

Canadian Public Opinion on Governance and the Public Service



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This study was conducted by the Environics Institute, in partnership with the Institute on Governance.

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Introduction

Governments have played a central role in the building of modern-day Canada, and in past generations the Canadian public has been supportive of the role and place of government as important institutions to collective well-being and economic security. Such confidence has been eroding over the past several decades, in part through broader socio-cultural trends (e.g., a general decline in deference to authority), and political trends (the emergence of a movement defining government as the problem rather than the solution). Governments at all levels are now facing increasing scrutiny and political pressures while at the same time contending with increasing expectations for accountability and performance.

Most of the public discussion about the role of government has focused on policies and spending decisions, with little if any attention given to the process of governance and how our governments should operate. Elected officials are front and centre as the leaders taking responsibility for government policy and making the important decisions, but behind the scenes it is the public service that is responsible for making government run and implementing policies. Politicians come and go as different political parties take the reigns of power, but the public service plays an essential non-political role of ensuring that the institutions of government function effectively, efficiently and with continuity.

This raises important questions about what exactly Canadians know and think about how their country, province and municipality are governed, and about the people who carry out these responsibilities. Anecdotal evidence is helpful, but the only way to provide definitive answers is through properly designed survey research. Such research can accurately reveal current public awareness, knowledge, perceptions, expectations and priorities of the Canadian public generally, as well as by important segments of the population (e.g., across regions, generations, and socio-economic status). This type of empirical evidence is essential to understanding the extent to which there is an underlying stability or a pending crisis in public confidence in our government institutions, and what might be required to address it.

To address these questions, The Environics Institute partnered with the Institute on Governance to conduct a landmark national public opinion survey on governance and the public service. The research is based on an online survey conducted July 31 to August 9, 2014, with a representative sample of 2,000 Canadians, aged 18 and over. The sample was weighted by region, age and gender to match the country's population.

This report presents the results of the survey, including an analysis by region and key demographic subgroups of the population, including citizens' level of attention and engagement in public affairs issues. Detailed tables are available under separate cover. All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

Executive Summary

What does the public expect from governments, and how well do they believe their country, province and local municipality are governed? The survey results reveal that Canadians continue to see their governments as essential institutions, and there is broad agreement on some of the expectations about how they should operate. But citizens are divided on how well these expectations are being met today, whether it is at the municipal, provincial or federal level. Most can agree that improvements are needed, but there is no collective public vision of what this might entail.

WHAT CANADIANS EXPECT FROM THEIR GOVERNMENTS IN TERMS OF HOW THEY OPERATE.

The survey confirms previous research showing that Canadians consider governments to be essential institutions, not just as governing bodies but in ensuring the quality of life in their community. A key aspect of this role is in looking out for everyone in society, including those facing hardships (e.g., financial, health-related, discrimination). While the overall scope of government activity and oversight has contracted in many areas over the past decade, citizens continue to place significant expectations in terms of policies, programs and services.

More specifically, most Canadians place a high priority on a range of government practices, among the most important being the protection the privacy of the personal information it collects from citizens, and public accountability for how decisions and policies are made. Comparatively lower emphasis is given to how governments consult with citizens, publish non-confidential research and statistics, and implement innovating improvements in the delivery of online services. Providing services in a cost-effective way is also important, but sits in the middle of this list.

In the public's eye, elected officials are the face and essential actors in government, and there is broad agreement that their decisions should be based more on the priorities of their constituents than on their own judgement and experience (a view most strongly held by younger generations). Canadians also see an important role for the civil servants who run government departments and agencies, and believe they should be playing an active part

in shaping policies and decisions (rather than limiting their role to carrying out whatever politicians might decide). Few citizens accept the view that good public policy emerges from tension between politicians and civil servants.

Political parties do not enjoy a positive public image, but their contribution to good governance is not fully rejected. Only one in five Canadians say political parties currently have a positive impact on the effectiveness of government, but most also believe they have a constructive role in government policy development that extends beyond election periods.

HOW WELL GOVERNMENTS ARE LIVING UP TO PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS.

Canadians' assessment of their governments' effectiveness is decidedly mixed. The public is somewhat more likely to see their governments as "working" rather than "broken", with opinions more positive when it comes to municipal government, followed provincial governments and least so for the federal government. At the same time, Canadians are as likely to say that governments are the cause as the solution to important problems facing society today, and fewer than half believe that people in government are genuinely trying to do their best for the people they represent, with this confidence lowest when it comes to the federal government. When asked how government is broken, Canadians are most likely to emphasize wasteful spending and lack of responsiveness to citizen priorities and needs.

Citizens' assessment of government performance in specific areas is similarly mixed. Canadians are most positive about how their governments are protecting the privacy of citizen information and making effective use of electronic technology, and less so when it comes to being accountable for decisions, providing public services in a cost-effective way, actively consulting citizens, and publishing government generated-research and statistics. Again, municipal governments receive the stronger ratings, while the federal government rates the lowest (with this difference most evident in terms of public accountability for decisions, active consultation with the public and working constructively with other levels of government).

Canadians are most likely to see the people they elect to office as the accountable actors when governments fail to operate as they should, rather than civil servants, front-line workers, political parties or the media. This view is consistent for all three levels of government, and is equally strong regardless of whether it involves governments failing to make good decisions, using taxpayer dollars efficiently, being accountable and transparent, or providing needed services to citizens.

The public is divided about the contribution that the country's media make to good governance in Canada today. On the one hand, the media is widely lauded for holding governments to account for their performance, and providing the only way for most citizens to know what their governments are doing. On the other hand, most Canadians also believe the media is often biased in how it covers important issues, and is too focused on uncovering government scandals and controversies.

HOW GOVERNMENTS NEED TO CHANGE. Given the less than enthusiastic endorsement of current government effectiveness, it is no surprise that Canadians want to see improvements. But there is little agreement on what this might entail, perhaps because it is not a question that is given much thought by most citizens, nor is it one that leads to easy or obvious answers. Opinions are divided with respect whether the need is for fundamental change in how governments operate or is more a matter of incremental improvements. Not surprisingly, opinions on this question are closely tied to whether one sees government as working or broken.

The desire for better governance notwithstanding, public opinion does not offer a clear direction on what needs to change. Canadians identify a number of areas for improvement, such as improving public accountability and transparency, providing better leadership, and more efficient spending. But none of these emerge as a broadly endorsed theme, and four in ten Canadians could not suggest any

specific improvements when asked. More telling, perhaps is a notable degree of skepticism about the prospect of seeing progress: Fewer than four in ten express confidence that governments are capable of making the necessary changes.

