

# The Economy, Life Satisfaction and Religion: Canada in the Americas Context

This final section focuses on topics outside the main themes covered in the AmericasBarometer 2012 study, but which further enhance our understanding of how Canadians compare with citizens in other countries throughout the western hemisphere. Included are questions about overall life satisfaction, the economy and household financial well-being, the importance of religion and desirable traits in children.

## Overall life satisfaction

The very first question on the survey asks respondents how satisfied they are in general with their life.

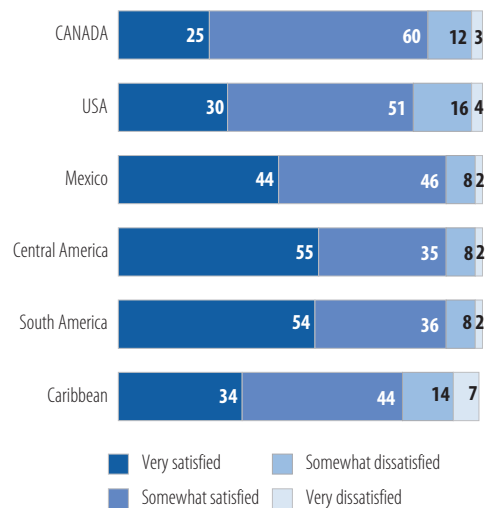
More than eight in ten Canadians report to be at least “somewhat” with their lives, but only one in four (25%) are “very” satisfied, and this reflects a modest decline since 2010, when 29 percent made this assessment.

Canadians are less likely than citizens of most other countries to describe themselves as very satisfied with their lives, although no more apt to say they are dissatisfied. Citizens in Central and South America are most likely to say they are very satisfied with their lives, although there is considerable variation across countries: This assessment is reported by six in ten or more residents of such countries as Brazil, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Panama and the Dominican Republic, compared with fewer than one in six living in Haiti and Suriname. Dissatisfaction is most evident in Haiti (33%), although this is a dramatic improvement since 2010 and before.

Across the Americas, life satisfaction ratings have improved in most countries, especially since 2010.

In Canada, strong life satisfaction is most widespread in Atlantic Canada and Manitoba/Saskatchewan, as well as among Canadians 60-plus and those on the political right. This assessment is least apt to be reported among residents of Montreal, those in the lowest income bracket and those on the political left. Since 2010, strong life satisfaction declined most noticeably among Canadians aged 45 and over.

## Overall satisfaction with your life



It would seem counterintuitive that citizens of wealthy countries like Canada and the USA would be less likely to be very satisfied with their lives overall. International studies generally show that happiness (a related measure) generally increases with income, although it is also been documented by Canadian economist John Helliwell and others that income is only one of many factors influencing personal happiness, others being social support, mental health and individual values. Canadians may indeed be among the wealthiest of the hemisphere’s citizens; but their frame of reference is themselves and other Canadians, and the recent recession and other trends (stagnant incomes, youth unemployment) may be having an impact. Evidence for this comes from the recently-reported decline in the newly-developed Index of Canadian Wellbeing over the 2008 –2010 period.

## National economic trends

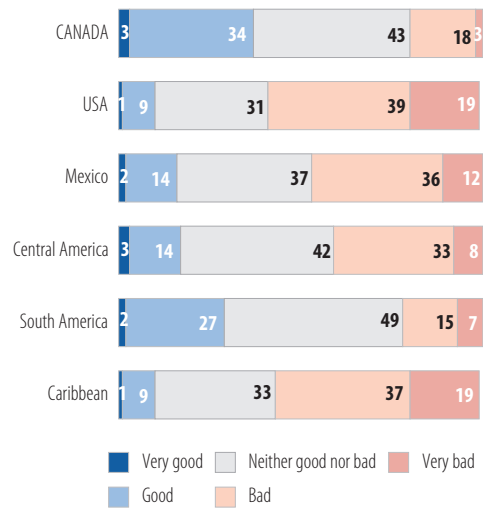
**CURRENT NATIONAL ECONOMY.** Canadians may not be the happiest citizens, but they are far and away among the most positive about their national economy. Close to four in ten (37%) describe the country's current economy as good or very good, compared with 21 percent who say it is bad or very bad. This stands in sharp contrast to citizens of many other countries in other regions. Only Uruguayans are more upbeat (43% good versus 13% bad). The most negative assessments are given in El Salvador, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the USA.

