



Canadian
Survey

AmericasBarometer

2025 SERIES

Brief

Public support for autocratic leaders in Canada and the USA

Do Canadians and Americans support strong
leaders and restrictions on the opposition?



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

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AmericasBarometer

These results are from the Canadian portion of the 2025–26 AmericasBarometer, a regular comparative survey of democratic values and behaviours that covers countries in North, Central and South America, as well as a significant number of countries in the Caribbean (the 2025–26 study will cover 20 countries).

The project is led by the LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy (CGD) and was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with CGD's LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University and with the support of the Max Bell Foundation.

The survey was conducted online with a sample of 3,550 Canadians (aged 18 and over) between July 30 and August 7, 2025. The results are weighted by region, age, gender, education and language so as to be fully representative of the Canadian population.

This report also includes results from the companion survey conducted in the United States. This survey was conducted online with a 1,600 Americans, 18 years of age and older, between October 3 and 16, 2025. The results are weighted by region, age, gender, education and ethnicity so as to be fully representative of the American population.

[See our website for more reports from this survey.](#)

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Introduction

One of the most consequential trends in politics and governance over the past decade has been the deterioration of democratic institutions and norms in many parts of the world. A mounting number of countries are now governed by strong leaders exerting their power over legislatures, media and the courts. In some cases, leaders have well-entrenched authoritarian rule, as in Russia, China, Hungary, Honduras, Belarus, and Myanmar. Other countries with established constitutional democracies are being challenged by an emergent authoritarian populism that prioritizes a strong national leader to address apparent existential threats.

The United States fits this second category, as President Donald Trump has upturned his country's established democratic norms through his domination of the government and exerting his will in both domestic and foreign policy. In Canada, the country's parliamentary system remains intact but the economic and existential threats posed by the USA has set the stage for Prime Minister Mark Carney to take an outsized executive role in leading the country.

Given this political context, how do Americans and Canadians feel about the powers afforded to their national leader over other branches of government and the media? In these difficult economic times are they looking for an autocratic-style national leader to take control of the government to address current challenges?

Insight into this question is provided by the AmericasBarometer survey research program that encompasses population surveys on democracy, governance and civic engagement in 20 plus countries spanning the western hemisphere, conducted biennially since 2006. Our focus here is on results from the most recent surveys in Canada and the USA (conducted in July – September 2025) and how opinions on this issue have changed or not over the past few years.

Is it good to have a strong leader who bends the rules to get things done?

Canada

Would Canadians like to see a strong Prime Minister who may bend the rules to get things done? In 2025, the public is evenly divided on this question. One-third say this type of national leader is a very good (6%) or good (26%) idea, compared with the same proportion who believe it is a bad (23%) or very bad (9%) idea. The remainder (36%) have no clear opinion either way.

The current public sentiment on this issue is essentially the same as what was recorded in 2023, but more divided than in 2021 when a plurality of Canadians endorsed the idea of a strong Prime Minister bending the rules (38% saying it was a good thing, versus 26% who disagreed). This pattern over time suggests that stronger public support for strong political leadership in 2021 was due in large part to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic still gripping the country at that time, when citizens were relying on government benefits and public health measures to keep everyone safe.

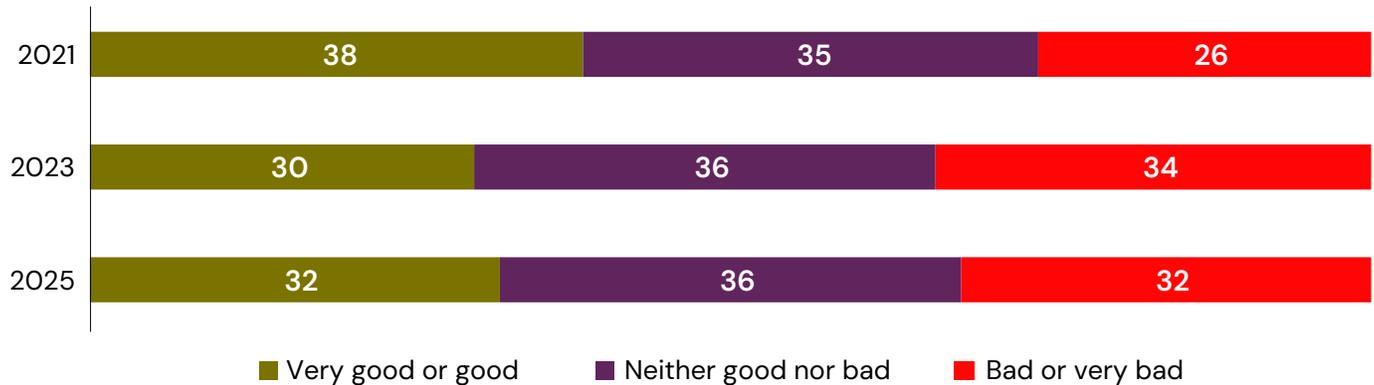


Liberal Party supporters are the most likely to say a strong national leader bending the rules is a good thing. But the gap in opinions across the three main national parties is not substantial, and actually narrowed over time.

Figure 1

Is having a strong leader who bends the rules a good or bad form of government?

Canada, 2021 - 2025



Is it a good or bad form of government for our country to have a strong leader who may bend the rules to get things done?

How do opinions on this issue compare across the country? Some differences are apparent, but all show the same shift in sentiment over the period 2021 to 2025. Support for a strong national leader who bends the rules is currently most evident among Canadians 18 to 29 years of age, men, first generation in the country, and those without a high school diploma. Opinions also vary a bit across regions, with the idea of a strong national leader tilting more positively in Ontario and Atlantic Canada, and less so in Alberta and British Columbia.

