

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.

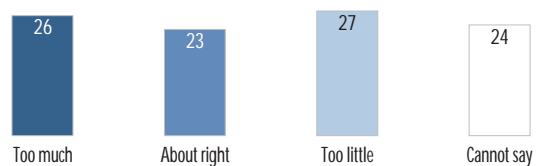
Government regulation of business

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.

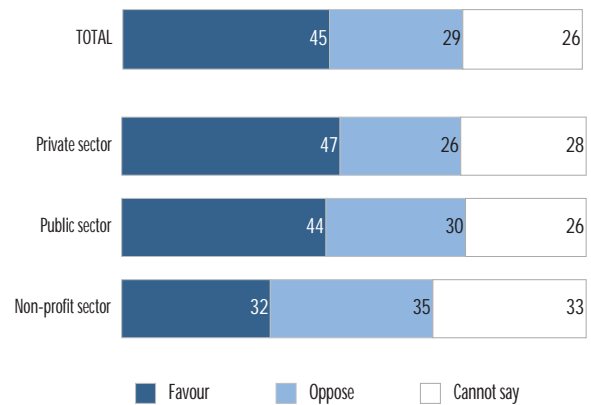
Over the past few decades there has been a major trend toward the private sector taking responsibility for delivery of public services that have traditionally been provided by governments (e.g., postal services, transportation, waste management). Canadians are generally comfortable with this trend, at 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

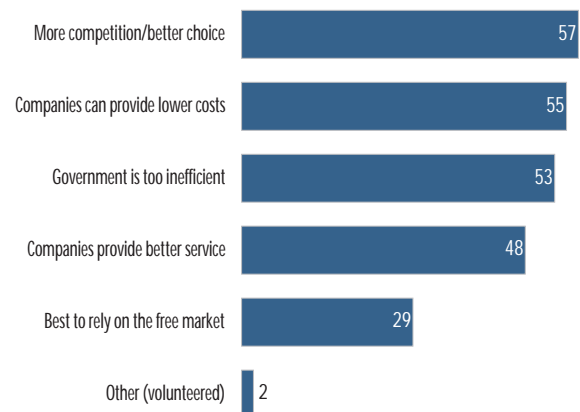
By employment sector



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

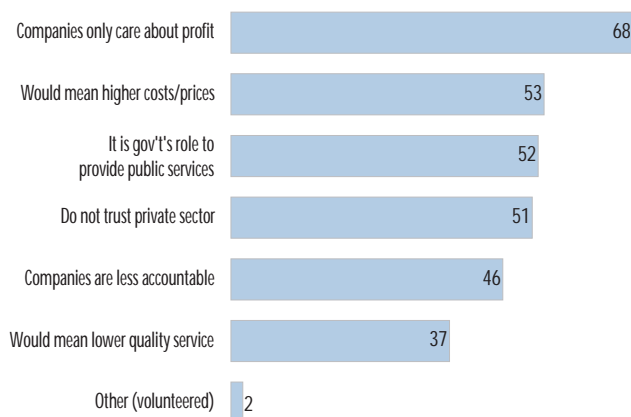


Q.29a

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

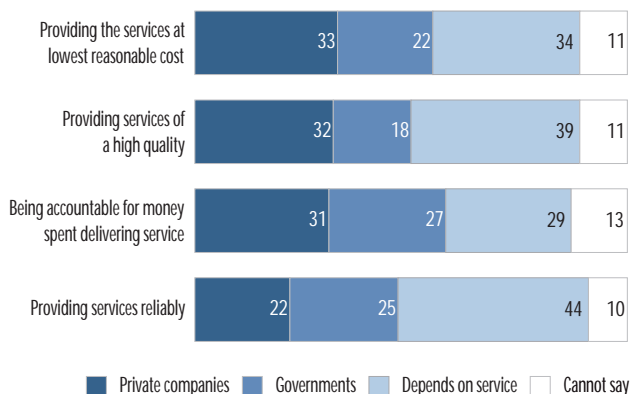


Q.29b

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

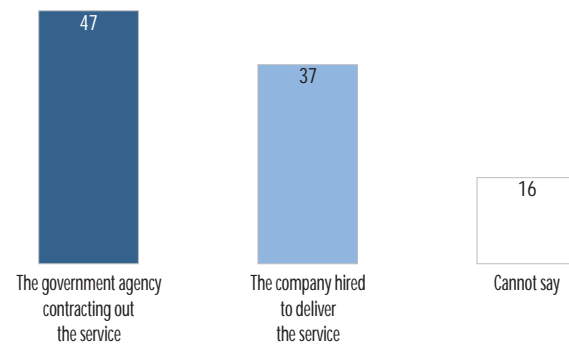
Do you think governments or private companies are more likely to do a better job of delivering services in terms of each of the following... ?

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