

# Assessment of Government Performance

This section probes Canadians' assessment of how well their governments are performing, against expectations and priorities about how they should be governing. To address the different levels of jurisdiction, the survey sample was randomly divided into three groups, each of which was asked a core set of questions with specific reference to the federal government, their provincial government or their local municipal government. The combined data for all three groups provide a holistic picture of public opinion, while the subsets reveal similarities and differences in perceptions across jurisdictions.

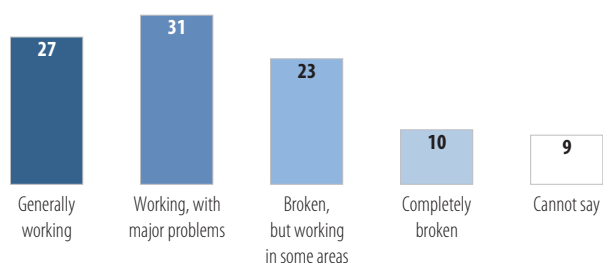
## Are governments in Canada working?

*Canadians are more likely to see their governments as working versus broken, especially at the municipal level. But public opinion is divided on whether government represents the solution or the cause of important problems facing society today.*

Canadians were asked a global question about the effectiveness of governments in their country today, borrowed from the 2013 survey of Americans conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute and The Brookings Institution (see footnote 2). Overall, opinions are mixed, based on the combined data across federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions. Just over half of Canadians are positive, with one in four (27%) saying government is "generally working", and another three in ten (31%) who believe it is "working, with major problems." One in three are negative, indicating government is "broken, but working in some areas" (23%) or "completely broken" (10%). One in ten (9%) could not offer an opinion on this question

Public assessment of government is notably consistent across the population. Positive views are a bit higher among men, while belief that government is broken is most evident among French-speakers, Canadians aged 45 and older, and those working in the non-profit sector. A key factor appears to be direct experience with a government agency or service in the previous 12 months: Among those very satisfied with this service experience, 68% say that government is

Are governments in Canada working?



Q.8

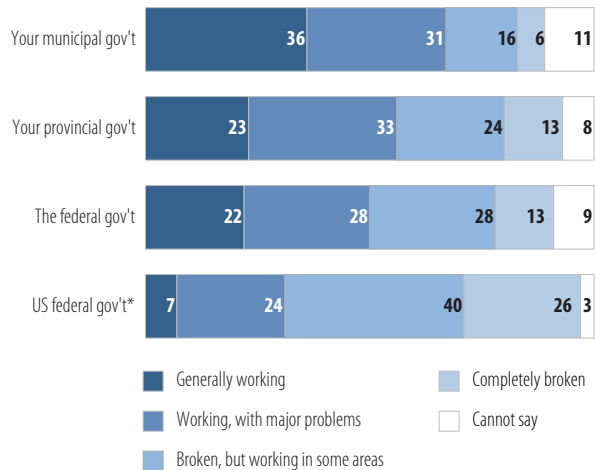
*Would you say that [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government today is: ... ?*

*[adapted from Brookings 2013 US survey]*

generally working; this drops to 37 percent among those somewhat satisfied, and declines further to only seven percent among those who are not satisfied (61% of this group says government is broken). Individuals who have not had any government experience in the past year are somewhat more negative than average (42% working, versus 36% broken), with one in five (22%) in this group unable to offer an opinion.

## Are governments in Canada working?

By jurisdiction



\* Source: Public Religion Research Institute/The Brookings Institution, 2013

Q.8

Would you say that [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government today is: ... ?

[adapted from Brookings 2013 US survey]

## HOW DO PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS VARY ACROSS JURISDICTIONS?

There is some difference in how Canadians view their governments as working versus broken, with municipal governments receiving the most positive assessment (67% generally working or working with problems), followed by provincial governments (55%) and then the federal government (50%).

While the federal government receives the lowest public rating in Canada, it reflects a more positive view in comparison with the US government: Only seven percent of Americans in 2013 said their federal government is generally working, compared with 66 percent who say it is partially or completely broken.

Across Canada, jurisdiction does not have much impact on how citizens assess the effectiveness of their governments. Municipal governments are somewhat more likely to be seen as working by residents of cities ranging from 5,000 to 100,000 in population. Provincial governments are most positively rated in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (31% say it is generally working), and least so in Quebec (15%, versus 44% who say broken). Quebecers are also the least likely of all Canadians to say the federal government is generally working (12%). At all levels, satisfaction with a recent experience with a government agency or service is closely related to opinions about whether that level of government is working or broken.