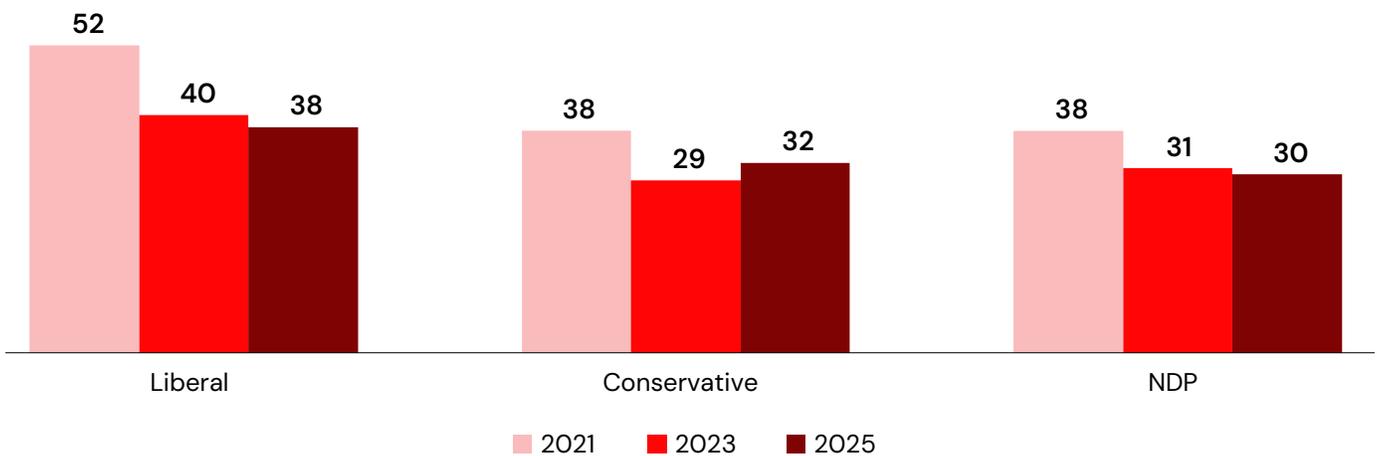
We would expect to see that Canadians' views about the relative power exercised by the Prime Minister strongly influenced by whether or not their preferred party forms the government. The survey results show evidence of this, as Liberal Party supporters are the most likely to say a strong national leader bending the rules is a good thing. But the gap in opinions across the three main national parties is not substantial, and actually narrowed over time between 2021 and 2025.

The drop in support for this idea took place across party lines, but most significantly among Liberal Party supporters; they remain the most likely to endorse a strong leader bending the rules but now are also equally as likely as Conservative and NDP voters to say it is a bad one.

Figure 2

Having a strong leader who bends the rules is a good form of government

Canada, 2021 – 2025, by federal party support



Is it a good or bad form of government for our country to have a strong leader who may bend the rules to get things done?

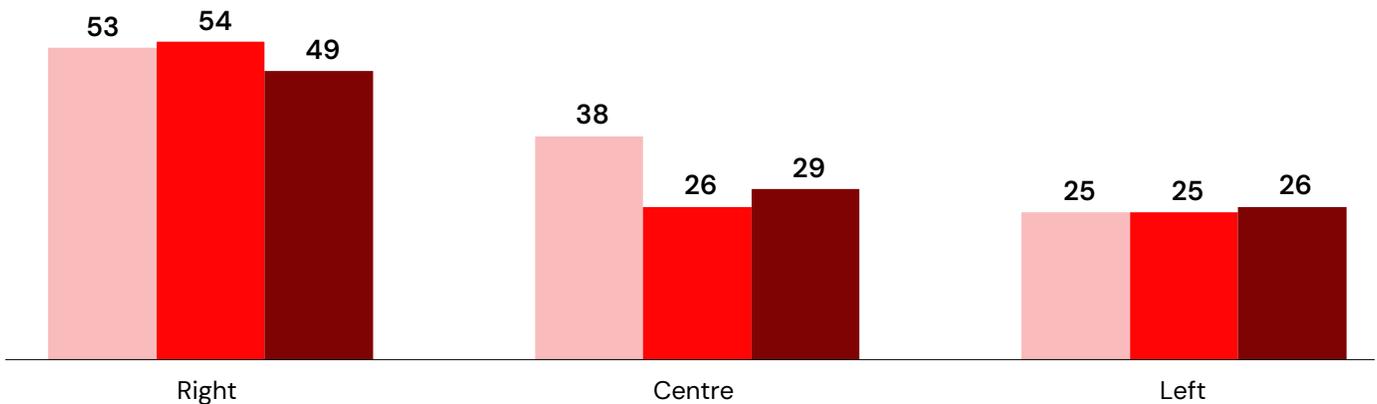
What appears to matter more than party support is one's broader political ideology along the classic left-right spectrum. As might be expected, it is Canadians who identify themselves on the political right who most favour the idea of a strong national leader who bends the rules to get things done – by a two-to-one margin (49% say this is a good idea, versus 24% who believe it is a bad idea).

Almost the reverse perspective is expressed by those on the political left (26% good, versus 44% bad), while those in the centre reflect the national division (29%, versus 31%). What is most notable is that opinions expressed by those on both the political left and right have held largely steady between 2021 and 2025, with the decline in positive support for strong leaders occurring primarily among those in the centre.

Figure 3

Having a strong leader who bends the rules is a good form of government

Canada, 2021 – 2025, by political ideology



Is it a good or bad form of government for our country to have a strong leader who may bend the rules to get things done?

