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY (JSGS)

Founded in 2007 by the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan, the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy (JSGS) is well-known and respected for its innovative degree and micro-credential programs for both graduate students and current policy practitioners. Through its thought-provoking research, JSGS provides a Saskatchewan perspective on local, provincial, national, and global policy issues spanning areas of innovation, science, technology, society and inequality, and governance. www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.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. <https://www.environicsinstitute.org>



Contents

- Executive summary 1
- The size and impact of government 3
- The division of powers in the federation 8
- National programs and standards 11
- Trust in federal and provincial/territorial governments 17

The **Confederation of Tomorrow** surveys are annual studies conducted by an association of the country's leading public policy organizations: the **Environics Institute for Survey Research**, the **Canada West Foundation**, the **Centre D'Analyse Politique – Constitution et Fédéralisme**, the **Institute for Research on Public Policy**, the **Brian Mulroney Institute of Government** and the **Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy**. The surveys give voice to Canadians about the major issues shaping the future of the federation and their political communities. The 2021 study consists of a survey of 5,814 adults, conducted online in the provinces between January 25 and February 17; and online and by telephone in the territories between January 25 and March 1. Survey results are weighted by region, gender, age, language, education, immigrant background and Indigenous identity to ensure they are representative of the country as a whole. When results are reported for the territories (individually or combined), these are weighted separately to ensure they are representative of that region.

Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented governments in Canada with enormous challenges. While the current priority remains stemming the spread of the virus and accelerating the pace of vaccinations, governments are also looking ahead to the measures needed to shape an economic recovery. In this context, it is striking that Canadians' views on the role of government – and on how the different governments in the federation work together – generally have not changed that much since the onset of the pandemic. Notably, most Canadians continue to be comfortable with the decentralized nature of the federation. And while there is widespread support for increases in federal transfers to provinces and territories for health care, care for the elderly, and child care, the public is more divided as to whether this funding should be tied to the acceptance of national standards.

The size and impact of government

Canadians' preferences regarding the size of government have not changed over the past two years. In every province, a plurality favours neither a larger nor a smaller government; while a larger government is the second most favoured option, and smaller government is the least favoured. Canadians living in cities with populations of at least one million are more likely to favour a larger government with more services. Across all sizes of community, however, only about one in five favour smaller governments with fewer services.

At a time of heightened concern about political polarization, it is notable that neither the option of a larger or a smaller government attracts the support of a majority of the supporters of any of the main federal political parties. In each case, roughly one in two party supporters either favour neither option in particular, or have no opinion; while the others are divided between the larger and smaller government options.

There is currently no consensus in Canada as to the impact of governments, with roughly equal proportions saying that

governments have a positive and negative impact on most people's lives. Views on this question, however, have evolved somewhat over the past two years: compared to 2019, fewer Canadians see governments as having a negative impact on most people's lives.

Residents of the Prairie provinces are the most likely to say that governments negatively impact most people's lives; while residents of the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and the territories are the least likely to hold this view. Canadians living in cities with populations over 200,000 are more likely to see government's impact as positive rather than negative; the reverse is true for those living in communities with populations below 200,000.

The division of powers in the federation

The pandemic has not prompted Canadians to rethink their preferences regarding the optimal division of powers in the federation. Most Canadians continue to be comfortable with the decentralized nature of the federation, with relatively few seeing the need to transfer powers from their provincial or territorial government to Ottawa. In fact, despite the important role that Ottawa has played in providing emergency support during the crisis, the proportion of Canadians seeking a more centralized federation is slightly lower now than before the pandemic began.

As usual, Quebecers are more likely than Canadians outside Quebec to say their provincial government should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now. However, in both Quebec and the rest of Canada, relatively few favours a transfer of powers to Ottawa.

While, overall, there has been little change in views since 2019, changes are more pronounced in some individual provinces. Specifically, in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, support for more powerful provinces has declined significantly over the past two years. That said, support for decentralization continues to be higher in these two provinces than in any other province other than Quebec.

National programs and standards

While the amount of money transferred by the federal government to provinces and territories is a perpetual source of discussion and friction between the two orders of government, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed urgency to the conversation. Provincial and territorial health systems are under intense pressure. At the same time, the pandemic experience has highlighted weaknesses in the country's social safety net in areas such as a child care and care for the elderly.

In this context, the Confederation of Tomorrow 2021 Survey of Canadians finds that there is widespread support for the federal government providing more funding to provinces and territories for health care, care for the elderly, and child care. The public is more divided, however, as to whether increased federal funding should come with strings attached. About two in five say that the federal government should provide more funding to the provinces and territories, and let each province and territory decide how to spend this money to improve services in their area. About one in three say that federal government should create a single set of national standards for services in each of these areas, and then provide more funding only to provinces and territories that meet those standards.

As is often the case on such questions, there is a noticeable difference in opinion between Quebecers and residents of the other provinces and territories. In Quebec, support for unconditional funding outweighs support for funding with national standards by about two-to-one. In the rest of Canada, the public is more or less evenly split on the question of whether additional federal funding should be tied to national standards.

There are further differences among provinces and regions outside Quebec – although these differences are not always consistent across the three policy areas mentioned in the survey. In Ontario, in the case of care for the elderly, which has attracted particular attention in the province during the pandemic, opinion leans somewhat more toward having national standards than toward transfers without conditions.

Opinions on this question vary among supporters of the main federal parties, in expected ways. Bloc Québécois supporters are the most favourable to increased federal funding without conditions, followed by supporters of the

Conservative Party. Only in the case of the Bloc Québécois supporters, however, does a clear majority favour one of the options over the other. With the exception of the Bloc, this is an issue that divides opinion within the main federal political parties as well as between them.

A second issue related to the funding of social programs is whether provinces should be allowed to opt out of any new national program and receive federal funding to set up their own similar program. One in two Canadians agree that provinces should be allowed to opt out in this way; three in ten disagree. While agreement is highest in Quebec, it is almost as high in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The level of agreement is more or less the same as it was when this question was last asked in the early 2000s.

Support for “opting out” is also related to political ideology, but in different ways in the two parts of the country. Outside Quebec, it is the traditional left-right political ideology that matters. Most Canadians (outside Quebec) who place themselves on the right of the political spectrum agree that provinces should be able to opt-out with compensation; most of those who place themselves on the left do not. In Quebec, however, the left-right political divide has no impact on opinions on this issue. In that province, support for opting out not surprisingly relates strongly to a different ideology entirely, namely support for sovereignty.