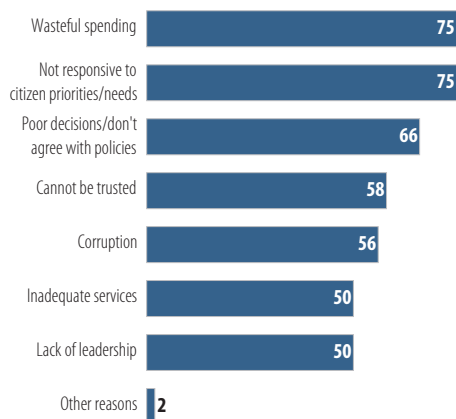
**HOW GOVERNMENTS ARE BROKEN.** The third of Canadians critical of their government’s effectiveness were asked in what way they believe it is partially or completely broken. The question offered seven response options, with the opportunity to volunteer additional reasons. Results show that views about why governments encompass multiple reasons: Each of the seven reasons presented was selected by at least half of respondents.

Three quarters of Canadians who believe governments are broken say it is because of wasteful spending (75%) and/or because it is not responsive to citizen priorities or needs (75%), while two-thirds (66%) say it is because of poor decisions or policies they do not agree with. Smaller majorities believe their government cannot be trusted (58%) or cite corruption (56%), while half attribute their assessment to inadequate service levels (50%) and/or lack of leadership generally (50%). Two percent cite other reasons, while notably only one percent are unable to offer any response to this question.

This question was framed in terms of a specific level of government (tied to the previous question), and there is some variation in responses by jurisdiction. Those who say the federal government is broken are more likely to emphasize it not being responsive to citizen priorities and needs (78%), while provincial governments are most apt to be criticized for wasteful spending (79%). Municipalities fare the best, and are less likely than the senior levels of government to be seen as broken because of unresponsiveness, lack of trust, corruption or inadequate levels of service.

Subsample sizes are too small to support in depth analysis by regional and demographic subgroups, but a few patterns emerge. Albertans are most likely to attribute broken governments to wasteful spending, corruption and lack of leadership (across all jurisdictions). Older Canadians and those who are highly engaged tend to emphasize most of the listed reasons.

### How is government broken?



### How is Government Broken?

By Jurisdiction

	Municipal	Provincial	Federal
Wasteful spending	74	79	71
Not responsive to citizen priorities/needs	62	72	78
Poor decisions/don't agree with policies	66	65	68
Cannot be trusted	44	63	60
Corruption	44	62	58
Inadequate services	32	54	56
Lack of leadership	50	49	51

Q.9

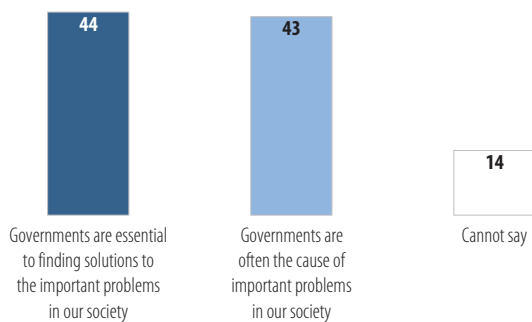
*In what way is [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government broken?*

**GOVERNMENT AS THE SOLUTION VERSUS THE CAUSE OF PROBLEMS.** The survey also examined the broader question about the role and impact of government on society, specifically in terms of whether it is seen as the solution or the cause of important problems facing society today. Canadians are evenly divided on this question, with 44 percent expressing the view that government is essential to finding solutions to important problems, while a comparable proportion (43%) maintain that government is often the cause of such problems. Another 14 percent do not offer an opinion either way.

This division of opinion is evident across the population, to a greater or lesser degree. Those most likely to see government as the solution live in the Toronto area, have higher levels of education and income, are immigrants and are highly engaged. Those most apt to see government as the problem live in rural communities, are French-speaking, and older (especially 60 plus). As might be expected, views on this question are highly correlated with whether Canadians see government as generally working (66% say government is the solution versus 26% who see it as the problem) or completely broken (18% versus 75%).