These findings suggest that Canadian public opinion about strong national leaders who bend the rules to get things done is less about which particular party or leader forms the government, as about one's general political ideology. Party support and political ideology are closely linked, with Liberal Party and NDP voters leaning clearly to the left while Conservative Party supporters are more likely to align with the political right; but in all parties, fewer than one in ten place identify with the extreme of the spectrum (either "10" on the right or "1" on the left), and six in ten place themselves in the centre.

United States

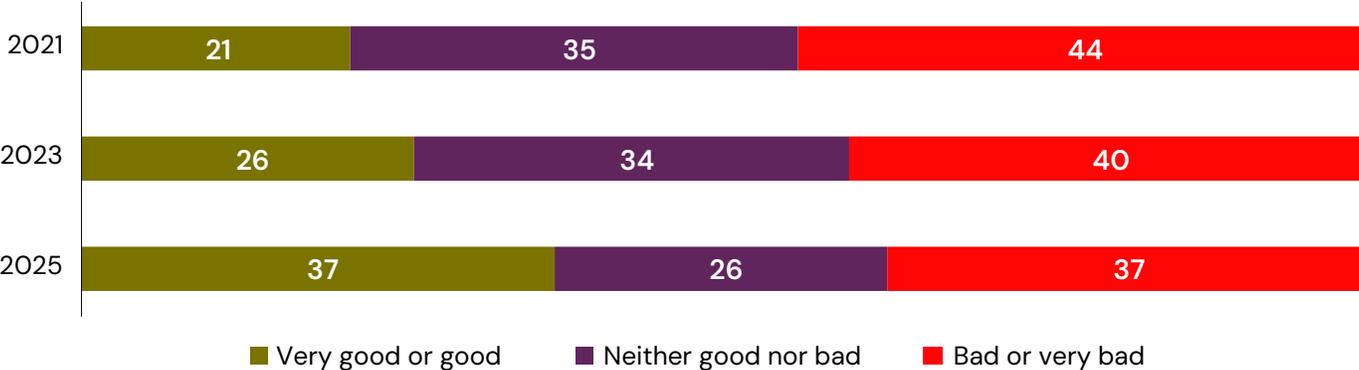
The American public's perspective on strong national leaders who bend the rules is broadly similar to what Canadians say, but reflects a very different trajectory over time. In 2025, Americans are also evenly divided between those who think this is a good (37%) or bad (37%) form of government, the difference from Canada being that a larger proportion of Americans are definitive in stating this idea is either very good (15%) or very bad (16%).

These current numbers reflect a significant shift since 2021, when the American public was twice as likely to oppose (44%) as support (21%) the strong leader model of government. This may reflect a very different public reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic than witnessed in Canada – in the form of opposition to government interventions to control the spread of the virus and its deadly effects. But given most of the change in sentiment over time took place between 2023 (when the pandemic was mostly over) and 2025, this shift is more about the change in presidency from Joe Biden to Donald Trump, and Republican support for his strong-arm style of executive power.

Figure 4

Is having a strong leader who bends the rules a good or bad form of government?

United States, 2021 – 2025



Is it a good or bad form of government for our country to have a strong leader who may bend the rules to get things done?

The rise in public support for a strong leader who bends the rules is most apparent among American men, and especially young men (ages 18 to 34). This group’s embrace of the idea swelled from 30 percent in 2021 to 59 percent in 2025 (up 29 percentage points). Young women are also more likely than before to share this view, but in much fewer numbers (rising from 24% in 2021 to 32% in 2025).

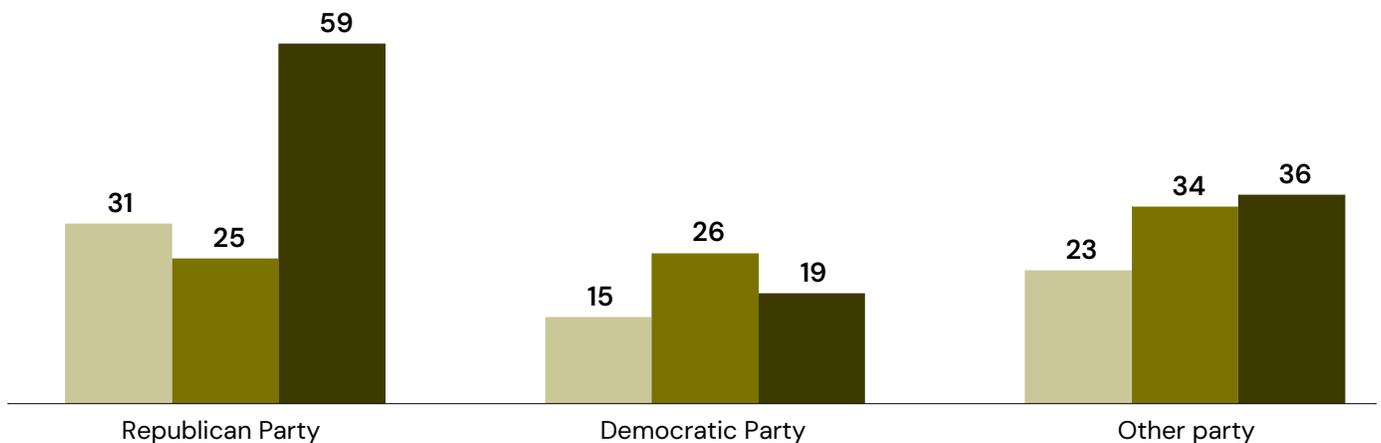
But the main story on this question is about political party affiliation, as we might expect given the sharp partisan division now driving US politics:

- **In 2021** (early in Joe Biden’s administration and during the pandemic), Republicans were twice as likely as Democrats to favour a strong leader who bends the rules, but in both parties a larger proportion proclaimed this a bad idea (40% and 52%, respectively).
- **By 2023** (well into Joe Biden’s term and post-pandemic), the difference in viewpoint between the two parties narrowed as Republicans became less enamored with strong leaders and Democrats (and third party supporters) became more so.
- **By 2025** (months into Donald Trump’s second term), the partisan divide rebounded strongly, mostly as Republican support for strong leaders more than doubled, while Democrats’ rejection of this kind of leadership did the same. The proportion of Republicans who say strong leaders who bend the rules is very good for government shot from 6 percent in 2023 to 25 percent in 2025. Over the same time period, the number of Democrats who believe this is very bad doubled (from 15% to 32%).

Figure 5

Having a strong leader who bends the rules is a good form of government

United States, 2021 – 2025, by political party support



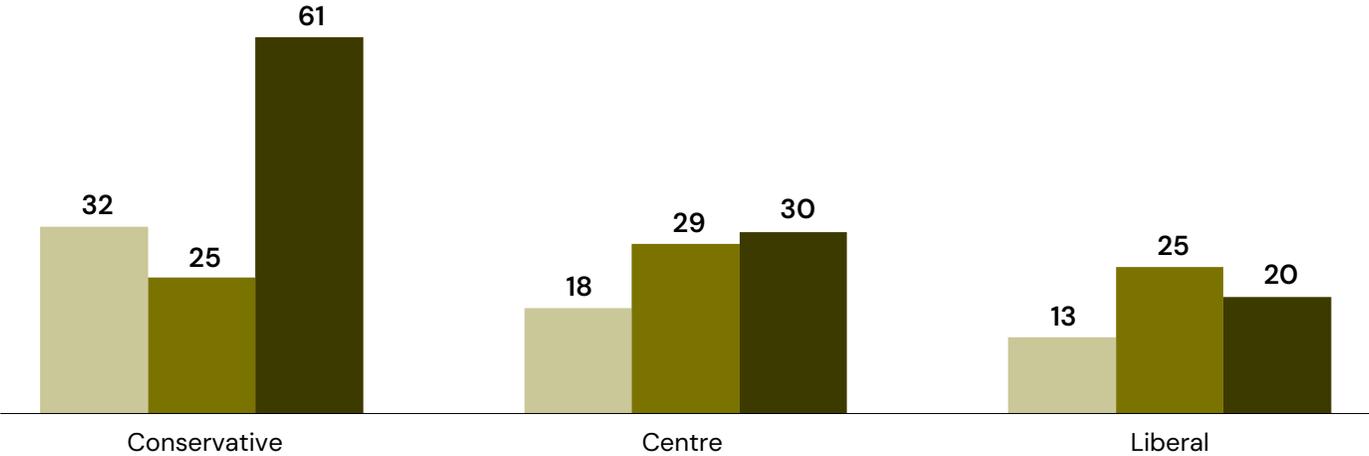
Is it a good or bad form of government for our country to have a strong leader who may bend the rules to get things done?

A similar pattern appears across the spectrum of Americans' political ideology, with the views of Republicans and Democrats mirroring those who identify on the political right (conservative) and left (liberal), respectively. In 2025, more than half (61%) of those who identify as conservative say it is good for leaders to bend the rules to get things done, compared with just one in five (20%) liberals.

Figure 6

Having a strong leader who bends the rules is a good form of government

United States, 2021 – 2025, by political ideology



Is it a good or bad form of government for our country to have a strong leader who may bend the rules to get things done?

Party identification among US voters is strongly tied to political ideology, although not everyone lines up exactly. Just over half (53%) of Republicans identify as conservatives, while four in ten Democrats (40%) identify as liberals. A sizeable proportion of voters in both parties (42% and 48%, respectively) place themselves in the political center.

Should national leaders be able to limit the voice of opposition parties?

Canada

Another way in which national leaders might extend their authority over democratic institutions is by limiting the voice of opposition parties (e.g., in Parliament). Canadians as a whole are much more likely to reject than embrace this concept, although notably a plurality do not have a clear opinion either way.

In 2025, almost four in ten (38%) disagree with the premise that “it is necessary for the progress of this country that our prime ministers limit the voice and vote of opposition parties”, of which 26 percent disagree in the strongest way (responding with a “1” on a 7-point scale). In comparison, only one in ten (11%) agree with the statement, of which four percent strongly agree (“7” out of 7). Half (51%) place themselves in the middle between these two positions, neither clearly positive nor negative about this type of prime ministerial power.