Canadians are favourable toward four types of government operational innovations that were presented on the survey. Three-quarters express support for publishing more information online about how government decisions are made, and for taking a more ambitious approach to modernizing service delivery along the lines of what the private sector offers. Almost two-thirds endorse governments more actively consulting with citizens through online platforms, and offering the option of online voting in future elections.

Given the balancing act involved in providing programs and services on the one hand, and paying for them on the other, how much government does the public want? There is no consensus on this question, but Canadians are more likely to prefer smaller governments that provide fewer services and lower tax rates, compared with bigger government with more services and higher tax rates. But just as many advocate for the status quo or do not have a clear opinion on the question.

Finally, there is modest public support in principle for the practice of governments contracting out the delivery of public services to private sector contractors, which tend to be seen as better able to offer lower prices and higher quality service. At the same time, many Canadians make it clear that the benefits of private sector involvement depend on the type of public service being delivered. Moreover, a notable minority oppose this type of outsourcing out of concerns about companies focusing too much on profits, potentially leading to higher prices, or a general distrust of the private sector. In the end, the public is more likely than not to expect governments to be ultimately accountable for ensuring that contracted-out services are delivered properly.

HOW OPINIONS VARY ACROSS THE POPULATION.

Canadians' opinions about the effectiveness of their governments are similar across the population, in that the broad conclusions outlined above apply regardless of province, community size, socio-economic status, age group, gender or whether born in Canada or abroad. But some variations in attitudes are worth noting:

- Citizens' direct experience with a government service or agency in the previous 12 months is closely linked to attitudes about the effectiveness of government. Those who were very satisfied with this experience (regardless of jurisdiction) were significantly more positive in their opinions about government effectiveness, in comparison with those not as satisfied or who had no such experience in the previous year. This link does not confirm causality, but it is consistent with other evidence showing that direct experience (both positive and negative) with organizations has a powerful influence over broader opinions of their effectiveness.
- Being informed about how governments operate appears to have a limited influence on views about government effectiveness. The survey categorized Canadians by how engaged they are in public policy and public affairs (based on media use, voting behaviour and education level). Those most highly engaged (the top 30% of the population) are more positive on some questions (e.g., government as the solution rather than the cause of problems), but overall do not stand out as having a noticeably different perspective to governance and government effectiveness. Canadians with a low level of engagement are distinctive as a group in being least apt to express any opinion on many of the topics covered.
- For the most part, public opinion about governance is not a matter of who Canadians are in terms of where they live or who they are, as defined by their demographic characteristics. The most notable pattern is a somewhat more negative view of government among older citizens, those living in rural areas, and those who live in Quebec.

Important Priorities for Government

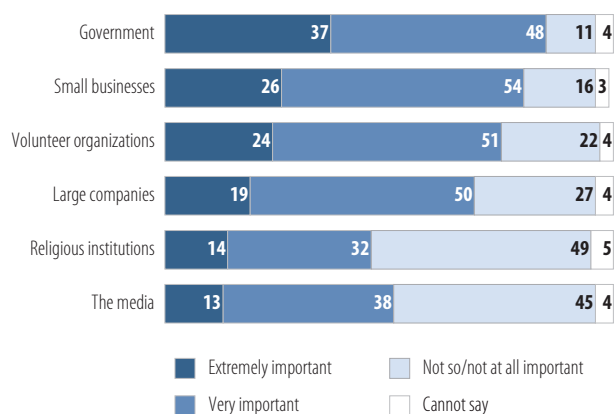
Role of Government in Quality of Life

Canadians see government as essential to ensuring their local quality of life, and more so in comparison with the private and non-profit sectors, and the media.

The initial survey questions asked about the overall role of institutions in society, and reveal that Canadians place considerable importance on government relative to other sectors and institutions. Close to four in ten (37%) say government is “extremely important” in ensuring a good quality of life in their own community, with another half (48%) indicating the government’s role is “very important.” By comparison, one in four identify small businesses (26%) and volunteer organizations (e.g., United Way, YMCA) (24%) as having an extremely important role in local quality of life, with fewer assigning this level of importance to large companies (19%), religious institutions (14%) and the media (13%).

Opinions are generally similar across the population, with the importance of government somewhat more evident among residents of major urban centres, immigrants, engaged Canadians¹, and those who are broadly positive about the role of government in today’s society (see more on this below). No more than one in five from any group expresses the view that government’s role in local quality of life is of little or no importance. Opinions on these questions are notably consistent across regions, socio-economic status, age cohorts and employment sector.

Importance in ensuring good quality of life in your community



Q.1
How important do you believe each of the following sectors is to ensuring a good quality of life in your community?

1 A variable was created to measure the degree to which Canadians are paying attention to, and engaged with, public policy and public affairs. An index of “engagement” was created based on responses to questions about media use, voting behaviour, and education level. “Engaged Canadians” represent the top 30% of the population on this index.

Important values guiding government policy

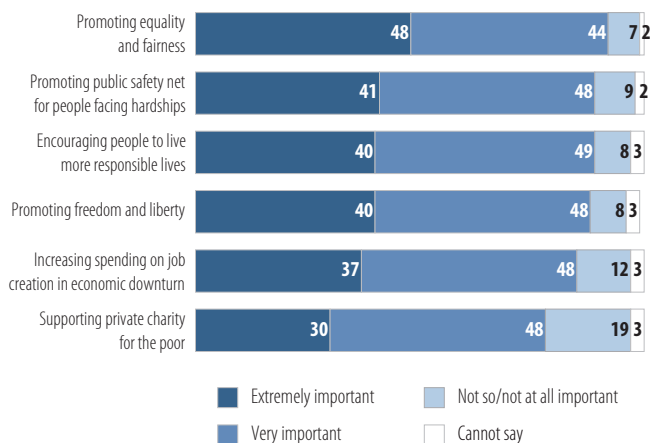
Among values guiding government policy, the public places the top priority on ensuring equality and fairness, with less emphasis given to promoting freedom, personal responsibility, and increased spending during downturns.

What values do Canadians believe should guide government policy, especially as they relate to economic policy? There is broad public agreement across the six values presented on the survey, with eight in ten or more identifying each as very, if not extremely, important.

Of these values, Canadians are most likely to place “extreme importance” on promoting equality and fairness (48%). Four in ten place this level of importance on providing a public safety net for people experiencing hardship (41%), encouraging people to live more responsible lives (40%), promoting freedom and liberty (40%) and increasing spending on job creation during economic downturns (37%), with somewhat fewer emphasizing and supporting private charity for the poor (30%).

These questions were drawn from a 2013 survey of Americans, which provides the basis for a cross-national comparison.² Canadians and Americans place a similar priority on their governments being guided to encourage people to live more responsible lives and promoting liberty and freedom. But Canadians are more likely to place very or extreme importance on providing a public safety net (plus 25 percentage points), supporting private charity for the poor (plus 19 points) and promoting equality and fairness (plus 13 points).³

Values that should guide government policy



Q.2

Please indicate how important you believe each of the following values should be in guiding government policy in our country today: [From Brookings 2013 US survey] ...