Across jurisdictions, opinions are most divided among those focusing on the federal government (44% solution versus 42% problem). Opinions are somewhat more positive among those responding in terms of their provincial government (47% versus 41%), and results are similar across provinces. Canadians are comparatively most positive about the capability of their municipal government to address rather than cause problems (47% versus 38%).

Is government the solution or the cause of problems?

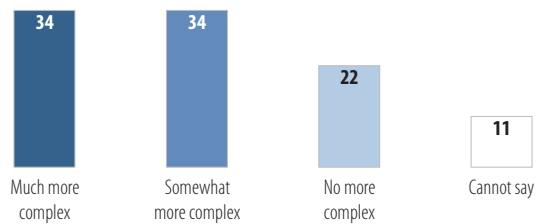


Q.15  
Which of the following two statements about [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government is closest to your own view, even if neither is exactly right?

**ARE THE ISSUES FACING GOVERNMENT TODAY MORE CHALLENGING?** Given the public's expectations and dissatisfaction with their governments, is there any appreciation that the issues facing governments today are more challenging than they were 10 years ago? Most Canadians accept this reality, with seven in ten agreeing the issues today are much more (34%) or somewhat more (34%) challenging than they were a decade ago. One in five (22%) maintain that the issues facing government today are no more complex than before.

Opinions on this question are consistent regardless of whether the question is in response to the federal, provincial or municipal government, and is also similar across the population. The view that government challenges are no different from before is most apt to be expressed in Quebec and by French-speakers, older Canadians and those critical of government generally (e.g., 40% among those who believe that government is completely broken)

Are the issues facing government today more complex than 10 years ago?



Q.16  
Do you believe the issues facing [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government today are: ... ?

## Government performance across dimensions of governance

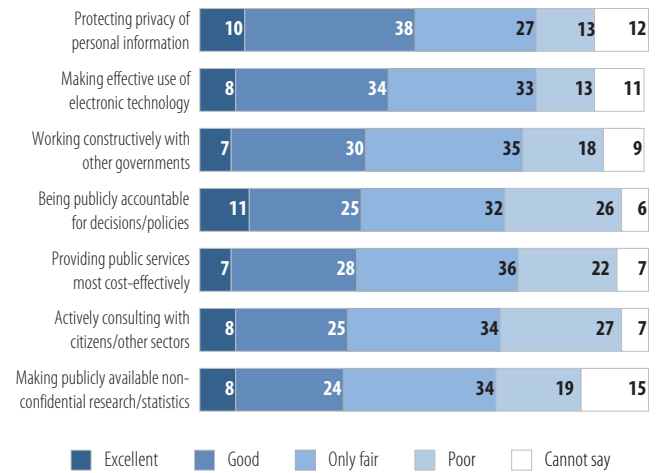
Public assessment of government performance is similar across specific areas of governance, with the strongest ratings for protection of personal information and weakest for public release of non-confidential research and statistics. Municipal governments are generally seen as doing the best job.

The public was asked to rate one of the levels of government in terms of the job they feel it is doing on each of the seven broadly defined dimensions previously rated by priority (see above). Overall, Canadians' assessment is decidedly mixed, and notably similar across the dimensions which suggests that many do not know enough or care enough to have clearly-defined opinions about government performance on these aspects of governance. On each of the seven dimensions, about one in ten rate the job being done as excellent, with most giving ratings of either "good" or "only fair." Poor ratings range from 13 percent to 27 percent.

Among the dimensions rated, Canadians are the most positive about government performance in **protecting the privacy of personal information it collects from citizens** (48% excellent or good, versus 13% poor), followed by **making effective use of the latest electronic technology in the delivery of information and services** (42% versus 13%). Fewer than four in ten give excellent or good ratings to the job being done in terms of **working constructively with other levels of government** (37%), **being publicly accountable to citizens for decisions and policies** (36%), **providing public services in the most cost-efficient way possible** (35%), while one in three give this rating to **actively consulting with citizens and other sectors** (33%), and **making publicly available the non-confidential research and statistics it collects** (32%).

Public evaluations vary somewhat across the population in a consistent pattern across the seven dimensions. Positive (excellent or good) ratings are most evident among younger Canadians, in some cases among those with post-graduate degrees, and among those who believe that government is working. Poor ratings tend to be given by older, rural residents and in particular those who say that government is broken (large majorities in this category are negative across all of the dimensions, suggesting this underlying perspective dominates assessments of specific areas of government activity).

How good a job is government doing?