Canadians' assessment of their current national economy has remained steady since 2010. Views about the country's economy are the most positive among residents of Alberta, Manitoba/Saskatchewan, and Toronto, as well as younger Canadians, men, immigrants, those with more education and income, those on the political right and those very satisfied with their life overall. Negative assessments are most evident in Quebec, and among Canadians with the least education and income.

**ECONOMY COMPARED WITH LAST YEAR.** Despite the generally positive views on the Canadian economy, only one in five (20%) say that the current economic situation is now better than it was 12 months ago, compared with one-quarter (23%) who believe it is now worse. This represents a sharp drop from 2010, when almost twice as many (37%) felt the economy was improving (versus 21% who said it was getting worse). Canadians' perceptions of the economic trend is largely similar to the hemispheric average, although somewhat less apt to feel their economy is getting worse. A positive economic trend is most apt to be reported by citizens of Uruguay (38%) and Suriname (33%), while a declining trend is most evident in Honduras (59%), the Dominican Republic (58%) and El Salvador (55%).

In Canada, residents of Alberta (34%) are most likely to see the economy improving, along with younger Canadians, those with higher incomes and education, and those on the political right. This perspective is least apt to be shared by Quebecers (9%), Canadians with the least income and those on the political left.

## Your country's current economic situation



## Household financial circumstances

**CURRENT HOUSEHOLD FINANCES.** In terms of individuals' own household financial situation, Canadians are twice as likely to describe it as very good (5%) or good (35%), as describe it as bad (16%) or very bad (4%), and this assessment is essentially unchanged from 2010. Predictably, Canadians are more upbeat than citizens in most other countries in the hemisphere, although by no means the most positive. Good or very good household finances are reported by four in ten or more of those living in the South American countries of Brazil, Argentina, Guyana and Ecuador, and are least evident in Haiti (12%) and the Dominican Republic (14%), where four in ten describe their situation as bad.

Across the Americas, household economic circumstances have shown improvement, especially since 2010. In some countries the lowest point was in 2008 (e.g. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras), and in others the high point was in 2010 (Peru, Bolivia, Chile).

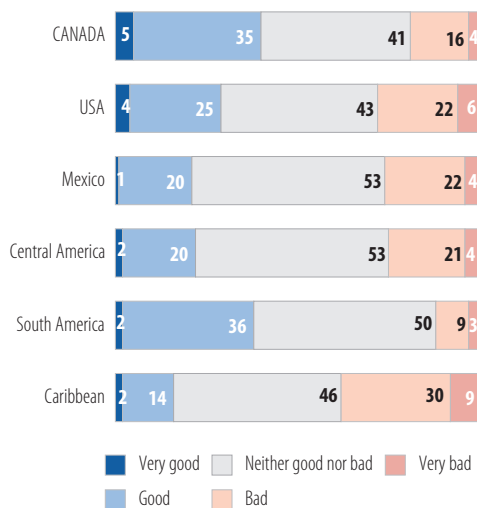
In Canada, descriptions of personal economic circumstances vary predictably by household income, ranging from 19 percent among those earning annual household incomes of less than \$30K, to 70 percent among those earning more than \$100K. To a lesser degree, positive reports are more prevalent among residents of Manitoba/Saskatchewan (51%) (versus 34% in B.C.), those 60-plus, immigrants and those on the political right.

### PERSONAL ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

**COMPARED WITH LAST YEAR.** While Canadians are among the most positive about their personal economic circumstances, their sense of how this has changed or not over the past year falls largely on the hemispheric average. One in five (20%) report their circumstances have improved, while a slightly larger proportion (24%) say it is now worse (the rest saying there has been no change). These results are essentially unchanged from 2010.

As with current assessment, it is South Americans who are most likely to report their personal finances have improved over the past year, notably those in Uruguay (38%) and Brazil (34%). Worsening conditions are most widely described by citizens of the Dominican Republic (46%), Honduras (43%) and El Salvador (40%), with this assessment reported by one in three Mexicans (34%) and Americans (32%).