² Public Religion Research Institute and the Brookings Institution (2013). Do Americans believe capitalism and government are working? <http://tinyurl.com/pv5766q>

³ The value statement about increased spending during economic downturns was not included in the US survey.

Priorities for how governments operate

Canadians place the highest priority on how governments operate in the areas of protecting the privacy of personal information and being publicly accountable for decisions and policies.

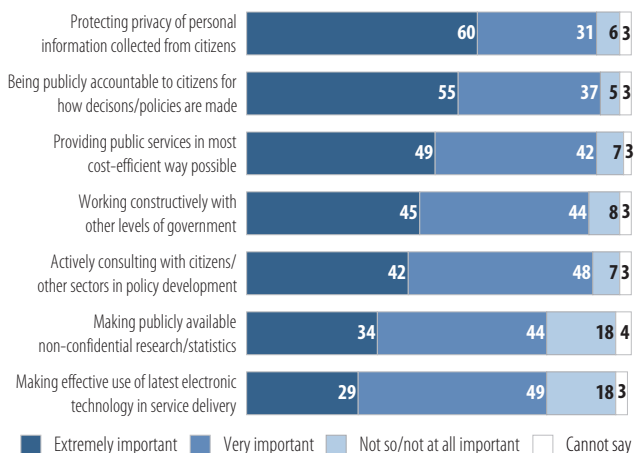
The survey explored the public's priorities on how governments should operate, with respect to seven broadly defined dimensions. Not surprisingly, there is a widespread consensus among Canadians in endorsing these dimensions – in all but one case at least nine in ten say they are at least “very” important, with greater variation in the proportion who consider them to be “extremely” important.

At the top of the list is ***protecting the privacy of personal information that governments collect from citizens***, identified by 60 percent as extremely important, with another 31 percent saying very important and very few (6%) indicating not so or not at all important. Close behind are ***being publicly accountable to citizens for how decisions and policies are made*** (55% extremely important), ***providing public services in the most cost-efficient way possible*** (49%), ***working constructively with other levels of government*** (45%), and ***actively consulting with citizens and other sectors in the development of policies*** (42%).

Somewhat lower priority is given to ***making publicly available the non-confidential research and statistics that governments collect*** (34% extremely important), and ***making effective use of the latest electronic technology in the delivery of information and services*** (29%).

These priorities are largely consistent across the population. The level of importance assigned to these dimensions tends to be higher among older Canadians (especially for those 60 and over), among those highly engaged, and those who are fundamentally critical of government (i.e., believe it is broken, and more likely to be the problem than the solution – see below). There are few differences by socio-economic status, except in the case of making effective use of the latest electronic technology, which is given greater emphasis by those with the lowest levels of education and income.

Important priorities for how governments operate



Q.3

Now thinking about how governments operate, how important do you believe each of the following is to having a good government that serves everyone well ... ?

Role of specific government actors

The public believes elected officials should heed their constituents over their own judgement and work collaboratively with the civil servants who serve them. Most are comfortable with political parties playing an active role in government policy development.

The survey asked Canadians specific questions about how they view the appropriate governance roles of elected officials, civil servants and political parties.

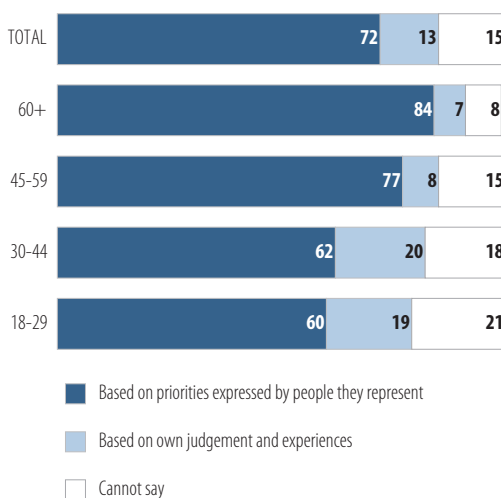
ELECTED OFFICIALS. Politicians are elected by the people to represent them in government, but they are often called upon to exercise their own judgement and experience in making decisions that may not be consistent with their constituents' wishes. How does the public view this balance? The survey results reveal a clear priority, with more than seven in ten (72%) Canadians saying it is more important for elected officials to base their decisions on the priorities of the people they represent (regardless of their own views), compared with just 13 percent who believe it is more important for them to exercise judgement and experience (even when this does not reflect the views of those who they represent). Another 15 percent cannot offer an opinion either way.

This sentiment reflects a majority view across the population, although stronger among some groups than others. The most noticeable difference is across age cohorts, with the priority placed on representing constituent priorities most widespread among Canadians 60 and older (84%), and least so among those under 30 (60%). This viewpoint is also somewhat more evident among women, proponents of smaller government, and highly engaged Canadians (among those with low engagement, 30% were unable to offer an opinion on the question).

CIVIL SERVANTS. What role do Canadians believe civil servants should play in how they relate to the elected officials to whom they report? Two-thirds (66%) believe that civil servants should actively provide expert advice and recommend policies, compared with fewer than one in five (18%) who say they should limit their role to carrying out whatever decisions are made by elected officials. This reflects a majority view across the country, but strengthens along with age, education level and household income, as well as with level of engagement with public policy and public affairs.

How elected officials should make decisions

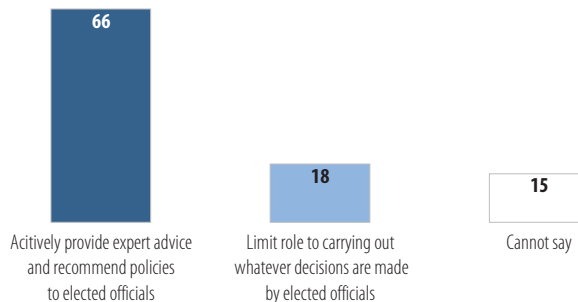
By age cohort



Q.4

Thinking now of the elected officials who lead our governments, is it more important that they make decisions ... ?

Best role for civil servants



Q.5

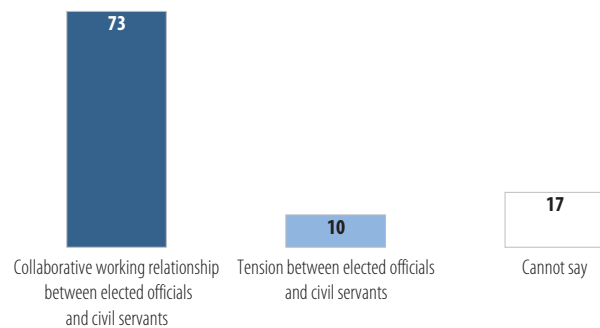
Thinking now of the civil servants that manage government departments and agencies, do you think they should ... ?