Trust in federal and provincial/territorial governments

Overall, the pandemic has not significantly affected which government Canadians trust more to manage the health care system. Opinions continue to be divided, with one in three trusting their provincial or territorial government more, one in four trusting both governments equally, and one in five trusting the federal government more. Opinions about which government is trusted more to make the right decisions in managing the COVID-19 pandemic are similarly divided. In this case, however, there is also considerable variation across the country. The proportion trusting their provincial or territorial government more to manage the pandemic is highest in the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Prince Edward Island; the proportion trusting federal government more is highest in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The size and impact of government

Canadians' preferences regarding the size of government have not changed over the past two years. In every province, a plurality favours neither a larger nor a smaller government; while a larger government is the second most favoured option, and smaller government is the least favoured. Views on the impact of government, however, have evolved somewhat: compared to 2019, fewer Canadians see governments as having a negative impact on most people's lives.

For the past year, governments in Canada have been focused on the twin tasks of stemming the spread of COVID-19 while providing emergency supports for those most affected by the restrictions on economic activity. As the pace of vaccination picks up, however, Canadians can look forward to an eventual reopening of the economy. Governments will soon need to shift focus from short-term measures to longer-term strategies for an economic recovery.

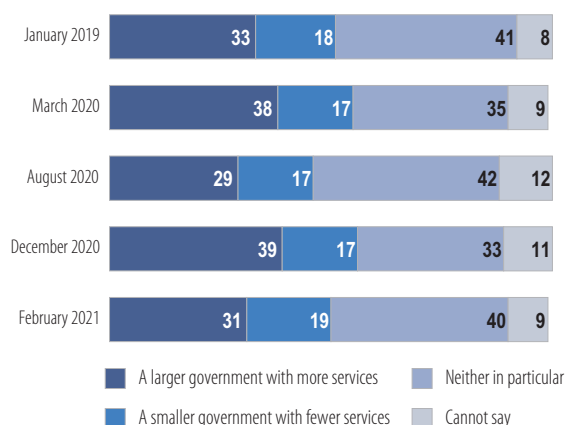
While governments in Canada may be facing never-before-seen challenges, citizens' views on the role of government – and on how the different governments in the federation work together – have not changed that much since the onset of the pandemic.

Size of government. A plurality of Canadians is attracted neither by the option of a smaller government, nor that of a larger one. Asked to choose between a smaller government with fewer services, or a larger government with more services, 40 percent say they favour neither in particular. Three in ten (31%) favour a larger government with more services; and 19 percent favour a smaller government with fewer services.

More notably, there has been no change in preference over the past two years: answers to this question in the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey were almost identical to those in 2021. Other surveys conducted by the Environics Institute during the pandemic show some fluctuation in support for a larger government, and for neither a larger nor smaller government, with support for a smaller government remaining stable throughout the period at just under one in five.

Preferred size of government

2019-2021



Q.7

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

Currently, there is relatively little variation across the country in preferences about the size of government. In every province, a plurality favours neither a larger nor a smaller government, while a larger government is the second most favoured option, and smaller government is the least favoured. Preference for a larger government with more services ranges from a low of 29 percent in Manitoba, to a high of 34 percent in Newfoundland and Labrador, and British Columbia. Preference for a smaller government with fewer services ranges from a low of 12 percent in Newfoundland and Labrador, and New Brunswick, to a high of 25 percent in Alberta.

Preferences in the three territories are slightly different. Forty percent of residents of the territories favour a larger government with more services, making this the most popular choice in the region; while 27 percent favour neither in particular, and 21 percent favour a smaller government with fewer services.

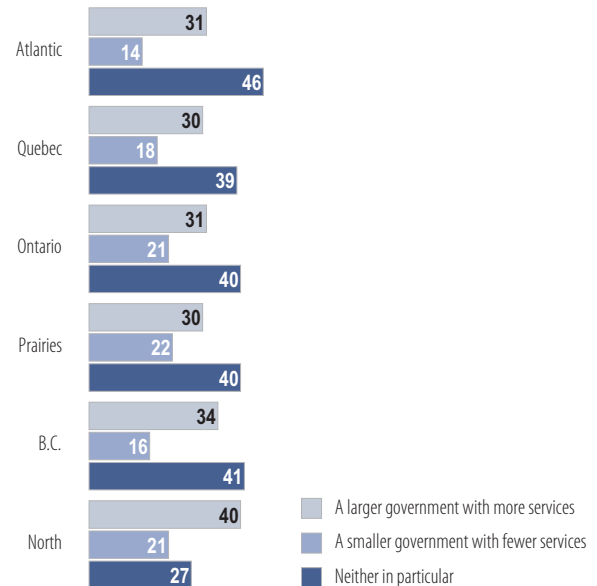
In contrast to the modest differences across provinces, there are more important differences between bigger cities and smaller towns. One third (34%) of Canadians living in cities with populations of at least one million favour a larger government with more services, compared to one in four (25%) of those living in communities with populations under 100,000. Across all sizes of community, however, only about one in five favour smaller governments with fewer services.

Views on whether governments should be larger or smaller also vary among Canadians in several other ways.

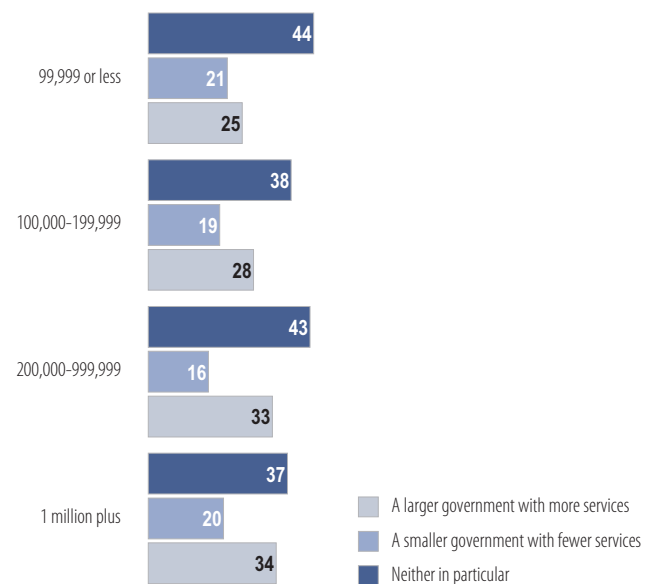
- **Gender:** Men (27%) are more than twice as likely than women (12%) to favour smaller governments offering fewer services.
- **Age:** Younger Canadians are more likely than their older counterparts to favour a larger government with more services: 44 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds favour this option, compared to 23 percent of those age 55 and older.
- **Education and income:** Support for larger government increases as educational attainment rises; conversely, support for smaller government increases as household income rises.
- **Immigrant background:** Immigrants (37%), and especially recent immigrants (49%), are more likely to favour a larger government with more services than second generation (32%) or third generation-plus (29%) Canadians.
- **Racial identity:** Racialized Canadians (43%) are more likely than those who identify as white (28%) to favour a larger government with more services.
- **Impact of the pandemic:** Those who say their day-to-day life has been affected to a great extent by the COVID-19 pandemic (37%) are more likely to favour a larger government with more services, compared those who say they have been not very much or not at all affected (27%).