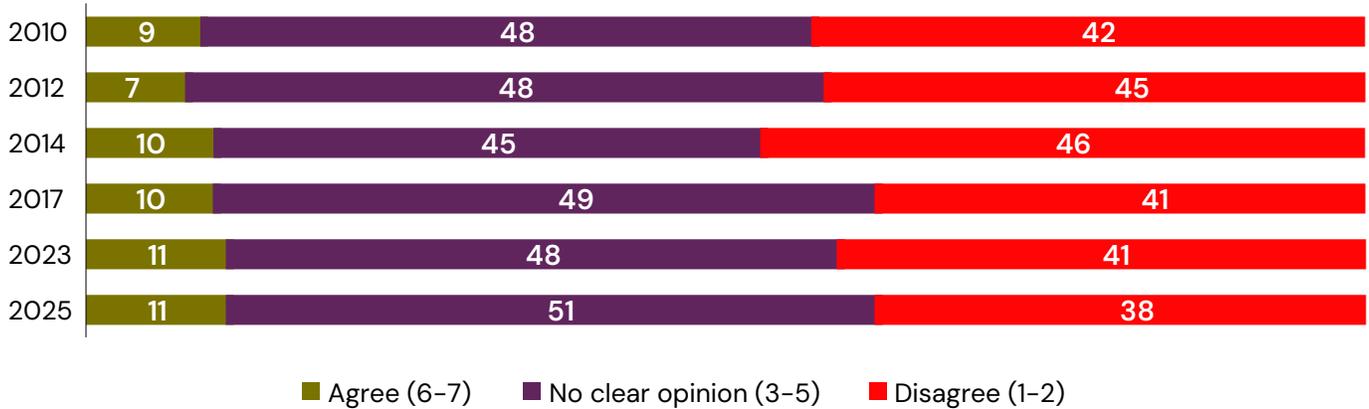
Canadians as a whole are much more likely to reject than embrace the idea that national leaders should limit the voice of opposition parties.

Canadian public opinion on this question has been generally consistent over the past 15 years, with opposition to strong prime ministerial power most widespread in 2012 and 2014 (during the later years of Stephen Harper as the country’s leader), when close to half expressed disagreement.

Figure 7

Should prime ministers limit the voice and vote of opposition parties?

Canada, 2010 – 2025



Agree or disagree: It is necessary for the progress of this country that our prime ministers limit the voice and vote of opposition parties.

This consistent national trend notwithstanding, Canadians' opinions are based in part on whether their political party of choice is running the government. In 2010 and 2012 when Stephen Harper was in office, disagreement with strong prime ministerial powers came predominantly from supporters of the opposition parties (e.g., just above 60% among Liberal, NDP and BQ voters, respectively, in 2012), among whom no more than four percent endorsed the concept. The balance of opinion among Conservative Party voters was also negative toward prime minister power over opposition parties, but the margin was much smaller (32% disagree, versus 12% agree in 2012).

In more recent years with a Liberal Party government in power, it is now Conservative Party supporters who are most likely to disagree with this concept (51% in 2023 and 49% in 2025). But public objections to strong prime minister powers are less driven by partisan concerns than a decade or so ago. Notably, opposition party supporters are less likely to oppose prime ministerial powers during recent and current Liberal governments of Trudeau and Carney than the now decade-old Conservative government of Harper.

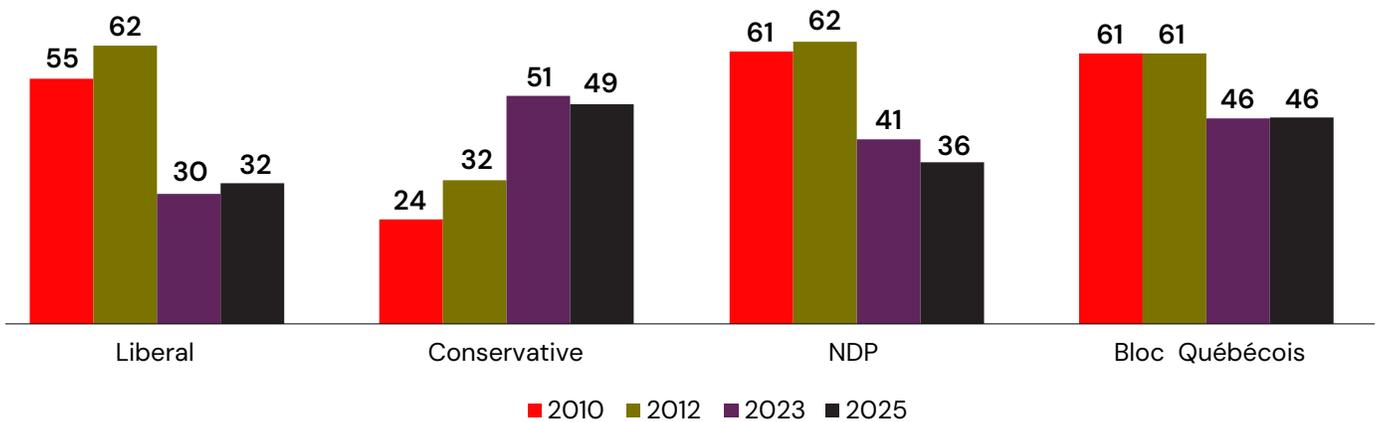
In 2025 (early in the mandate of Mark Carney facing the country's most significant foreign policy challenges in generations), Liberal Party supporters are twice as likely to disagree (32%) than agree (15%) that prime ministers should have the power to limit the voices of opposition parties.

Figure 8

Disagree: prime ministers should limit the voice and vote of opposition parties

Canada, 2010 – 2025, by federal party support

Agree or disagree: It is necessary for the progress of this country that our prime ministers



limit the voice and vote of opposition parties.