Canadians also believe that the best government policy results from a collaborative working relationship between elected officials and civil servants (73%), rather than one characterized by tension (10%). This viewpoint is strongest among older Canadians, those with a university education and those who are highly engaged, while less evident among francophones, Canadians under 45, and those in the lowest income bracket. In no group do more than one in five believe tension creates better policy, with the exception of those who advocate bigger government (29%).

POLITICAL PARTIES. Political parties in Canada are known chiefly as organizations for electing representatives and leaders, but most Canadians appear to be comfortable with the idea of them also being actively involved in governance and policy-making. Six in ten (62%) believe that political parties have a constructive role helping to set government policy between elections, compared with 22 percent who say their role should be limited only to organizing and running elections.

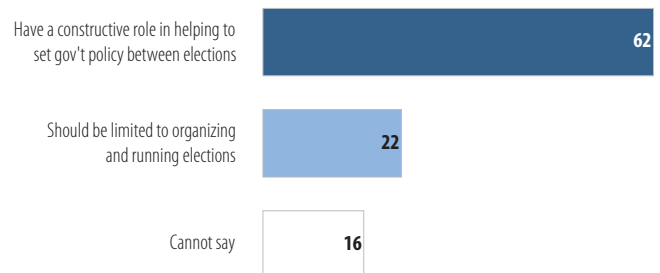
Support for party involvement in policy is most evident in Quebec (71%; and especially among French-speaking Canadians at 80%), as well as among women, Canadians 60 and older, those employed in the non-profit sector and those who are highly engaged.

Best way to create good public policy



Q6.
Which view is closer to your own ... ?

Role of political parties



Q7.
Do you believe that political parties in our system of government ... ?

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.

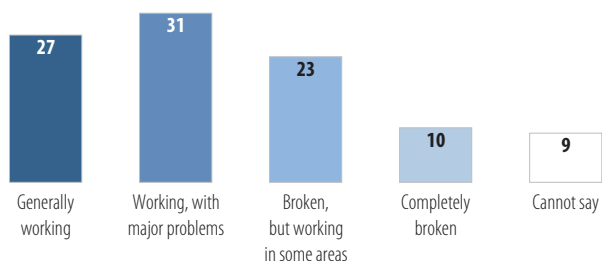
Are governments in Canada working?

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

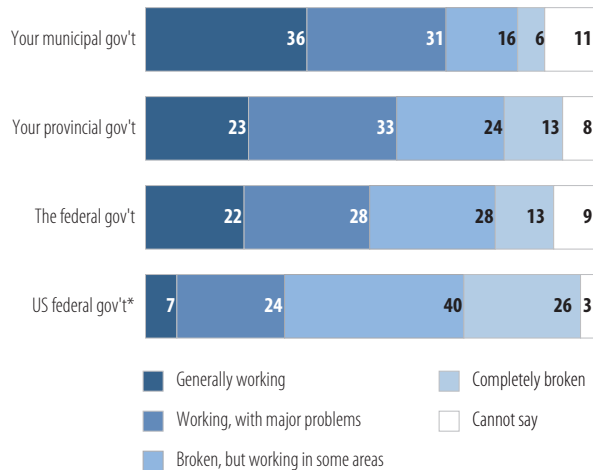
Would you say that [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government today is: ... ?

[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.

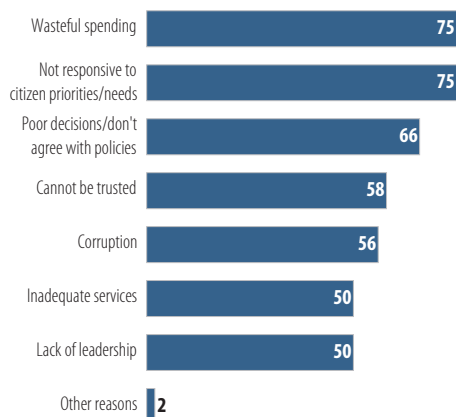
HOW GOVERNMENTS ARE BROKEN. The third of Canadians critical of their government's effectiveness were asked in what way they believe it is partially or completely broken. The question offered seven response options, with the opportunity to volunteer additional reasons. Results show that views about why 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

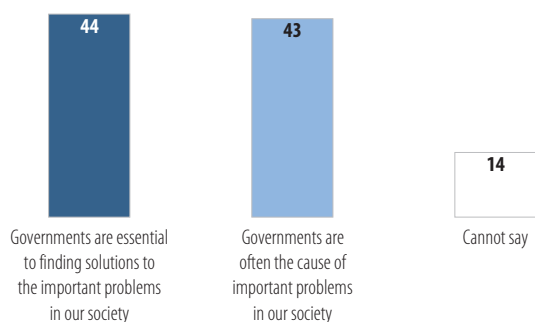
In what way is [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government broken?

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?

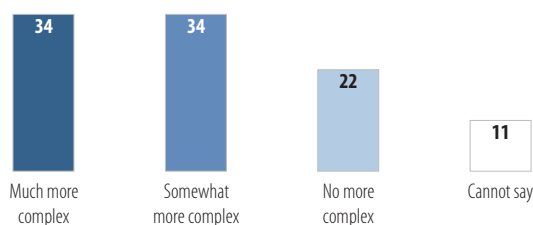


Q.15
Which of the following two statements about [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government is closest to your own view, even if neither is exactly right?

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

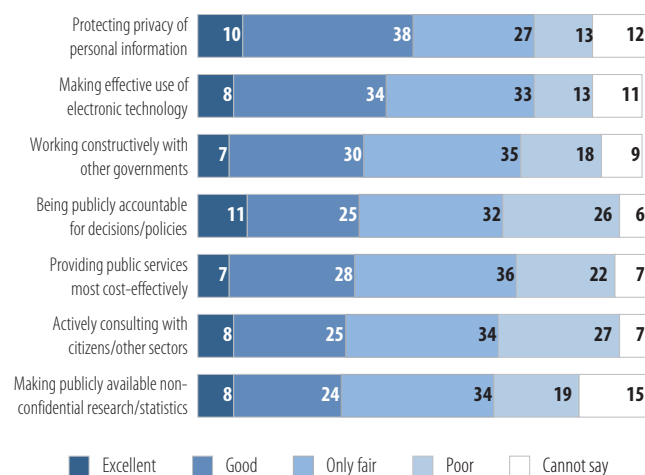
Public assessment of government performance is similar across specific areas of governance, with the strongest ratings for protection of personal information and weakest for public release of non-confidential research and statistics. Municipal governments are generally seen as doing the best job.