Preferred size of government

By region



By community size



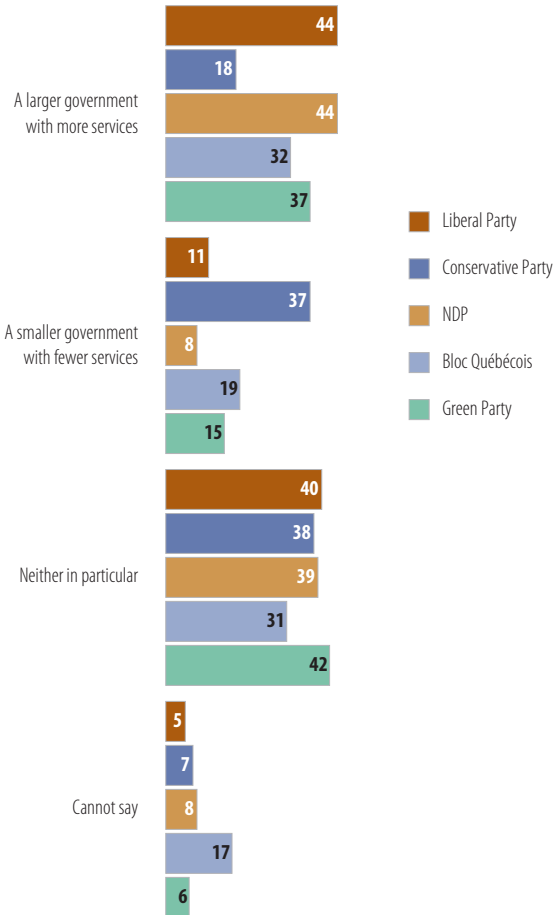
Q.7

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

Finally, there is an expected difference between supporters of the main federal political parties, with Liberal Party (44%) and NDP (44%) supporters more likely to favour a larger government with more services than Conservative Party supporters (18%). Conversely, Conservative Party supporters are more likely to favour a smaller government with fewer services (37%) than Liberal Party (11%) or NDP (8%) supporters. At a time of heightened concern about political polarization, it is notable that neither the option of larger or smaller government attracts the support of a majority of any of these groups of supporters. Within each party, roughly one in two supporters either favour neither option in particular, or do not provide a response; while the others are divided between the larger and smaller government options.

Preferred size of government

By federal party support



Q.7
Generally speaking, would you say you favour ...?

Impact of government. There is currently no consensus in Canada as to the impact of governments, with roughly equal proportions saying that governments have a positive (36%) and negative (34%) impact on most people’s lives; while 16 percent say they don’t have much impact, and 14 percent choose not to say either way.

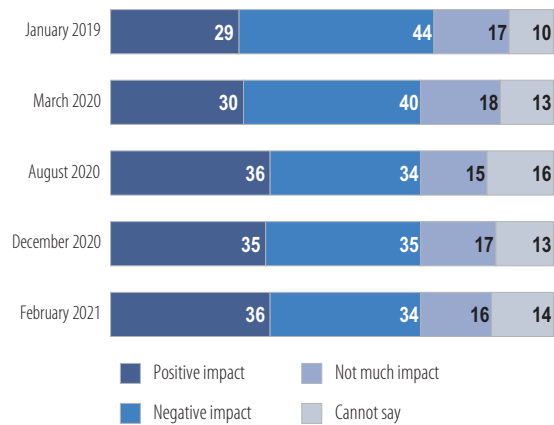
On this question, views have evolved somewhat over the past two years: since 2019, the proportion of Canadians seeing governments as having a negative impact on most people’s lives has dropped 10 points, from 44 to 34 percent. Whereas, in 2019, Canadians were 15 points *more* likely to see government’s impact as negative rather than positive, today they are two points *less* likely to do so. It is not clear whether this change is due mainly to the public’s reactions to the steps governments have taken to support Canadians during the pandemic, or whether the trend began before the pandemic hit.

Currently, residents of the Prairie provinces are the most likely to say that governments negatively impact most people’s lives (46%), followed by those in Ontario (34%) and B.C. (33%); residents of the Atlantic provinces (30%), Quebec (27%) and the territories (25%) are the least likely to hold this view. But the proportion holding this view has dropped in each region of the country (though to a lesser extent in the North, where it was already comparatively low).

As is the case for views on the size of government, views on the impact of governments differ between residents of bigger cities and smaller towns. Canadians living in cities with populations over 200,000 are more likely to see government’s impact as positive rather than negative; the reverse is true for those living in communities with populations below 200,000.

Impact of governments

2019-2021

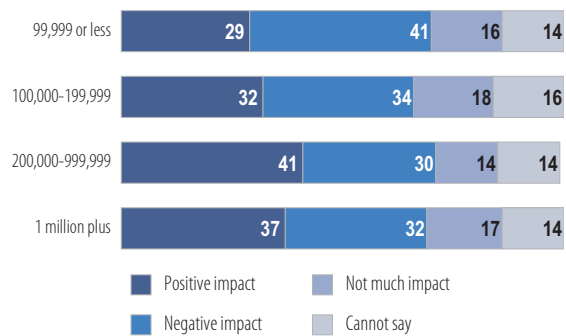


Q.8

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

Impact of governments

By community size



Q.8

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

Views on whether governments have a positive or negative impact also vary among Canadians in several other ways.

- **Gender:** Men (38%) are more likely than women (30%) to say governments have a negative impact on most people's lives.
- **Education:** Those with a university education are more likely to see government's impact as positive rather than negative; the reverse is true for those who did not continue their education past high school.
- **Immigrant background:** Immigrants (42%), and especially recent immigrants (49%), are more likely to say governments have a positive impact than second generation (36%) or third generation-plus (34%) Canadians.
- **Racial identity:** Racialized Canadians (26%) are less likely than those who identify as white (36%) to say that governments have a *negative* impact on most people's lives.
- **Federal party support:** A majority of Liberal Party supporters (57%) say that governments have a positive impact on most people's lives; this view is also held by a plurality of supporters for the Bloc Québécois (42%), the Green Party (42%) and the NDP (40%), but by only a minority of Conservative Party supporters (22%). Conversely, only among Conservative Party supporters does a majority (53%) say that governments have a mostly *negative* impact.

The division of powers in the federation

The pandemic has not prompted Canadians to rethink their preferences regarding the division of powers in the federation. Most Canadians continue to be comfortable with the decentralized nature of their federation, with relatively few seeing the need to transfer powers from their provincial or territorial government to Ottawa. There has been relatively little change in views over the past two years.