Q.10

How good a job do you believe [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government is doing in terms of each of the following: ... ?

The public's opinion about government performance varies modestly depending on the jurisdiction being evaluated. Across the seven dimensions, municipal governments are somewhat more likely to receive excellent or good ratings, followed by provincial governments and then the federal government. The gap between municipal and federal governments is most notable in the areas of being publicly accountable for decisions and policies, actively consulting with the public and other sectors, and working constructively with other governments.

Finally, one of the objectives of measuring public opinion about these dimensions of government activity is to determine how priorities and performance are aligned (do high priority areas receive higher or lower levels of performance?). Overall, there is no notable mis-match between priorities and performance. Alignment is strongest in the case of protecting the personal information collected from citizens, and less so in terms of being accountable for decisions/policies, and actively consulting citizens and other sectors.

## Who is responsible when governments fail to operate as they should?

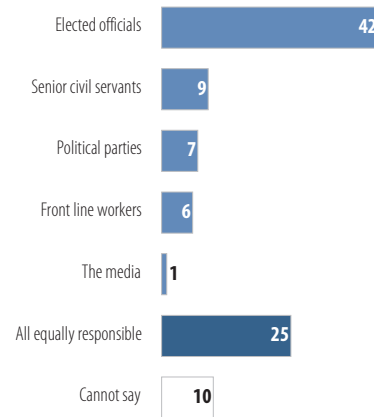
Canadians see politicians as primarily responsible when governments fail to operate as they should, regardless of jurisdiction or area of governance. Fewer than half believe the people running governments are trying to do their best for the people they represent.

Who do Canadians hold responsible when their governments fail to govern as they should? Of the five options offered, the public is by far most likely to place this responsibility on elected officials (42%), in comparison to senior civil servants (9%), political parties (7%), front line workers delivering public services (6%) and the media (1%). One in four (25%) say that all of these actors are equally responsible when government fails, while another one in ten (10%) are unable to offer any opinion.

Views about responsibility for such failure are notably consistent across the population, in terms of region, demographic characteristics, and even by level of jurisdiction evaluated. Elected officials are given somewhat greater emphasis among older Canadians, those with more education and those who are highly engaged. Perspectives on overall effectiveness of government are not linked to opinions about responsibility, although those who say government is working are somewhat more apt to look to senior civil servants, while those who say it is broken give a bit more emphasis to elected officials.

This question was also framed in terms of four areas of governance, to see if who is held responsible depends on whether the failure takes place with respect to providing needed services to citizens, making good decisions, using taxpayers' dollars efficiently, or being accountable and transparent. Results reveal that public views about who is most accountable are essentially the same regardless of whether the failure is one of service delivery, decision-making, spending or accountability. This suggests that Canadians do not make such distinctions (and perhaps do not really care) when assigning blame for when their governments do not live up to expectations.

Who is most responsible when government fails to operate as it should?



Q.12

When [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government fails to operate as it should, in terms of [providing needed services to citizens / making good decisions / using taxpayer dollars efficiently / being accountable and transparent], who do you hold most responsible?

Who is most responsible when government fails to operate as it should?

By area of governance

Area of governance	Elected officials	Senior civil servants	Political parties	Frontline workers	All equally responsible
Using taxpayer dollars efficiently	43	10	8	6	23
Being accountable and transparent	43	8	7	5	26
Providing needed services to citizens	42	9	7	6	24
Making good decisions	39	9	8	6	27

Q.12

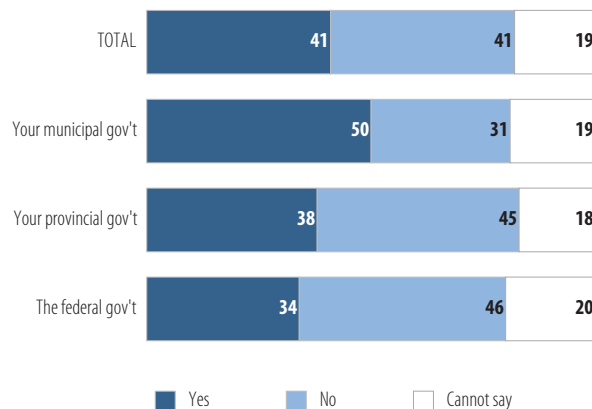
When [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government fails to operate as it should, in terms of [SPLIT SAMPLE: providing needed services to citizens / making good decisions / using taxpayer dollars efficiently / being accountable and transparent], who do you hold most responsible?