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?

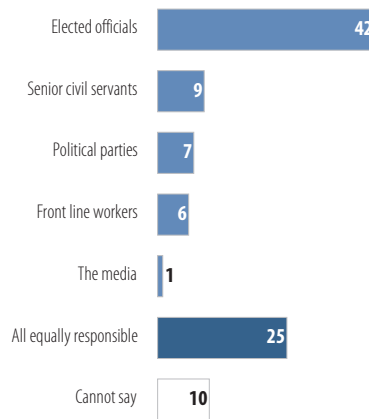
Canadians see politicians as primarily responsible when governments fail to operate as they should, regardless of jurisdiction or area of governance. Fewer than half believe the people running governments are trying to do their best for the people they represent.

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

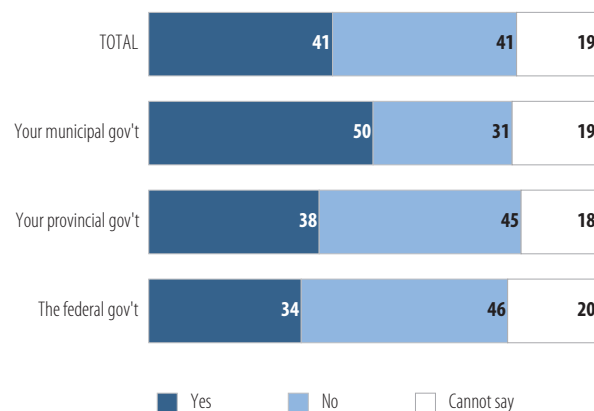
When [the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government fails to operate as it should, in terms of [SPLIT SAMPLE: providing needed services to citizens / making good decisions / using taxpayer dollars efficiently / being accountable and transparent], who do you hold most responsible?

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.

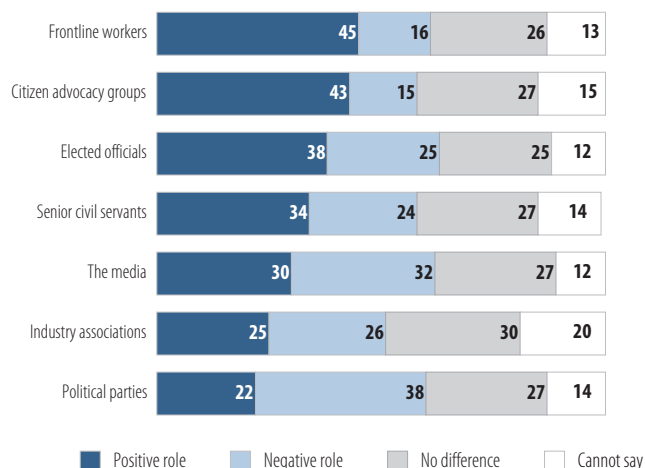
The survey asked Canadians whether each of seven groups or institutions is playing a positive or negative role in the effectiveness of government today. The public is most apt to say a positive role is currently being played by **front line workers delivering public services** (45%) and **citizen advocacy 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:

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

- **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.
- **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.

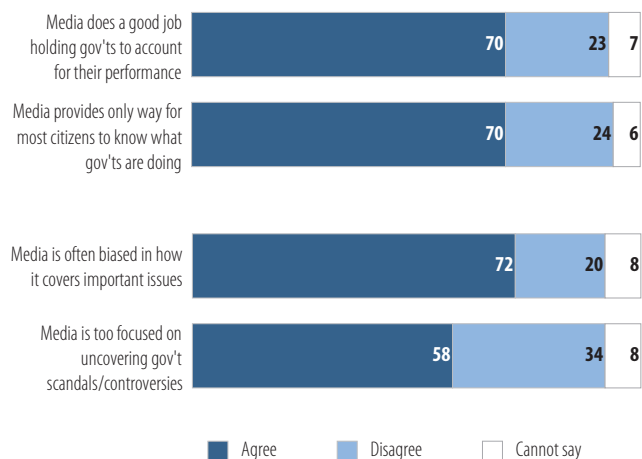
ROLE OF MEDIA IN SOCIETY. The survey also probed more deeply into public attitudes about the role of media in today's society, through a set of four statements to which survey participants either agreed or disagreed.

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:

- Strong agreement that media does a good job of holding 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;
- Strong agreement that media is the only way for citizens to keep informed about government is most widespread in Quebec, among rural residents and those with a high school diploma;
- Strong agreement that the media is biased in covering 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
- Strong agreement that media are too focused on 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.

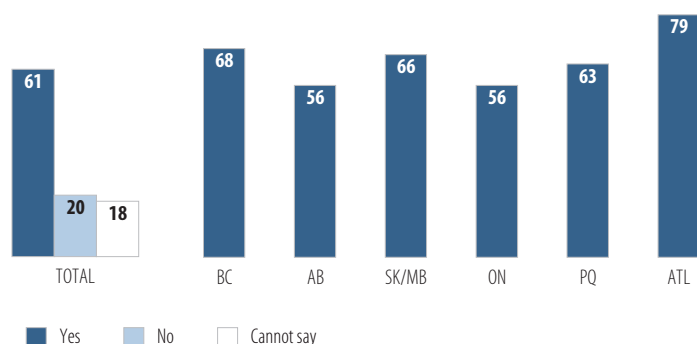
Is one region favoured over others? Canada's system of federal transfer payments has been an integral part of Confederation, but the distribution has consistently created resentment among provinces who feel they are not receiving their fair share of support. This sentiment has been consistently documented 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).⁴ 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

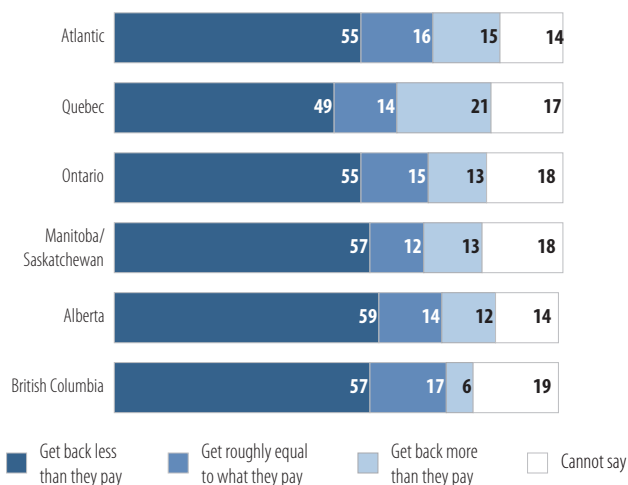
Where you live	Who is most favoured?		
Atlantic	Alberta (35)	Ontario (34)	Quebec (19)
Quebec	Alberta (41)	Ontario (27)	Quebec (12)
Ontario	Ontario (31)	Quebec (26)	Alberta (26)
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	Ontario (41)	Quebec (31)	Alberta (14)
Alberta	Quebec (41)	Ontario (38)	Alberta (16)
British Columbia	Ontario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

How Government Should Change

The survey asked Canadians their views about the need for change in how governments operate, and what types of change are most important.