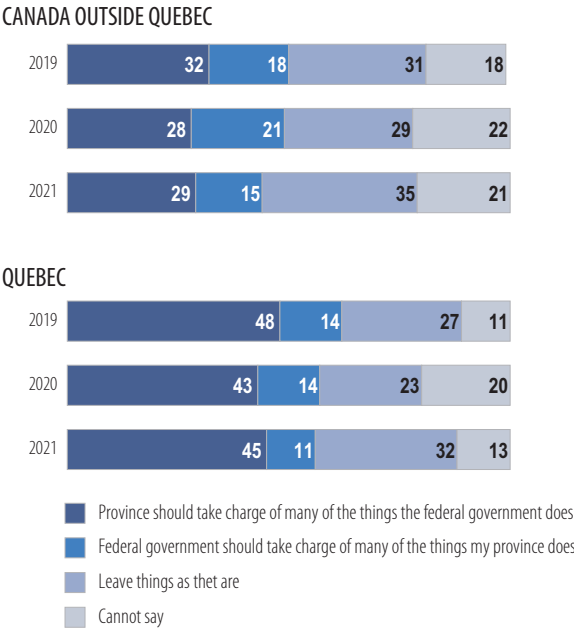
The pandemic has sharpened public attention on the respective roles each order of government plays in the federation. The federal government has made extraordinary use of its powers to borrow and spend, to support Canadians (and provinces and territories) throughout the crisis. Provinces and territories have been at the forefront of providing essential health care and public health services, while attempting to keep schools functioning as well and as safely as possible, whether online or in person. Yet, this experience has had no significant impact on how Canadians see the optimal distribution of powers in the federation.

Transfer of powers. Most Canadians continue to be comfortable with the decentralized nature of their federation, with relatively few seeing the need to transfer powers from their provincial or territorial government to Ottawa.

Overall, opinion in the country is divided: about one in three either see no need for change (34%), or want the government of their province or territory to take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now (32%). Fewer (14%) support the federal government taking charge of many of the things the government of their province or territory does right now. One in five (19%) do not state a preference.

As usual, there is an important difference between the views of Quebecers and other Canadians. In Quebec, a larger proportion (45%) favour their provincial government taking charge of many of the things the federal government does right now; outside Quebec, only 29 percent choose this option. Importantly, however, in both Quebec and the rest of Canada, relatively few favours a transfer of powers to Ottawa (only 11% of Quebecers, and 15% of other Canadians, opt for this approach).

The division of powers in the federation
2019-2021



Q.23
Which of the following statements is closest to your own view of how governments should work in Canada?

What is most significant in the current context is that there has been relatively little change over the past two years. In both Quebec and the rest of Canada, there have been slight decreases in the proportion wanting Ottawa to take on more things that provinces or territories currently do; and slight increases in the proportions preferring the status quo. Overall, though, it is fair to say that the onset of the pandemic has not prompted Canadians to rethink their preferences regarding the division of powers in the federation. More specifically, despite the important role that Ottawa has played in providing emergency supports during the crisis, the proportion of Canadians seeking a more centralized federation is lower now than before the pandemic began.

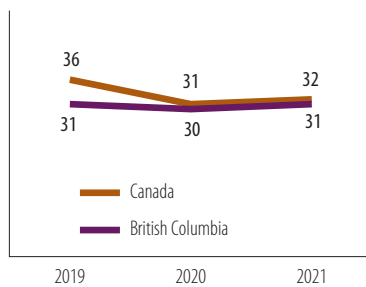
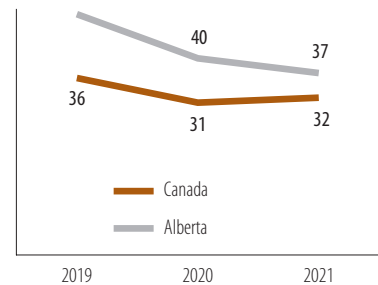
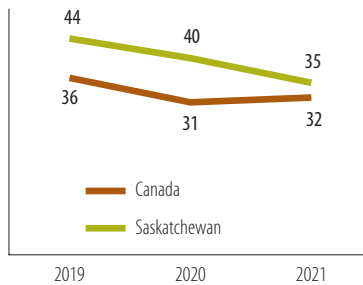
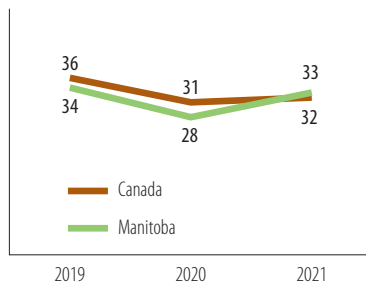
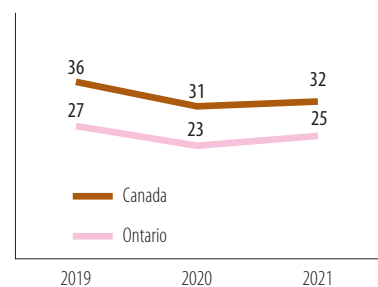
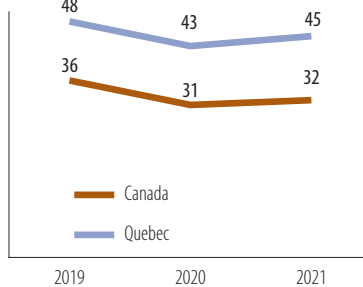
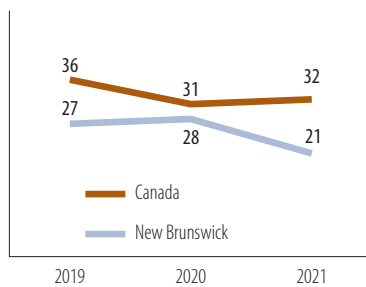
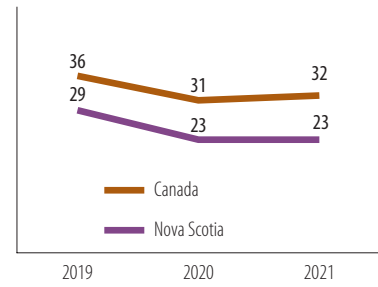
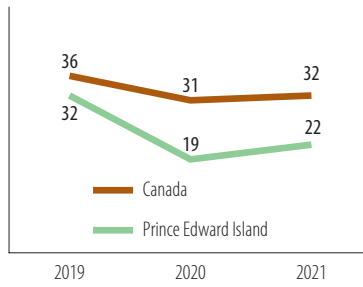
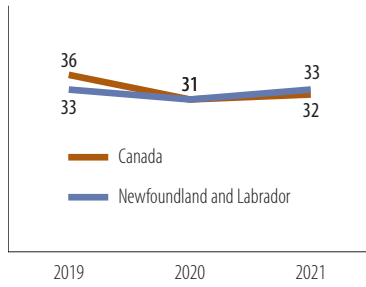
While, overall, there has been little change in views since 2019, changes are more pronounced in some individual provinces. Specifically, in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, support for more powerful provinces has declined over the past two years. The proportion saying their provincial government should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now fell by 12 points in Alberta (from 49% to 37%), and by nine points in Saskatchewan (from 44% to 35%). That said, support for decentralization continues to be higher in these two provinces than in any other province other than Quebec.