United States

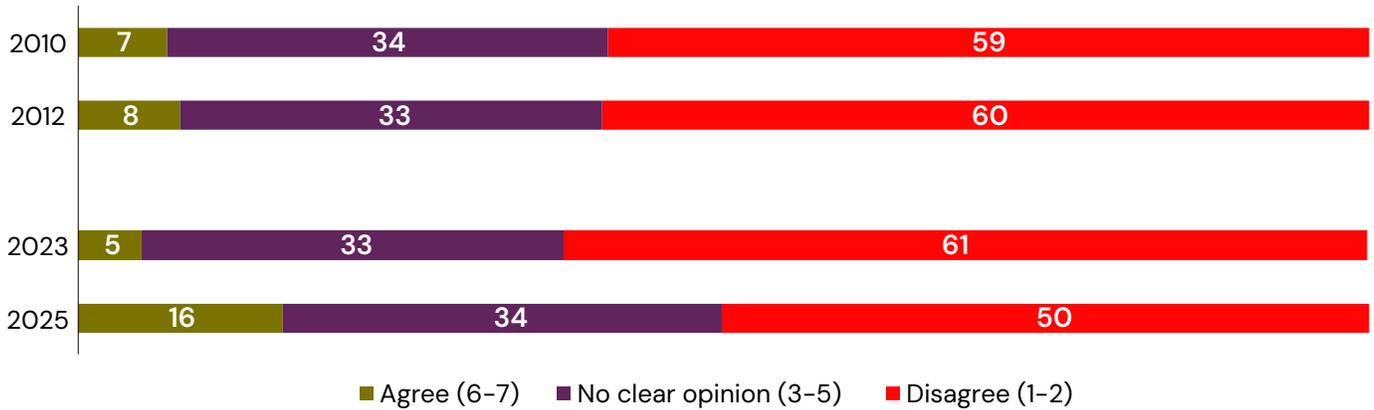
Americans also express opposition to their presidents limiting the voice and vote of opposition parties in Congress, but are more likely than Canadians to be definitive in their opinions. In 2025, half (50%) disagree with the statement, compared with one in six (16%) who agree with it.

US public opposition to this type of presidential power over opposition parties has been generally consistent stretching back to 2010, but 2025 marks a noticeable shift of roughly 10 percentage points in the direction of agreement with the statement.

Figure 9

Should presidents limit the voice and vote of opposition parties?

United States, 2010 – 2025



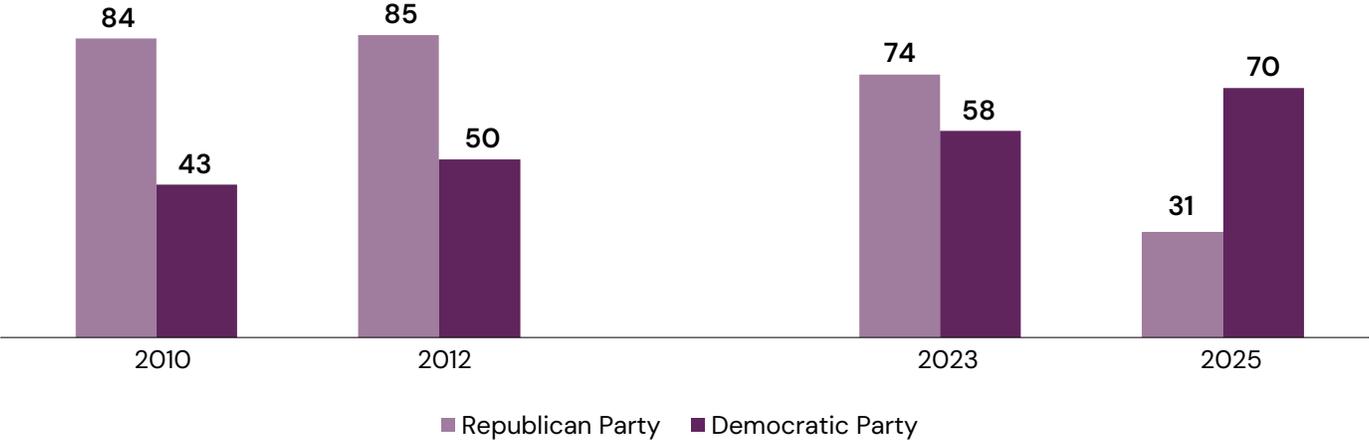
Agree or disagree: It is necessary for the progress of this country that our presidents limit the voice and vote of opposition parties.

As expected, opinions differ dramatically by political party support, based on which party holds the White House. During the Obama and Biden administrations, Republicans opposed such executive powers by much higher margins than Democrats. In 2025 with Donald Trump early in his second term, these proportions essentially flip, with Democrats now disagreeing with the statement by more than two to one (70%, versus 31%), compared with one-quarter (23%) of Republicans now expressing agreement that presidents should limit opposition parties. This polarized split notwithstanding, Democratic voter opposition to such powers has increased in each successive year this question was posed to Americans (e.g., even during the years their party held the presidency).

Figure 10

Disagree: presidents should limit the voice and vote of opposition parties

United States, 2010 – 2025, by political party support



Agree or disagree: It is necessary for the progress of this country that our presidents limit the voice and vote of opposition parties.



Other indicators of public support for autocratic leadership

Canada

The survey included three additional questions (first asked in 2025) that provide further indication of the extent of public support for strong national leader powers that reflect an autocratic or authoritarian style of government.

A clear majority of Canadians reject each of the three types of strong powers:

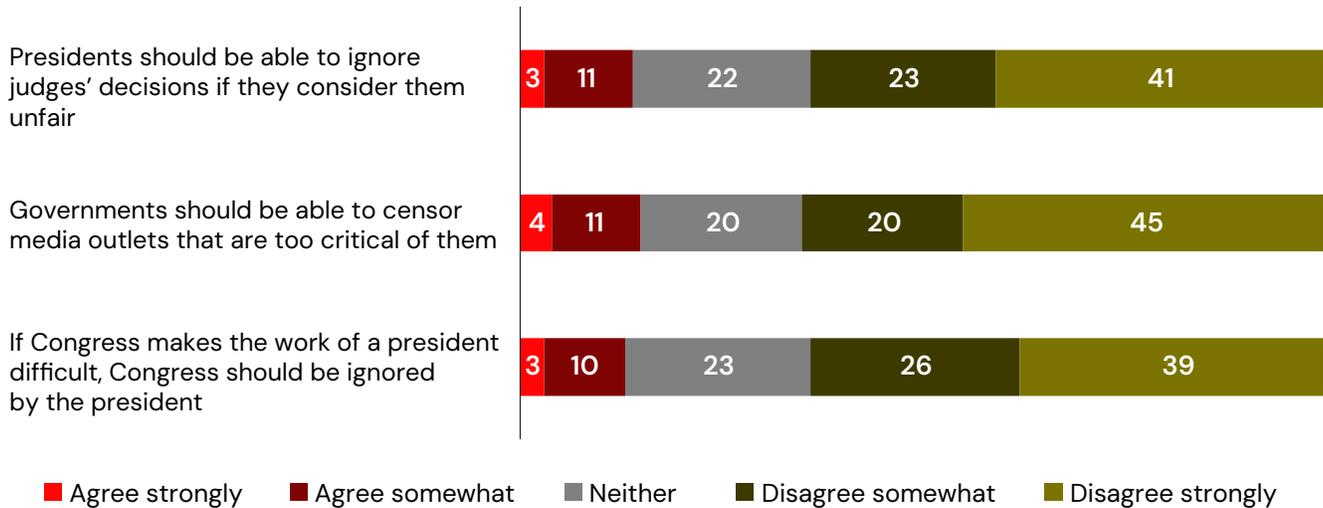
- Two-thirds somewhat (26%) or strongly (39%) disagree with the premise that the prime minister should ignore Parliament if it makes the work of the prime minister difficult.
- Two-thirds somewhat (20%) or strongly (45%) disagree that governments should be able to censor media outlets that are too critical of them; and
- Two-thirds somewhat (23%) or strongly (41%) disagree that prime ministers should be able to ignore judges' decisions if they consider them to be unfair.

The strength of such opposition to these types of executive power is underscored by the fact that a plurality in each case strongly disagree, compared with fewer than five percent who strongly agree.

Figure 11

Indicators of public support for autocratic leaders

Canada, 2025



Canadians' opinions on these questions stand out as being surprisingly consistent across political partisan lines. Clear majorities of Liberal, Conservative, NDP and Bloc Québécois supporters disagree with all three types of strong executive power, with fewer than one in five expressing agreement.

In no group of Canadians is there anything approaching majority support for these types of autocratic leader powers, but these ideas are most likely to be endorsed by younger people and those with less formal education. For instance, Canadians 18 to 29 oppose prime ministers ignoring judges' decisions by a two-to-one margin (48% disagree, versus 23% agree). But this idea is much more firmly rejected by older people, especially those ages 60 plus (76%, versus 8%).

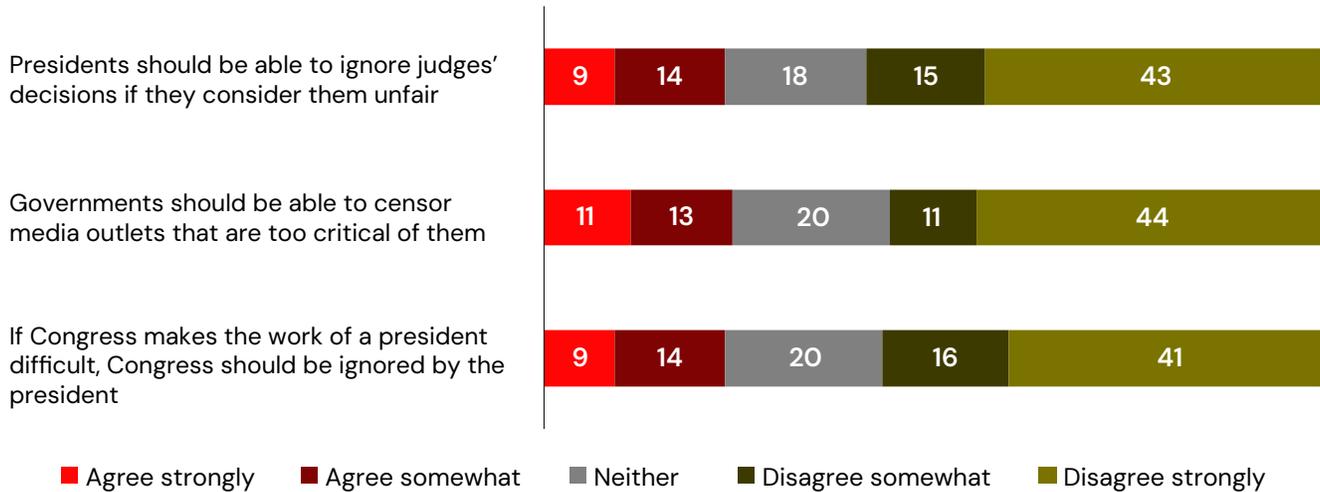
United States

Americans' views of these strong leader powers look notably similar to those of Canadians at a national level. Majorities oppose each of the three statements, with more than four in ten who strongly disagree. Americans are a bit more definitive in their opinions in comparison with their northern neighbours, being slightly more likely to strongly agree and less apt to somewhat disagree.