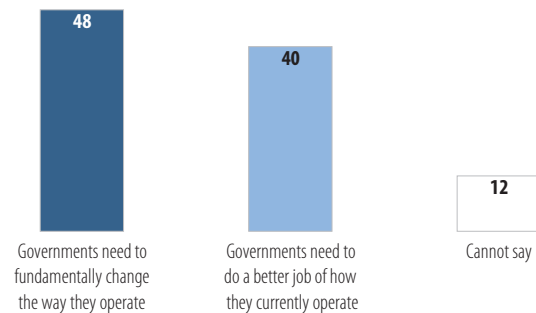
How much change is needed?

Canadians are divided on whether good governance requires fundamental change or incremental improvements, but there is limited confidence in government's capacity to make the necessary changes.

There is little doubt that everyone would agree that governments at all levels can improve the way they govern. A central question is how much change is needed to effectively serve the people who elect them to office. There is no public consensus on this question, with close to half (48%) of Canadians saying governments need to fundamentally change the way they operate, compared with four in ten (40%) who maintain it is a matter of doing a better job of how they currently operate.

Belief in the need for fundamental change in government is most widely expressed among rural and older Canadians, non-profit sector workers and – as might be expected – those broadly critical of government (73% of those who say it is broken, compared with 37% of those who say it is generally working). Of note, however, is that opinions on this question are the same between those who advocate bigger government (with higher taxes) and those who believe in smaller government (with lower taxes).

How much do governments need to change to serve the people who elect them?



Q.21

In order to properly serve the people who elect them, do you think ... ?

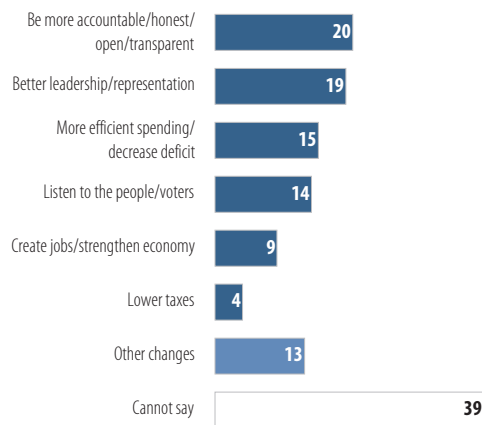
Canadians were asked to identify what they consider to be the single most important change government needs to make to do a better job (asked in an open-ended format, with no response options offered). The public provided a range of responses, but when categorized into conceptual categories none were expressed by more than one in five. At the top of this list are being more accountable/honest/open/transparent (20%), providing better leadership/representation (19%), providing more efficient spending/reducing deficits (15%), and listening to the people/voters (14%). No other category was mentioned by more than one in ten, and four in ten (39%) could not provide any response to this question.

Opinions are largely similar across the population. The top five types of changes are more apt to be mentioned by older Canadians, those highly engaged, and those who believe government is broken but working in some areas. The absence of any response to the question is most widespread among those under 45 years of age, Canadians with a high school education, those with no recent experience with government agencies or services, and those with low engagement. Notably, responses are largely the same between those who say government needs to make fundamental changes and those who believe it simply needs to do a better job.

Apart from the need for change, how much confidence does the public have that government is capable of doing so? Canadians are more likely than not to be skeptical, with fewer than four in ten saying they are very (8%) or somewhat (30%) confident in the capability of government to change as needed, compared with more than half who are not very (40%) or not at all (16%) confident. It is worth noting that most responses do not fall into the strongly held views on either end of the spectrum, indicating that most Canadians do not have a firmly fixed position on this question.

Confidence in government's capacity for change is higher in Alberta and BC (especially in Vancouver), among residents of major urban centres, Canadians under 45 years of age, those with medium levels of engagement, and those who believe that government is generally working. This view is least apt to be shared in Quebec, among those who believe government is broken, and those who advocate for smaller government with lower taxes.

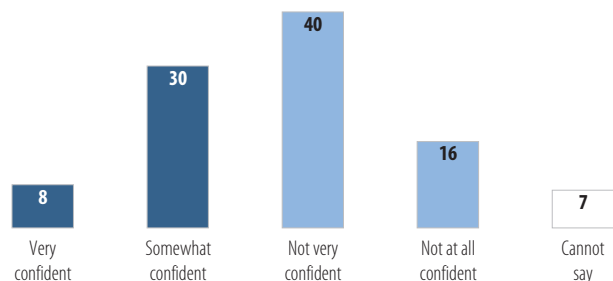
Single most important change government needs to make



Q.22

What in your view is the single most important change government needs to make in order to do a better job? (Responses not provided)

Confidence that government is capable of making necessary changes



Q.23

How confident are you that government is capable of making the type of changes necessary to do a better job of governing?

As might be expected, confidence in government's capability to change is linked to the extent of change needed. Those who believe that fundamental change is required are much less apt to be confident (27%) than those who say it simply needs to do a better job (55%).

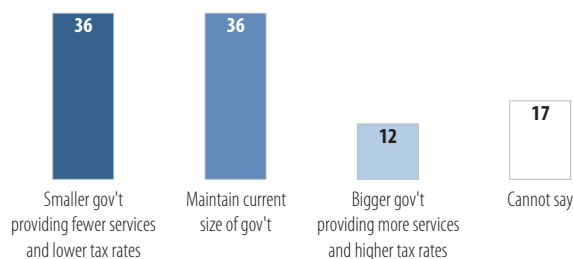
Preferred size of government

The public is more likely to prefer smaller government offering fewer services and lower tax rates than bigger government with more services and higher tax rates, but many also favour the status quo.

The tension between increasing expectations for public services and the rising cost of providing them is now a permanent reality for governments everywhere. Would Canadians prefer a larger government that offers more services along with higher tax rates (to pay for these services), or a smaller government with fewer services and lower tax rates? Attitudes are divided but the balance of opinion is clearly toward smaller government (36%) than bigger government (12%), although another 36 percent express a desire for maintaining the status quo. One in six (17%) do not express an opinion.

Views on this question are equally split across the country, and in no identifiable group does a majority express a clear preference. Smaller government receives the strongest support in Quebec and Alberta, among Canadians 45 to 59, those with higher incomes, and those highly engaged. Bigger government is a minority opinion across the board, but is most evident in Ontario and B.C., among Canadians under 30, and those with medium level engagement. Preference for the status quo is most apt to be stated by women and those who believe government is working.