Support for shifting powers away from Ottawa toward the provinces has also dropped over this period in the Maritime provinces, but to a lesser extent: from 28 percent in 2019, to 22 percent in 2021. Maritimers are less likely than other Canadians to favour more powerful provincial governments, but they are gradually becoming even less favourable toward this option over time.

In addition to these differences of opinion by region, there are some modest differences among other groups within the population. Men (36%) are more likely than women (29%) to favour their province or territory taking charge of many of the things the federal government does right now; and Canadians age 34 and younger (21%) are more likely to favour a transfer of provincial or territorial powers to Ottawa than are those age 55 and older (9%).

Support for provinces taking charge of many of the things the federal government does right now is also higher among supporters of the Bloc Québécois (78%) and the Conservatives Party (45%) than among supporters of the Green Party (29%), the Liberal Party (22%) or the NDP (22%). Pluralities of Liberal Party and NDP supporters favour the status quo. Even among these supporters, only one in five favour a transfer of provincial or territorial powers to Ottawa (the figures are 20% for Liberal Party supporters, and 19% among supporters of the NDP).

My province should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now
2019-2021, by province



Q.23
Which of the following statements is closest to your own view of how governments should work in Canada?

National programs and standards

There is widespread support for the federal government providing more funding to provinces and territories for health care, care for the elderly, and child care. The public is more divided, however, as to whether increased federal funding should come with strings attached. In Quebec, support for unconditional funding outweighs support for funding with national standards by about two-to-one. In the rest of Canada, the public is more or less evenly split. At the same time, one in two Canadians continue to agree that provinces should be allowed to opt out of any new national program and receive federal funding to set up their own similar program.

The pandemic has highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of Canada's approach to public policy. Citizens have benefitted from a high-quality, publicly-funded health care system, as well as decentralized decision-making about restrictions on activity that takes into account the circumstances of the disease in each region. At the same time, the failure to better protect seniors living in long-term care, or to enable schools and child care centres to open safely on a regular basis, led some to question whether the provinces were up to the task of providing essential public

services during a time of crisis. This, in turn, raised the issue of whether the federal government should play a bigger role either in delivering key programs – or at least tie federal funding for these programs to more rigorous and consistent national standards.

In the fall of 2020, the federal government's economic statement spoke of these "gaps in standards and care for our most vulnerable." It went on to promise that "in order to make sure seniors and those in care live in safe and dignified conditions, the federal government will work with provinces and territories to set new, national standards for long-term care." Additionally, it committed funding for what it called "a Canada-wide child care system," and reaffirmed that it is "taking concrete steps toward the implementation of national, universal pharmacare."¹

Against this backdrop, the Confederation of Tomorrow 2021 Survey of Canadians explored attitudes about the establishment of new national programs, and about a role for the federal government in setting standards for existing ones.

¹ Government of Canada, Fall Economic Statement 2020 (November 30, 2020), pp. 14, 16, 17 and 76; available at <https://www.budget.gc.ca/fes-eea/2020/home-accueil-en.html>.

Opting out of national programs. One way of practicing “flexible” or “asymmetrical” federalism in Canada has been to recognize the right of individual provinces to “opt-out” of any new national program agreed to by the federal and provincial governments (for instance, pharmacare), while still receiving its share of federal funding to help finance its own comparable provincial program.

In the early 2000s, views on this approach were fairly evenly divided, with about one in two Canadians agreeing that “provinces should be allowed to opt out of any new national program and be entitled to receive federal funding if they were to set up their own similar program,” but almost as many disagreeing. Agreement was much higher in Quebec, reaching 75 percent in 2006; outside Quebec, opinion was split equally between those who agreed (48%) and those who disagreed (49%).²

Fifteen years later, very little, if anything, has changed. One in two (51%) Canadians continue to agree that “provinces should be allowed to opt out of any new national program and be entitled to receive federal funding if they were to set up their own similar program,” including 63 percent of Quebecers, and 48 percent of Canadians outside Quebec.

Disagreement is now somewhat lower than it was previously (30% of Canadians, including 22% in Quebec and 32% in the rest of Canada, now disagree that provinces should be allowed to opt out and still received funding), but this change is likely due to the change in survey format from telephone to online, which results in an increase in the proportion that chooses not to express an opinion on the question.³

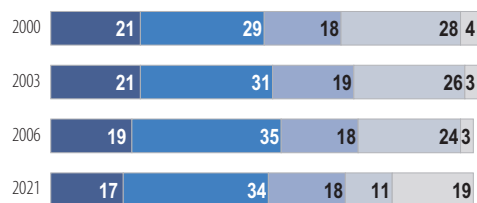
While agreement with the ability of provinces to opt out with financial compensation is highest in Quebec, it is almost as high in Saskatchewan (62%) and Alberta (57%); and it is lowest in Ontario (42%). In both Alberta and Ontario, the level of agreement is unchanged since 2006.⁴

Certain factors relating to support for opting out (with financial compensation) differ between Quebec and the rest of Canada. In Quebec, support for opting out increases with age, while the reverse is true in the rest of Canada.

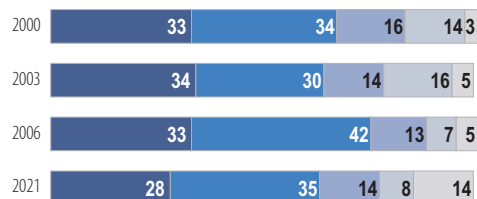
Should provinces be able to opt out of new national programs with compensation?

2000 – 2021

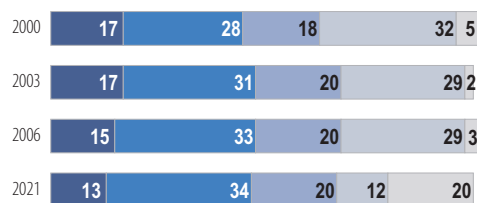
CANADA



QUEBEC



CANADA OUTSIDE QUEBEC



Legend:
■ Strongly agree
■ Somewhat agree
■ Somewhat disagree
■ Strongly disagree
■ Cannot say

Q.24

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Provinces should be allowed to opt out of any new national program and be entitled to receive federal funding if they were to set up their own similar program.