Apart from how effectively governments operate, what about the intentions and commitment of the people in government to do their best? On this question Canadians are evenly divided. Four in ten (41%) agree that the people who run government are genuinely trying to do their best for the people they represent even if they do not always succeed in doing so, while an equal proportion (41%) disagree.

On this issue, jurisdiction clearly matters. The public is most likely to believe in the intentions of people running their municipal government, and least apt to feel this way about those running the federal government. Across the country, a positive view is more evident among Canadians aged 30 to 44, and least so among French-speakers. As in other areas, views on this question are strongly linked to satisfaction with a government agency/service experience in the past year (people in government are seen as committed by 82% who were very satisfied by their experience, compared with only 15% among those not very or not at all satisfied).

Are people in government genuinely trying to do their best for people they represent?

By jurisdiction



Q.14

*Do you believe the people who run the [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government are genuinely trying to do their best for the people they represent, even if they do not always succeed in doing so?*

## Sector role in government effectiveness

In terms of having a constructive impact on government effectiveness, Canadians are most positive about the role of front-line public service workers and citizen advocacy groups, and least so with respect to industry associations and political parties. Views about the role of the media are mixed.

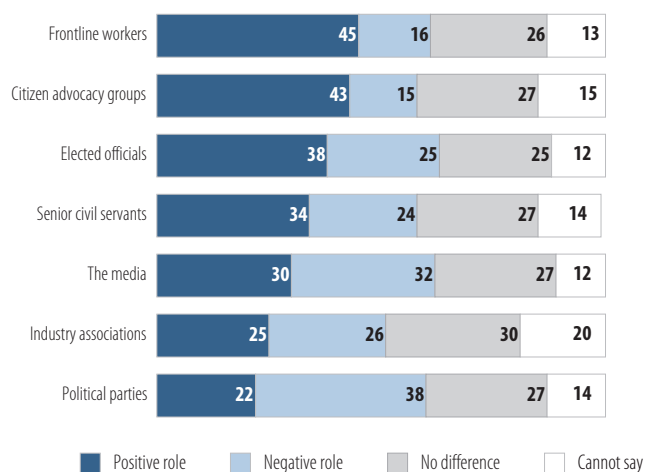
The survey asked Canadians whether each of seven groups or institutions is playing a positive or negative role in the effectiveness of government today. The public is most apt to say a positive role is currently being played by **front line workers delivering public services** (45%) and **citizen advocacy groups** (43%), with positive views outweighing negative by a three-to-one margin. In both cases about four in ten say either they are making no difference, or are unable to offer an opinion.

**Elected officials** (38%) and **senior civil servants** (34%) are not as highly rated, but both groups are more likely seen as having a positive role than a negative one. By comparison, views of the **media** (30%) and **industry associations** (25%) are evenly divided between positive and negative, while **political parties** are at the bottom of the list (22% positive role, versus 38% negative role).

Views about the impact of different sectors vary somewhat across segments of the population and by jurisdiction rated, as follows:

- t **Front line workers and citizen advocacy groups** are more positively rated by BC residents and Quebecers (citizen advocacy only), and by Canadians with higher levels of education. Ratings are more negative among men, those 30 to 44 years of age, and those who advocate for bigger government; they are marginally lower for the federal government than for provincial and municipal jurisdictions.
- t **Elected officials and senior civil servants** are most likely to be seen as having a positive impact on government by men, Canadians 30 to 44, and Quebecers (in the case of elected officials). The public is most positive about these actors in the municipal realm, and least so at the federal level.
- t **The media's** impact on government is more positively viewed by Quebecers, men, older Canadians, those with the highest levels of education and income, and those

### Impact on the effectiveness of government today



Q.13.

Please indicate whether you think each of the following generally plays a positive role, a negative role, or makes no real difference in the effectiveness of [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government today ... ?

highly engaged, and least so among younger Canadians. Once again, ratings are lowest in the context of the federal government, and highest at the municipal level.

- t **Industry associations** elicit less clear-cut opinions (50% are unable to say positive or negative), with younger and more educated citizens a bit more positive, while non-profit sector workers, those highly engaged and (especially) those advocating for bigger government tend to be more negative.
- t **Political parties** are most apt to be seen as having a positive impact on government among Quebecers, Canadians under 30, those with a post-graduate degree, while this view is least evident among rural residents and men. Opinions about political parties are more positive in the context of municipal government (24% positive versus 30% negative) in comparison with the provincial (20% versus 41%) and federal (21% versus 42%) levels.