Preferred size of government



Q.26

If you had to choose, would you rather have: ... ?

Support for specific types of government changes

Canadians widely endorse specific changes in how governments operate, in terms of publishing more information online and consulting with citizens, online voting, and modernizing service delivery similar to private sector practices.

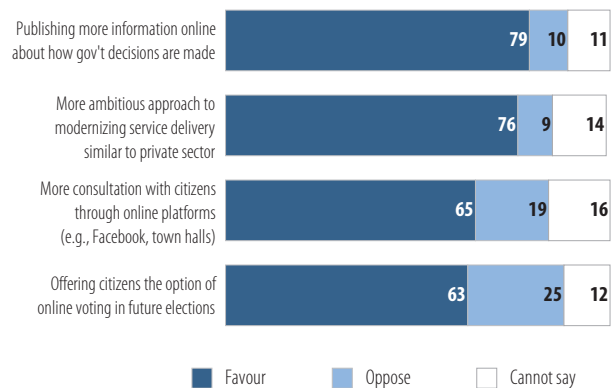
Four specific types of changes in how government operates were presented to gauge public support. All four are very popular and favoured by strong majorities of Canadians. Among the four, the strongest support is expressed for ***publishing more information online about how government decisions are made*** (79% favour, versus 9% oppose). Similarly, three-quarters (76%) favour governments ***taking a more ambitious approach to modernizing the delivery of public services*** (e.g., license renewals, employment assistance), similar to what is now being done by the private sector.

These types of government practice are widely favoured across the country, but especially among Canadians 45 and older, immigrants, those with more education and income, and those who are highly engaged, while least so among those who advocate for bigger government. Of note is the fact that support is equally strong among those who believe government is working and those who say it is broken.

Two-thirds (65%) of Canadians favour governments ***doing more consultation with citizens through online platforms such as Facebook and electronic town halls***, with 19 percent opposed and another 16 percent unable to say either way. This type of initiative is most widely favoured by Canadians 30 to 44, those with a post-graduate degree, those are highly engaged, and those who believe government is working. Opposition is most apt to come from rural residents (27%) and those who are French-speaking (26%).

More than six in ten (63%) favour governments ***offering citizens the option of voting online in future elections***, compared with one-quarter (25%) who oppose this type of voting platform. Support is most likely to be expressed by Canadians with higher levels of education, immigrants and those advocating smaller government. Opposition is most evident among those 18 to 29 (31%), Quebecers (33%) and those who believe in bigger government (34%).

Support for changes in how governments operate



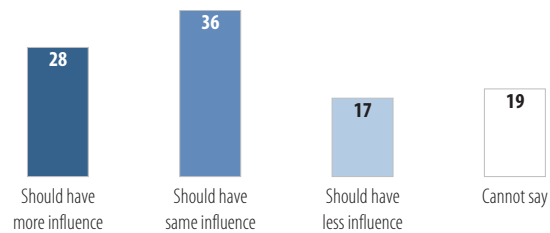
Q.25

Would you favour or oppose the following types of changes in how governments operate

ROLE OF CIVIL SERVANTS. One specific type of change would be the level of influence exercised by civil servants who manage government departments and agencies. There is no public consensus on this question, with 28 percent saying civil servants should have more influence than they have today, compared with 17 percent who believe they should have less, and a plurality (36%) who favour the status quo.

Opinions are notably consistent across the population. Advocates for increasing civil servant influence are somewhat more likely to be men, employed in the public service, very satisfied in their recent experience with government programs/services, and those who believe government is generally working. Support for reduced influence is most evident among Canadians 45 and older, those highly engaged, and those who advocate for smaller government – but in these cases the proportion espousing this view is less than one in four

Role of civil servants in the future



Q.24

In the future, would you like to see civil servants who manage government have more influence, the same influence, or less influence than they have today?

Role of the Private Sector in Delivering Public Services

The final section of the survey explored public opinion about the role of the private sector in terms of delivering public services traditionally delivered by public sector.

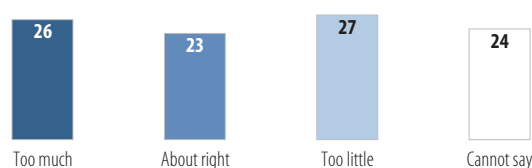
Government regulation of business

Canadians are evenly divided on whether there is too much or too little government regulation of business today, and half believe either the balance is about right or have no opinion on the question.

How does the general public view the current level of government regulation of business in Canada today? There is nothing resembling agreement on this question, with opinions evenly spread across those who say there is too little regulation (27%), too much regulation (26%), about the right amount (23%) and those unable to offer a response (24%).⁵

Perspectives on the regulation of business are similarly split across the population, with only minor variation. Those more likely to say there is too little government regulation live in Quebec (32%) and have a post-graduate degree (32%), while those taking the opposite view are 45 years and older (29%) and predictably advocate for smaller government (47%). Less obvious is the fact that opinions are not closely linked to whether Canadians think government is generally working or broken, although individuals in the former category are among those most apt to feel the current level of government regulation of business is about right.

Amount of gov't regulation in business today



Q.27

Overall, do you feel the amount of government regulation of business in Canada today is ... ?

5 This question was also asked on a series of EnvironicsFocus Canada surveys, most recently in 2011. Results are not directly comparable because the Focus Canada surveys (conducted by telephone) did not offer a "cannot say" option, and so the percentage giving this response was considerably smaller (9%), with a correspondingly greater proportion choosing the "about right" option (49%).

Private sector delivery of public services

The public generally supports the concept of public services being delivered by the private sector, which is more likely seen as being able to provide better service at lower cost. At the same time, Canadians believe the ultimate accountability remains with governments who subcontract these services.

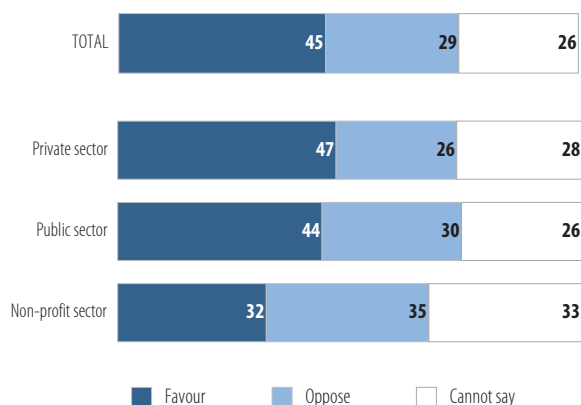
Over the past few decades there has been a major trend toward the private sector taking responsibility for delivery of public services that have traditionally been provided by governments (e.g., postal services, transportation, waste management). Canadians are generally comfortable with this trend, at least in principle, with 45 percent in favour compared with 29 percent opposed, and another 26 percent unable to say either way. These results are comparable to those from a 2004 Focus Canada survey, which asked the same question but did not offer a “cannot say” response; in this survey 53 percent favoured private sector delivery of public services, versus 37 percent who opposed, and 10 percent unable to say.