² These results are from the Environics Focus Canada surveys.

³ In 2021, 19 percent choose not to express an opinion either way, compared to only three percent in 2006. Generally speaking, survey participants are less likely to say they “don’t know” or “cannot say” in telephone surveys compared to online surveys, partly because these responses are not prompted by the interviewer.

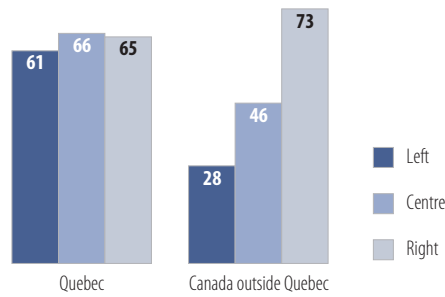
⁴ Agreement in Saskatchewan is higher today than it was in 2006, but this finding should be treated with caution as the sample size for Saskatchewan in 2006 was relatively small (N=128).

As a result, there is little difference in opinion on the issue between younger Quebecers and their counterparts in the rest of the country, but a significant difference between older generations. To the extent that Quebecers and other Canadians differ on this issue, this difference is centred (and preserved) in the minds of those old enough to remember the divisive constitutional debates of the 1980s and early 1990s.

In addition to age, support for opting out is also related to political ideology, but in different ways in the two parts of the country. Outside Quebec, it is the traditional left-right political ideology that matters. Most Canadians (outside Quebec) who place themselves on the right of the political spectrum agree that provinces should be able to opt-out with compensation; most of those who place themselves on the left do not (the proportions in agreement are 73% for those on the right, 46% for those in the centre, and 28% for those on the left).

In Quebec, however, the left-right political divide has no impact on opinions on this issue. In that province, support for opting out not surprisingly relates strongly to a different ideology entirely, namely support for sovereignty: 92 percent of Quebecers who describe themselves as “mainly sovereigntist” agree that provinces should be allowed to opt out of any new national program and be entitled to receive federal funding if they were to set up their own similar program, compared to 43 percent of those who describe themselves as “mainly federalist.”

Support for opting out, by political ideology Quebec and the rest of Canada, agree: provinces should be allowed to opt out



Q.24
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Provinces should be allowed to opt out of any new national program and be entitled to receive federal funding if they were to set up their own similar program.

National standards. Major federal-provincial transfer payments, such as the Canada Health Transfer and the Canada Social Transfer, are tied to minimal conditions – meaning that the federal government has little say in how the provinces choose to spend the funds. At times, however, the federal government has sought to negotiate agreements with provinces about specific program objectives or priorities in return for increased funding. It has also introduced new transfers in specific areas, such as child care, in return for spending commitments from provinces. Unconditional (or less conditional) transfers are favoured by those who see provinces as better placed to tailor spending to local priorities, which vary across the country. Conditional transfers are favoured by those who seek greater uniformity in programs across the country, and greater accountability from provinces as to how effectively the transfers they receive are spent.

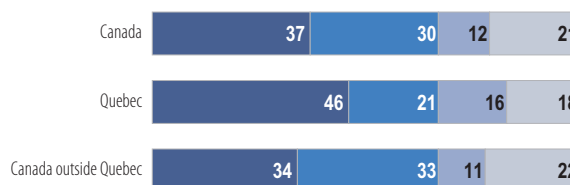
While the amount of money transferred by the federal government to the provinces and territories is a perpetual source of discussion and friction between the two orders of government, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed urgency to the conversation. Provincial and territorial health systems are under intense pressure. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted weaknesses in the country's social safety net, in areas such as a child care and care for the elderly.

In this context, the Confederation of Tomorrow 2021 Survey of Canadians asked about whether, and how, the federal government might provide additional funding in these areas.

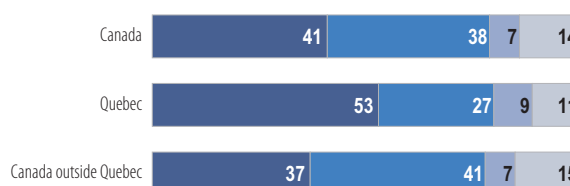
The survey finds that there is widespread support for the federal government providing more funding to provinces and territories in these areas, including eight in ten who favour more federal funding for health care (79%) and care for the elderly (79%), and almost seven in ten (67%) who favour more federal funding for child care. In each of these areas, only about one in ten say that the federal government should just continue to provide the same amount of funding as it does now, without any other changes.

Should more federal money for social programs should be tied to national standards?

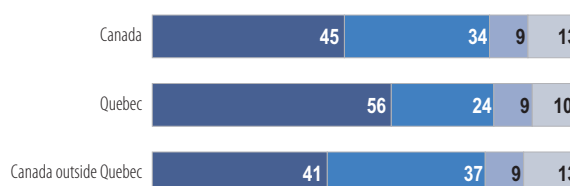
CHILD CARE



CARE FOR THE ELDERLY



HEALTH CARE



- Ottawa provides more funding; provinces decide how to spend
- Ottawa sets national standards; more money for provinces that meet them
- Ottawa provides same money as now; no other changes
- Cannot say

Q.26

As you may know, most important social programs in Canada are delivered by provincial and territorial governments. Which of the following do you think is the best way to improve the quality of services that Canadians receive in each of the following areas.

The public is more divided, however, as to whether increased federal funding should come with strings attached.

- A plurality (about two in five) say that the federal government should provide more funding to the provinces and territories, and let each province and territory decide how to spend this money to improve services in their area.
- About one in three say that federal government should create a single set of national standards for services in each of these areas, and then provide more funding only to those provinces and territories that meet those standards.

As is often the case on such questions, there is a noticeable difference in opinion between Quebecers and residents of the other provinces and territories.

- In Quebec, there is stronger support for more federal funding without conditions; a majority in the province support this option in the case of health care (56%) and care for the elderly (53%), and a plurality in the case of child care (46%). In each case, support for unconditional funding outweighs support for funding with national standards by about two-to-one.
- In the rest of Canada, the public is more or less evenly split on the question of whether additional federal funding should be tied to national standards. In the case of care for the elderly, support for more federal funding conditional on meeting national standards (41%) edges out support for unconditional funding (37%), but only slightly.

Beyond this difference, there are further differences among provinces and regions outside Quebec – although these are not always consistent across the three policy areas mentioned in the survey.

- Residents of the three **territories** are even more strongly and consistently favourable than Quebecers to more federal funds with no strings attached; a majority in the North favour this option in each of the three policy areas mentioned (child care, care for the elderly, and health care). **Manitobans** are also more likely to favour more unconditional as opposed to conditional funding in each

of these areas, though not by as wide a margin as either Quebecers or Northerners.