As with other questions covered in this section, public opinion about the impact of these sectors is heavily correlated with general views about government effectiveness, and this is most evident in with respect to elected officials and senior civil servants.



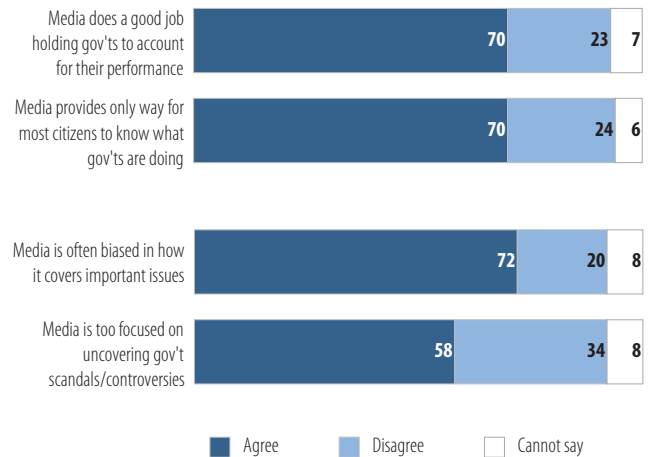
**ROLE OF MEDIA IN SOCIETY.** The survey also probed more deeply into public attitudes about the role of media in today's society, through a set of four statements to which survey participants either agreed or disagreed.

The results demonstrate that Canadians view of the media is neither uniformly positive nor negative: A majority value the media for what it does to hold governments to account for its performance (70%) and keeping citizens informed (70%), but at the same time believe the media is often biased in how it covers important issues (72%) and focuses too much on uncovering scandals and mistakes (58%).

Attitudes about the role of media are broadly consistent across the population, with some variation:

- t 4USPOHBHSFFNFOUUIBUNFEJBEPFTBHPPEXCPGIPMEJOH government to account is most evident in Quebec, among men and younger Canadians, while overall disagreement is most apt to be expressed by those who believe government is broken;
- t 4USPOHBHSFFNFOUUIBUNFEJBTUIFPOMXKPSDJUJXOT to keep informed about government is most widespread in Quebec, among rural residents and those with a high school diploma;
- t 4USPOHBHSFFNFOUUIBUUIFNFEJBTJCBTFEJODPWFSJOH important issues is most evident in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as among men, Canadians under 45 and those employed in the non-profit sector; and
- t 4USPOHBHSFFNFOUUIBUNFEJBBSFUPPGPDVTFEPO government scandals and mistakes is most widespread in Quebec and among advocates of small government.

### Role of media in our society



Q.20

Please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements ...

## Federalism and fairness

*Most Canadians believe the federal government favours one region of the country over others, and generally one other than their own. Easterners tend to see the advantage going to Alberta or Ontario, while westerners believe Ottawa favours Ontario or Quebec.*

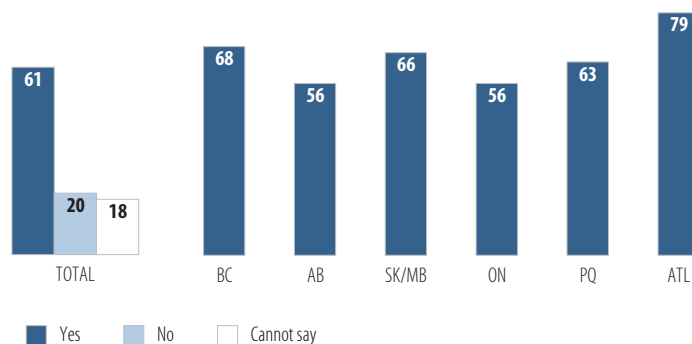
Is one region favoured over others? Canada's system of federal transfer payments has been an integral part of Confederation, but the distribution has consistently created resentment among provinces who feel they are not receiving their fair share of support. This sentiment has been consistently documented among the Canadian public for close to 30 years. On this current survey, six in ten (61%) Canadians say they believe the federal government favours one region above all others, compared with 20 percent who maintain they are all treated equally, and another 18 percent who cannot offer an opinion.