Figure 12

Indicators of public support for autocratic leaders

United States, 2025

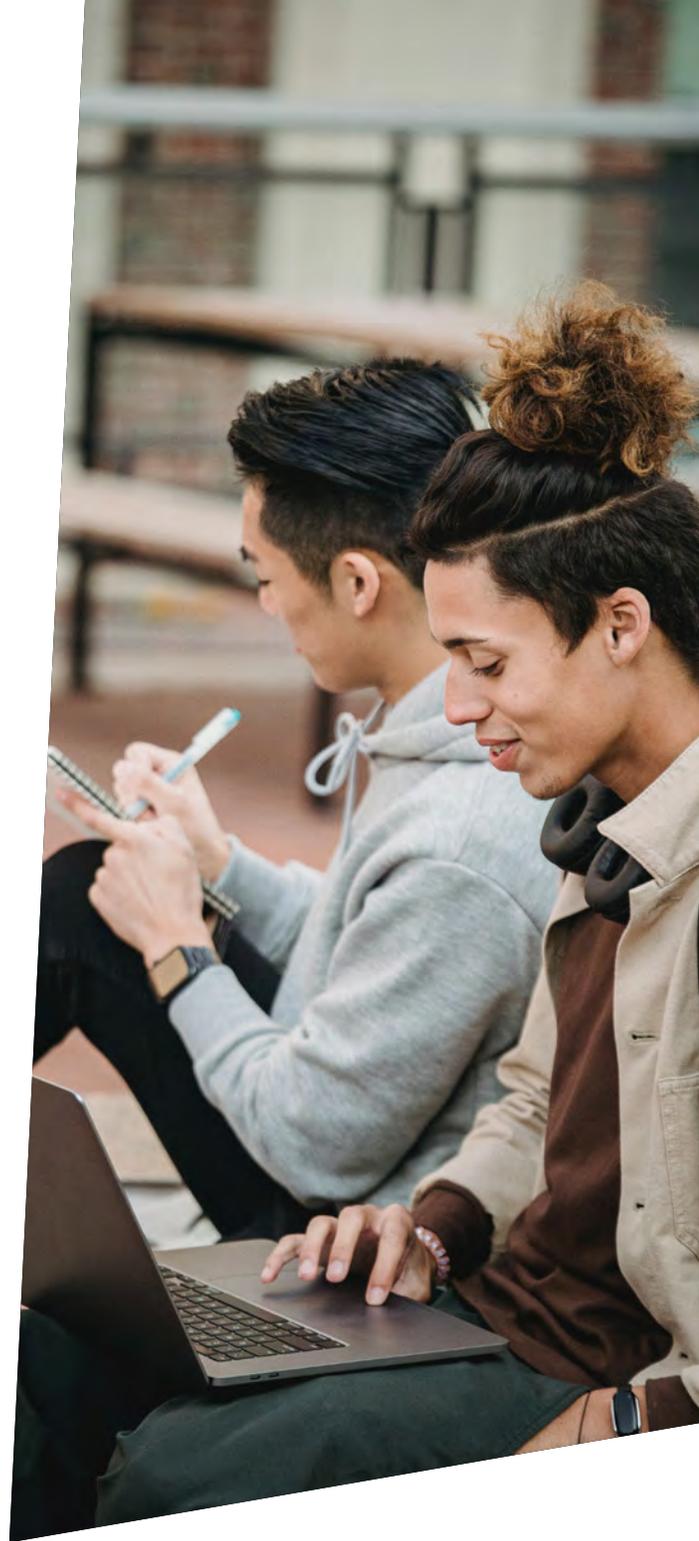


Where the two countries diverge sharply is how partisan politics shapes opinion. Republican Party supporters are divided on the merits of such autocratic powers; in each case opposition outweighs support but by a close margin (between 4 and 10 percentage points). In comparison, large majorities of Democratic voters reject these measures, with two-thirds voicing strong disagreement. For instance, Republicans are more likely to disagree than agree with the government censoring critical media (43%, versus 33%). Among Democrats the margin is much larger (72%, versus 15%). Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to strongly disagree with this statement (65%, versus 27%).

As in Canada, Americans' views of strong leader powers are partly a function age. Young Americans are the most likely to agree with these statements about exercising power over Congress, judges and the media, although in each case this remains a minority opinion. But unlike in Canada, educational attainment is less of a factor in how such powers are viewed.



Republican Party supporters are divided on the merits of autocratic powers; in each case opposition outweighs support but by a close margin. In comparison, large majorities of Democratic voters reject these measures, with two-thirds voicing strong disagreement.



Conclusion

Do Canadians and Americans endorse the idea of their national leaders exerting their executive powers to govern as they see fit? In 2025, the public in both countries are equally divided on the merits of strong leaders bending the rules to get things done. As expected there is a partisan dimension to this issue, as more favourable opinions are expressed by those who support the government and leader in power. But while this divide is now substantial in the USA (with Trump in the White House) and much less evident in Canada.

Opinions about autocratic leadership looked very different in 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, Canadians were more likely than not to say that it was a good idea for their country to have a strong leader who bends the rules to get things done. Americans by comparison opposed this idea by a two-to-one margin. Since that year, viewpoints have converged as Canadians have become less supportive of such strong leader power and Americans (notably Republicans) have become more so. These opposing trends provide some reassurance to Canadian commentators concerned that MAGA-style politics might catch on north of the border.

Apart from bending the rules from time to time, in 2025 there is little support in either country for national leaders who overstep their authority over other institutions. Only small minorities of Canadians and Americans believe their leaders should be able to limit the voice and vote of opposition parties, censor media that is critical of them, or ignore judicial decisions they consider unfair; in both countries a strong plurality express strong disagreement in each case.

Once again, there is a partisan dimension to such views, as those who support an opposition party are most widely opposed to autocratic leadership. But this partisan divide is much more evident in the U.S. where political polarization more broadly is feeding institutional paralysis and violence in the streets in some cities. By comparison, Canadians with opposing political views are more likely than not to share a common perspective on the executive role of their prime minister.



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