

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.

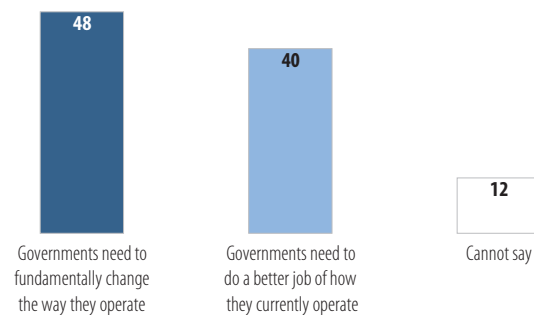
How much change is needed?

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 ... ?

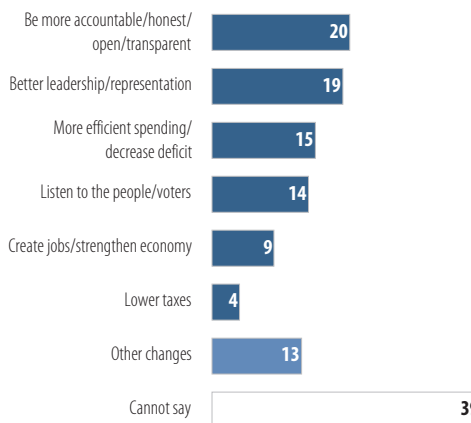
Canadians were asked to identify what they consider to be the single most important change government needs to make to do a better job (asked in an open-ended format, with no response options offered). The public provided a range of responses, but when categorized into conceptual categories none were 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.

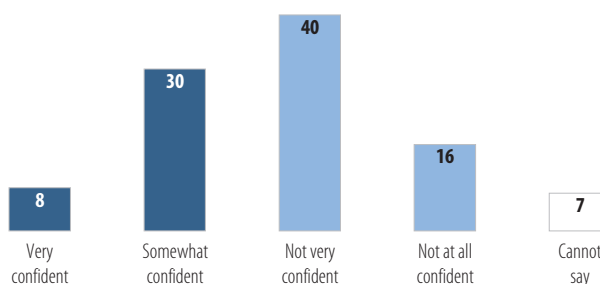
Single most important change government needs to make



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%).

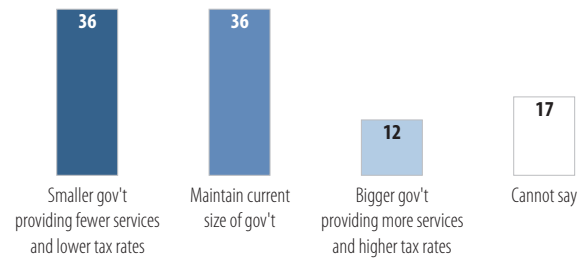
Preferred size of government

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).

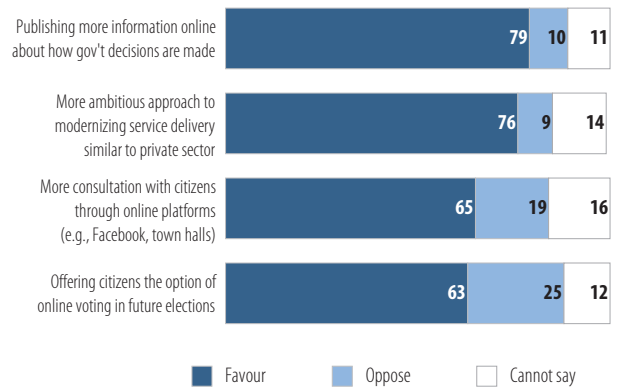
Similarly, three-quarters (76%) favour governments **taking a more ambitious approach to modernizing the delivery of public services** (e.g., license renewals, employment assistance), similar to what is now being done by the private sector.

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

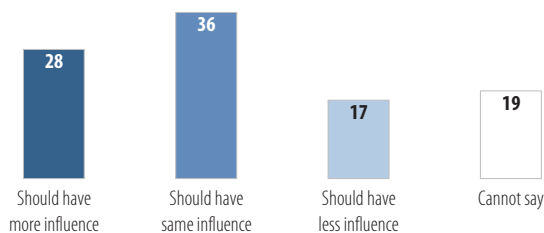


Q.25
Would you favour or oppose the following types of changes in how governments operate

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?