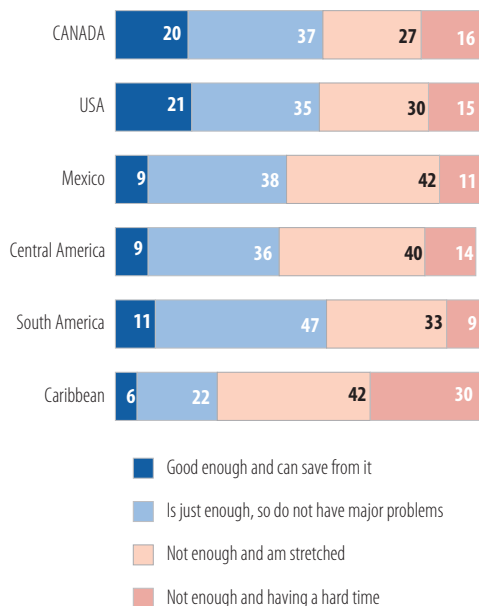
### Your own current economic situation



**ADEQUACY OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME.** Overall income is an important predictor of economic well-being, but perhaps more important is the extent to which income is sufficient to meet individuals' needs. Close to six in ten Canadians report their current household income is adequate, either that it is "good enough for them and they can save from it" (20%) or "is just enough so they do not have any major problems" (37%). More than one in four (27%) say their income "is not enough for them and they are stretched," while one in six (16%) go farther in reporting it "is not enough and they are having a hard time." These proportions are essentially unchanged since 2010. Adequacy of income is a good predictor of overall life satisfaction: Not having enough income is reported by one in five (21%) Canadians very satisfied with their lives, compared with 67 percent of those who are dissatisfied.

Compared with the hemispheric average, Canadians are somewhat more represented at both extremes, as are Americans. The variation across countries is not as significant as national economies might predict – in every country, a majority of citizens place themselves in one of the two middle categories. The Caribbean presents the greatest contrast, as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are the most likely of all to say they have enough and can save (26%), while economic hardship is most widely reported in Jamaica (32%), the Dominican Republic (31%) and Haiti (30%).

### Your own current household income is ...



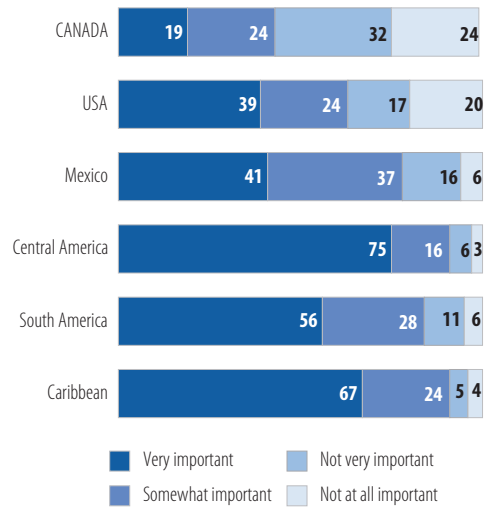
## IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION

Other research has documented a gradual decline in Canadians' affiliation to religious faiths, and this suggests that religion itself is becoming less important generally. One in five (19%) say religion is very important in their life and another 24 percent indicate it is somewhat important, while the majority maintain it is not very (32%) or not at all (24%) important. These proportions are essentially unchanged since 2010.

On this question, Canada stands out clearly from almost every other country in the western hemisphere – especially those in Central America and the Caribbean, where strong majorities say religion is very important, most widely in El Salvador (85%) and Guatemala (80%). The only other country comparable to Canada on this issue is Uruguay (where 23% say very important, versus 38% who say not at all).

In Canada, religion is most apt to be seen as very important among residents of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Canadians 60-plus, immigrants, those on the political right and evangelical Christians. Those most apt to say religion is not at all important to them include residents of B.C. and Quebec, Canadians under 45 years of age, those in the top income bracket and those on the political left. Importance on religion is positively correlated with overall life satisfaction.

### Importance of religion in your life



## DESIRABLE TRAITS IN CHILDREN

An interesting indicator of social values is what people consider to be positive traits for children to have. This year's survey asked whether it is most important for children to have "independence" or "respect for adults," or both of these traits equally. On this question, Canada and the USA stand in sharp contrast to the rest of the hemisphere: most citizens of both countries say that both of these traits are of equal importance in raising children.

By comparison, a clear majority in every other country places the greatest emphasis on respect for adults. The breadth of this view is most widespread in the Dominican Republic (94%), El Salvador (92%) and Nicaragua (89%), and comparatively lower in Chile (56%). No more than one in ten citizens in any country believe that independence is more important than respect for adults (with this perspective most evident in Peru (13%) and Honduras (12%).

The view that children should be raised with both independence and respect for adults is the clear majority view across Canada. Respect for adults attracts somewhat more of an endorsement in Quebec and Vancouver (25% in each), among men (23%) and evangelical Christians (31%). Independence is most apt to be favoured among Canadians on the political left (15%).

### Most important characteristic for children