- In **Ontario**, in the case of both child care and health care, opinion is more or less split between favouring more federal funding while allowing provinces to decide how to spend this money to improve services in their area, and providing more federal funding only to provinces and territories that meet national standards. In the case of care for the elderly, which has attracted particular attention in the province during the pandemic, opinion leans more toward having national standards (43%) than toward transfers without conditions (35%).
- Like Ontarians, **British Columbians** are evenly split over whether unconditional or conditional increases in federal transfers are best, in two of the three policy areas. But the exception in B.C. differs from that in Ontario. When it comes to health care, residents of B.C. are ten points more likely to favour more federal funds with no strings attached (42%) than they are to favour more funding contingent on national standards (32%).
- In **Saskatchewan** and **Alberta**, opinion is more or less split between favouring more federal funding while allowing provinces to decide how to spend this money to improve services in their area, and providing more federal funding only to provinces and territories that meet national standards – with a slight exception in the case of care for the elderly in Alberta, where opinion favours having national standards, though by a relatively small margin.
- Patterns among the **Atlantic provinces** are less consistent. In each of the four provinces, a plurality favours more transfers without conditions in the case of child care. In the case of care for the elderly, opinions are split between the options of more federal transfers without or with conditions, except in PEI, where a plurality favours the unconditional option. In the case of health care, the region is more divided: opinions in PEI and New Brunswick are more favourable to more transfers without conditions, but are more evenly divided in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia.

There are few other consistent and significant differences in opinion on this question among other population groups; notably, views on whether or not increased federal funding for child care, care for the elderly or health care should come with national standards do not vary by gender; they also do not vary between those who say they personally have been more or less affected by the pandemic.

Opinions, however, do vary among supporters of the main federal parties, in expected ways. In the case of child care,

for instance, Bloc Québécois supporters (66%) are the most favourable to increased federal funding without conditions, followed by supporters of the Conservative Party (43%). By contrast, pluralities of Liberal Party (38%), NDP (38%) and Green Party (40%) supporters favour more federal funding tied to national standards. Only in the case of the Bloc Québécois, however, does a clear majority favour one of the options over the other.⁵ With the exception of the Bloc, therefore, this is an issue that divides opinion *within the main federal political parties* as well as between them.

⁵ This pattern is consistent across the three policy areas asked about in the survey. A bare majority (50%) of Conservative Party supporters favour unconditional transfers in the case of health care.

Trust in federal and provincial/territorial governments

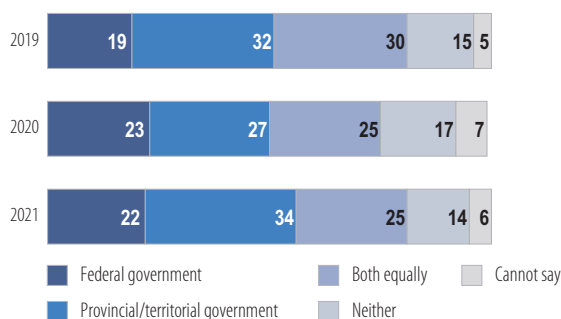
Overall, the pandemic has not significantly affected which government Canadians trust more to manage the health care system. Opinions continue to be divided, with one in three trusting their provincial or territorial government more, one in four trusting both governments equally, and one in five trusting the federal government more. Opinions as to which government is trusted more to make the right decisions in managing the COVID-19 pandemic are similarly divided. In this case, however, there is also considerable variation across the country. The proportion trusting their provincial or territorial government more to manage the pandemic is highest in the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Prince Edward Island; the proportion trusting federal government more is highest in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Throughout the pandemic, political leaders at all levels of government and in all regions have experienced a mix of public support for the measures they have enacted to respond to the crisis, and public frustration over their failure to respond faster or more effectively. In terms of popularity, some have fared better than others. The Confederation of Tomorrow 2021 Survey of Canadians, however, attempts to explore the impact of the pandemic less in terms of support for individual political leaders or parties, and more in terms of support for the different orders of government in the federation – though the two issues are often inevitably intertwined.

Managing the health care system. Overall, the pandemic has not significantly affected which government Canadians trust *more* to manage the health care system. Opinions continue to be divided, with one in three (34%) trusting their provincial or territorial government more, 25 percent trusting both governments equally, and 22 percent trusting the federal government more. An additional 14 percent trust neither government, and six percent do not offer an opinion.

Views are similar to those expressed in the two years preceding the pandemic. The proportion trusting their provincial or territorial government more to manage the health care system is up seven points (from 27% to 34%) since early 2020 (prior to the pandemic); however, it had declined by five points in the preceding year (from 2019 to

Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in managing the health care system?



Q.25a
Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas: Managing the health care system?