Public support for private sector involvement in public services is generally consistent across the population, although predictably strongest among those who advocate smaller government (62%). Counter-intuitively, this view is also most apt to be shared by those who are broadly positive about government – those who believe it is generally working (56%) and those who are very satisfied with recent experience with government agencies or services (62%). Public sector workers are not noticeably more opposed than others, but opposition is strongest among those employed in the non-profit sector (32% favour versus 35% oppose).

Those who **favour** private sector delivery were asked why they do so, from a list of five options (as well as being offered the opportunity to volunteer other reasons). Canadians are most likely to say they support private sector involvement because it offers more competition or choice (57%), means companies can provide lower costs (55%) and because government is too inefficient (53%); fewer mention that companies can provide better service (48%) and that it is best to rely on the free market (29%).

Private sector delivery of public services

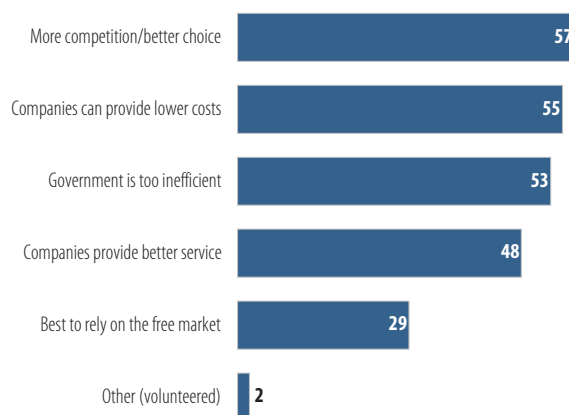
By employment sector



Q.28

Would you favour or oppose the private sector becoming more involved in the delivery of the types of services traditionally provided by government?

Why favour private sector delivery of public services

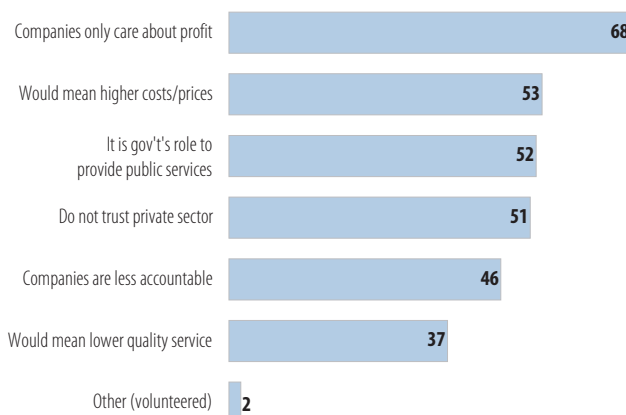


Q.29a

Why favour more private sector involvement in the delivery of services traditionally provided by government?

Those who **oppose** private sector delivery are most likely to say that companies care only about profit (68%), with smaller majorities saying it would mean higher costs and prices (53%), that it is governments' role to provide such services (52%), and because they do not trust the private sector (51%). Smaller proportions oppose private sector delivery because they believe companies are less accountable (46%) and that it would mean lower quality service (37%).

Why oppose private sector delivery of public services

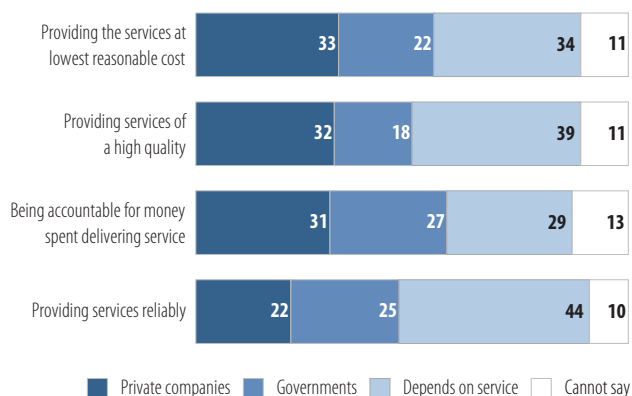


Q.29b

Why oppose more private sector involvement in the delivery of services traditionally provided by government?

WHICH SECTOR CAN DO BETTER? Canadians were asked to compare the relative strengths of the public and private sectors in terms of service delivery on four dimensions. Opinions are mixed, with the private sector getting the nod in three areas (providing services at the lowest reasonable cost, providing high quality services, being accountable for money spent), and the public sector in one (providing services reliably). But a significant proportion decline to state a clear position, indicating that it depends on the service involved (an option offered on the survey) or cannot answer the question.

Which sector can do a better job of delivering services?



Q.30

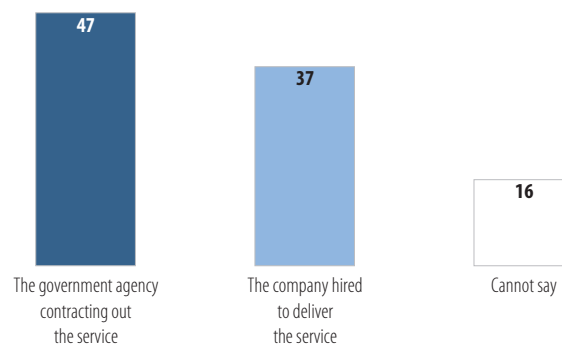
Do you think governments or private companies are more likely to do a better job of delivering services in terms of each of the following ... ?

Across dimensions, government is somewhat more positively rated by public sector workers, Canadians with a post-graduate degree, and those who advocate bigger government. The private sector is most apt to receive support from rural residents, Canadians under 45, and those advocating smaller government. In most cases these are differences of degree rather than fundamentally different opinions.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SERVICE DELIVERY. In cases where the private sector is contracted by government to deliver public services, who do Canadians believe should be directly accountable for ensuring the services are delivered properly? Close to half (47%) place this responsibility on the government agency contracting out the service, compared with 37 percent who say it should be the company hired to deliver the service. Another one in six (16%) cannot say either way.

Government is most likely seen as the responsible party by Canadians 45 and older, among those with a post-graduate degree, those highly engaged and those who believe government is working. Private sector responsibility is the minority view except among proponents of bigger government (54%).

Who should be accountable for ensuring proper service delivery



Q.31

In cases where the private sector is contracted by government to deliver public services, who should be directly accountable for ensuring the services are delivered properly



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