These results are consistent with previous Environics Focus Canada surveys conducted using the same question (but a different survey mode) between 1986 and 2012. Over this time span, the proportion who believe one region is favoured over others has ranged from a high of 73 percent (in 2005) to a low of 64 percent (in 2012).

As in past surveys, clear majorities in every province believe the federal government favours one region over others, with this view most widespread in Atlantic Canada (79%), and lowest in Ontario (56%) and Alberta (56%). These results are similar to those recorded in the 2012 Focus Canada survey, with the exception of Quebec where the proportion was previously higher (by 7 percentage points).<sup>4</sup> Across the population, perceptions of regional favouritism are most evident among older, rural Canadians, those highly engaged, and those generally critical of government.

### Federal gov't favours one region over others?

By province



Q.17

*In your opinion, does the federal government treat all regions in Canada equally, or does it favour one region over the others? [from Focus Canada 2012]*

4 The previous surveys are not strictly comparable to the current one because of a difference in how the surveys were conducted (Focus Canada surveys were conducted by telephone). There is strong evidence that survey mode will have minor but statistically meaningful differences in responses to survey questions.

While most Canadians share the view that the federal government is playing regional favourites, there is no agreement on which region enjoys the largesse. As might be expected, opinions depend on where one lives. Atlantic Canadians and Quebecers believe it is Alberta or Ontario that is most favoured by the federal government, while westerners focus on Ontario or Quebec. Ontarians stand apart in being most likely to identify their own province, followed closely by Quebec and Alberta; otherwise few Canadians see their own province as the one most favoured.

**DO PROVINCES GET BACK WHAT THEY PAY IN FEDERAL TAXES?** Consistent with public opinion about the government’s regional favouritism, a slim majority (54%) of Canadians also believe their province receives less (in the form of transfer payments, social programs and government spending) than its people pay to the federal government in taxes. One in six (15%) think their province receives something roughly equal to what is paid in taxes, with 14 percent who say it actually receives proportionately more. Another 17 percent are unable to offer an opinion to this question.

Attitudes on this question are remarkably similar across provinces, and generally comparable to results from the 2012 Focus Canada survey. Since 2012 the view that ones province receives less back than is paid in taxes has increased in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, while declining in Alberta. Across the population, this sentiment is most apt to be expressed by older, rural Canadians, and those generally critical of government.

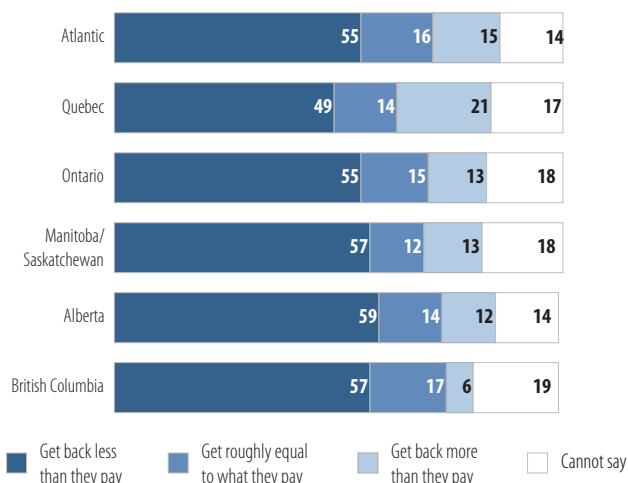
## Region most favoured by the federal government

Where you live	Who is most favoured?		
Atlantic	Alberta (35)	Ontario (34)	Quebec (19)
Quebec	Alberta (41)	Ontario (27)	Quebec (12)
Ontario	Ontario (31)	Quebec (26)	Alberta (26)
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	Ontario (41)	Quebec (31)	Alberta (14)
Alberta	Quebec (41)	Ontario (38)	Alberta (16)
British Columbia	Ontario (49)	Quebec (23)	Alberta (13)

Q.18  
(IF FAVOURS ONE REGION IN Q.17) Which region or province do you feel is favoured the most over the others? [from Focus Canada 2012]

## Does your province get back what it pays in federal taxes?

By province



Q.19  
Think now about the taxes which people in your province pay to the federal government and about federal spending returned to the province in the form of transfer payments, pensions, family allowance, government spending and unemployment insurance. [from Focus Canada 2012]

Generally speaking, would you say that people of your province get back more than they pay to the federal government, less than they pay, or an amount roughly equal to what they pay the federal government?