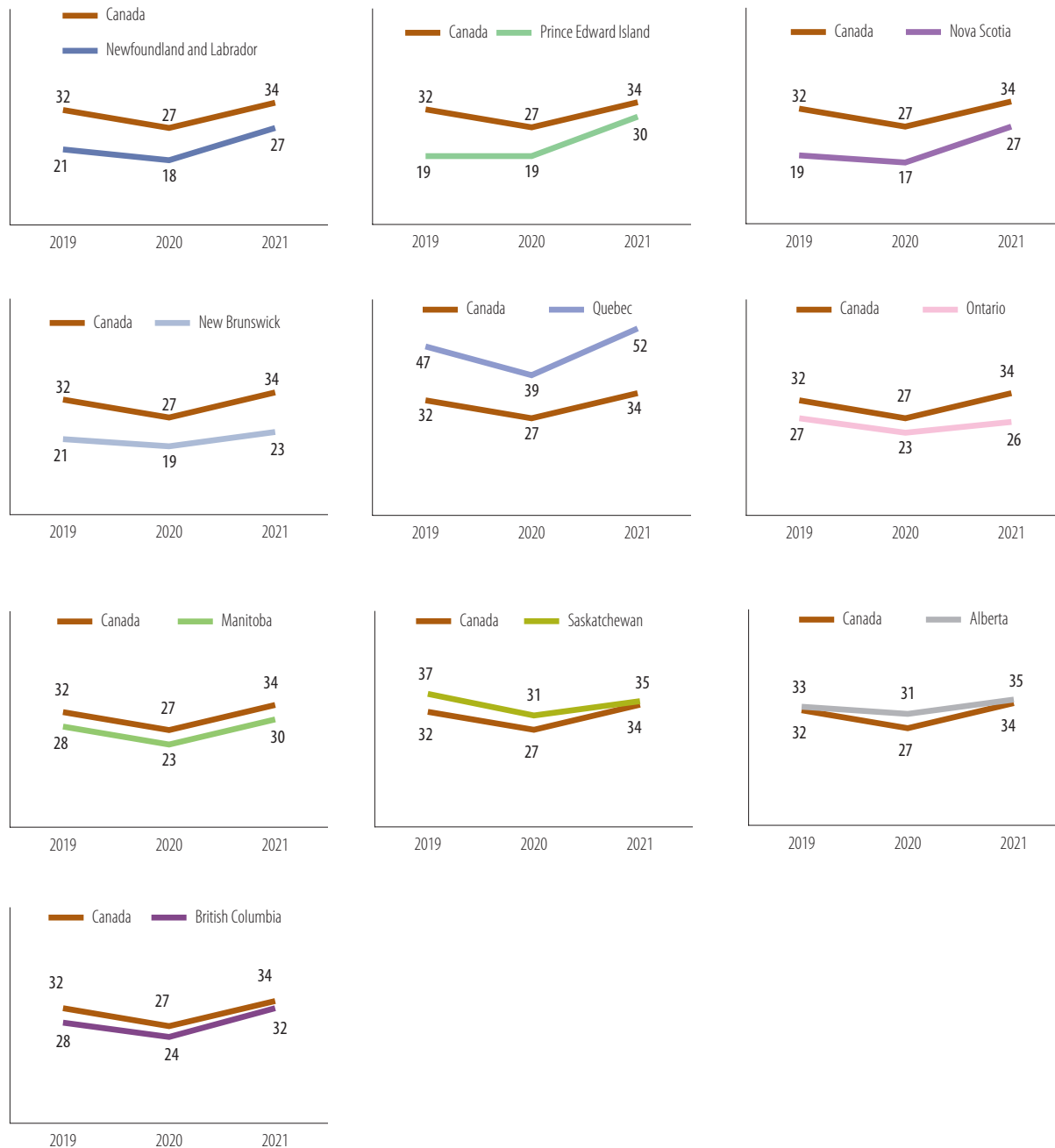
2020) – there is, thus, no longer-term trend. Notably, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, there has been no change, in either direction, in the proportion saying they trust neither the federal nor their provincial or territorial government to manage the health care system.

Underneath this national pattern, there have been some changes within individual jurisdictions. In the past year, the proportion trusting their provincial or territorial government more to manage the health care system has risen most significantly in the Northwest Territories (+16 points), Quebec (+13 points), PEI (+11 points), Nova Scotia (+10 points), Newfoundland and Labrador (+9 points), Nunavut (+9 points), B.C. (+8 points) and Manitoba (+7 points). In a number of these provinces, this increase mirrors the national trend in that it reverses a drop experienced in the previous year; this is true particularly in Quebec, Manitoba and B.C.

In Atlantic Canada, an increase over the past year in the proportion trusting their provincial or territorial government more to manage the health care system (+8 points) is accompanied but a decrease in the proportion saying they trust neither government (-9 points).

Finally, in both Saskatchewan and Alberta, there have been increases over the past two years (since 2019) in the proportions trusting the federal government more to manage the health care system (+12 points in each province), and an offsetting drop in the proportion trust both their provincial government and the federal government equally and, to a lesser extent, in the proportion trusting their provincial government more.

Trust my provincial government more to make the right decisions in managing the health care system



Q.25a

Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas: Managing the health care system?

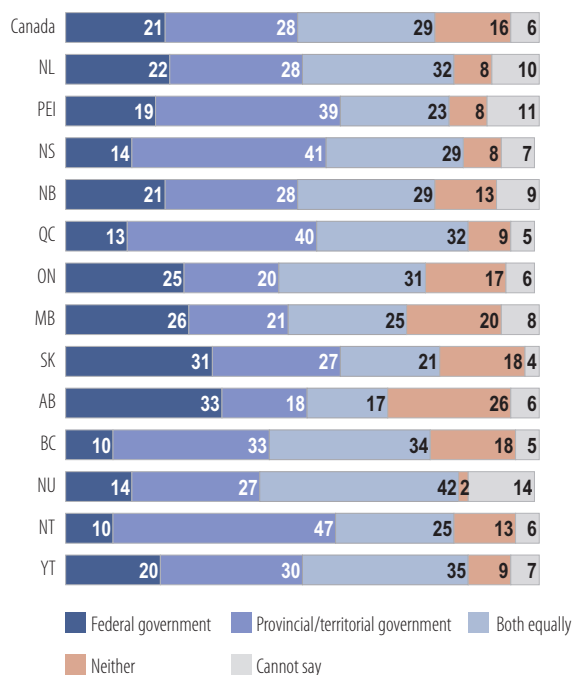
Managing the pandemic. As is the case with health care, opinions as to which government is trusted *more* to make the right decisions in managing the COVID-19 pandemic are fairly evenly divided: 29 percent of Canadians trust both the federal and their provincial or territorial government equally; 28 percent trust their provincial or territorial government more; 21 percent trust the federal government more; and 16 percent trust neither.

There is considerable variation across the country, however.

- The proportion trusting their provincial or territorial government *more* to manage the pandemic is highest in the Northwest Territories (47%), Nova Scotia (41%), Quebec (40%) and Prince Edward Island (39%). It is lowest in Manitoba (21%), Ontario (20%) and Alberta (18%).
- The proportion trusting federal government *more* to manage the pandemic is highest in Alberta (33%) and Saskatchewan (31%); and lowest in Nova Scotia (14%), Quebec (13%), B.C. (10%) and the Northwest Territories (10%).
- The proportion trusting both governments equally is highest in Nunavut (42%), Yukon (35%), B.C. (34%), Newfoundland and Labrador (32%), and Quebec (32%).
- The proportion trusting neither government is highest in Alberta (26%).

Provincial or territorial governments have been responsible for deciding when to impose and when to lift different restrictions in the effort to contain the spread of the virus; the survey results suggest that some of these governments are seen as having managed these decisions better than others. As is the case with managing the health care system, it is somewhat reassuring that, at a time of acute crisis, most Canadians place their trust in either one or government or the other, or in both equally, while relatively few say they trust neither. This is consistent with other findings of the survey which show, for instance, that there has been no overall decline in trust in governments in general since the onset of the pandemic.⁶

Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in managing the COVID-19 pandemic?



Q.25f
Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas: Managing the COVID-19 pandemic?

⁶ See the earlier report in this series: *All in this Together? Canadians' Views on Masks, Vaccines and Lockdowns during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, available at <https://www.environmentalinstitute.org/projects/project-details/all-in-this-together-canadians-views-on-masks-vaccines-and-lockdowns-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.



**Environics
Institute**

**The Environics Institute
for Survey Research**

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

416 969 2457
www.environicsinstitute.org