

AmericasBarometer

*The public speaks on democracy
and governance in the Americas*

Canada 2017 

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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AmericasBarometer



The AmericasBarometer (www.AmericasBarometer.org) is a multi-country public opinion survey on democratic values and behaviours in the Americas, conducted every two to three years by a consortium of academic and think tank partners in the hemisphere.

The research is coordinated by Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), which has been supporting surveys on governance for many years, beginning in Costa Rica in the 1970. This research has grown over time and now encompasses North America, Latin America and the Caribbean (covering 29 countries representing 99% percent of the hemisphere's population). It is the only comprehensive survey project of its kind in the Western Hemisphere.

The AmericasBarometer is a unique research project that contributes to our understanding of the changes in how citizens across the hemisphere view their country on key issues of democracy and governance. This research represents a unique body of public opinion data that is used extensively by academic researchers, governments, and organizations such as the World Bank, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme

AmericasBarometer and Canada



The focus of the AmericasBarometer has been on Latin America, in tune with the changing dynamics of governance and democracy in this continent over the past decade. The inclusion of Canada in this international research project is significant given the country's long standing adherence to a democratic system, its tradition of good governance, and because of its proximity as an alternative to the US model.

The inclusion of Canada in this year's AmericasBarometer survey is especially timely because of recent trends both in the western hemisphere and elsewhere in the world, notably the election of Donald Trump as US President, the rise of anti-government sentiments, nationalism and populism in parts of Europe, and major economic and political challenges facing such countries as Venezuela and Brazil. Many are now wondering if Canada may soon be following a similar path, and this research helps to answer the question.

Canada was first included in AmericasBarometer surveys in 2008 and 2010. In 2012, the Environics Institute for Survey Research joined the research consortium as the Canadian partner, and has conducted the Canadian research in 2012, 2014 and now in 2017.

2017 AmericasBarometer survey

The 2017 AmericasBarometer survey was conducted in 29 countries, with a total sample of approximately 40,000 individuals (fieldwork in some countries was completed in 2016). The questionnaire includes a core set of questions and was administered in each country by the domestic research partner. In all countries except Canada and the USA, the survey was administered in-person in people's homes.

The Canadian survey focused on the following themes:

- Attitudes about democracy
- Confidence in the political system and institutions of government
- Confidence in the justice system and the protection of human rights
- Tolerance for political dissent
- Confidence in the national economy and household financial circumstances

The Canadian survey was conducted online in English and French, with a representative sample of 1,511 Canadians (aged 18 and over) between March 24 and April 4, 2017. The sample was weighted by region, age and gender to match the country's population.

The AmericasBarometer results from the other 28 countries are not yet available, and will be published in a separate report in Fall 2017.

Overall trends

Canadians' level of confidence in their country's democracy, political system and central institutions has changed very little over the past three years, and continues a stable trend dating back to 2010. On most measures, public opinion has either not changed or improved modestly since 2014.

As before, Canadians are generally positive about their system of government and democracy, with a more mixed assessment of the central institutions of government. The public continues express the most trust in the Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP and Supreme Court, and much less so when it comes to the political system (e.g., Parliament, political parties) and the mass media.

The change in government in Ottawa since 2014 (and its change in "tone") appears to have had a positive effect in terms of improving public confidence in the Prime Minister and in how elections are run. Opinions between Canadians on the left and those on the right of the political spectrum are now less polarized than three years ago.

There is no clear evidence of growth in anti-government or populist sentiment among Canadians over the past three years. However, the public's commitment to democracy as the only form of government has weakened a bit over this period.

Overall trends (continued)

Canadians' faith in the country's democracy is further reflected in a sustained belief in the importance of free speech and tolerance of political dissent. Public confidence in the protection of human rights, including the right to a fair trial, has held steady for most of the past decade.

The stable or improving results may in part reflect improved confidence in both the national economy and ones' own household financial circumstances, in both cases now somewhat stronger than in 2014.

Income inequality remains an issue on the radar for most Canadians, but it is not manifested in a growing divide in confidence about economic conditions or the country's democracy and central institutions. Canadians at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder mirror the national average in terms of showing stable or improving opinions about the topics covered on this survey. There is no evidence of a growing segment of the population feeling economically or politically alienated.

Group trends

Within these stable national trends, there have been some notable shifts within specific parts of the population since 2014:

Age/generation. Younger Canadians (aged 18 to 29) have become more positive in their views about democracy and the country's institutions. In most cases this either erases or reverses a generation gap from previous years (when older Canadians were the most confident). At the same time, this young cohort is the least committed to democracy as the best or only form of government.

Political orientation. The most dramatic shift is a significant boost in confidence among Canadians (13% of the population) who identify as being on the political left, with this change likely in response to the new government in Ottawa. Opinions among those on the political right (22%) tend not to be quite as positive, but in most cases have held steady or improved modestly over this time. Both of these groups are now more confident than the majority (65%) who place themselves in the middle of the political spectrum.

Region. The most notable changes are in western Canada, with improving opinions on some (but not all) measures in Alberta and British Columbia, and the opposite trend in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (where confidence in the national economy has declined sharply since 2014). Quebecers continue to have less confidence than other Canadians in the country's democratic system.