

# Government and Politics

## Effectiveness of government

### SATISFACTION WITH SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT.

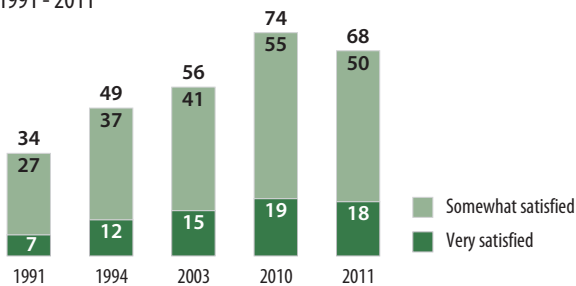
Governments are constantly under scrutiny – and often attacked for doing too much or too little, and not meeting public expectations. Such dissatisfaction notwithstanding, Canadians are notably positive about their current system of government when broadly defined. Seven in ten (68%) express satisfaction with their country’s system of government, although this proportion has declined modestly over the past year (down 6 points), reversing an upward trend dating back to the early 1990s.

This latest trend is driven primarily by declining confidence in Quebec (down 15 points) and Manitoba (down 16), but also in Ontario (down 8). West of Saskatchewan is a different story, with satisfaction levels in Alberta and B.C. up modestly since 2010. Satisfaction with system of government is now highest in Alberta (80%) and lowest in Quebec (55%).

On the political spectrum, confidence ranges from 82 percent among Conservative supporters to 37 percent among Bloc supporters. Views on this issue are also closely linked to satisfaction with direction of the country today.

### Satisfied with system of government

1991 - 2011

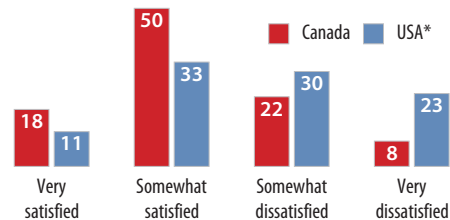


However frustrated Canadians may be with their governments, their confidence is well above that of their neighbours to the south. When the same question was posed to Americans in January 2012, fewer than half say they are very (11%) or somewhat (33%) satisfied with their own system of government, compared with a majority who are somewhat (30%) or very (23%) dissatisfied.

Across the USA, satisfaction is most evident among Americans 18 to 34 years of age, Hispanics and college graduates, and least so among whites and Americans with household incomes of \$35,000 to \$50,000.

### Satisfaction with system of government

Canada and USA 2011



\* Environics Institute survey, Jan. 2012

**GOVERNMENTS AS THE SOLUTION OR THE PROBLEM?**

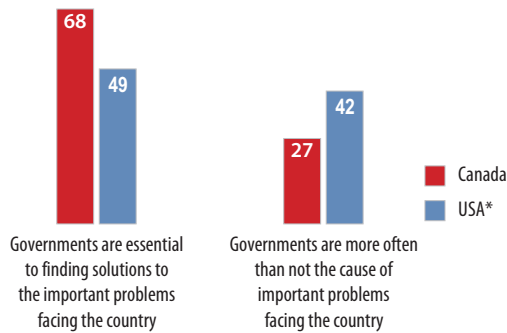
Although criticism of governments (leaders, policies, spending) might lead to the conclusion that Canadians think they are more trouble than they are worth, most in fact believe governments are essential to finding solutions to important problems facing the country (68%) rather than more often than not the source of such problems (27%).

Belief in governments as solvers of problems is strong across the country, with the exception of Canadians with the lowest levels of education and income, and supporters of the Green Party and Bloc Québécois.

Americans are less positive about the role of government in their country, based on a January 2012 Environics survey. Barely half (49%) share the view that governments are essential to finding solutions to important problems, compared with 42 percent who believe that government more often than not are the cause of such problems. This latter view is most widely held by Americans in the \$35,000 to \$50,000 income bracket.

**Are governments the solution or the problem?**

Canada and USA 2011



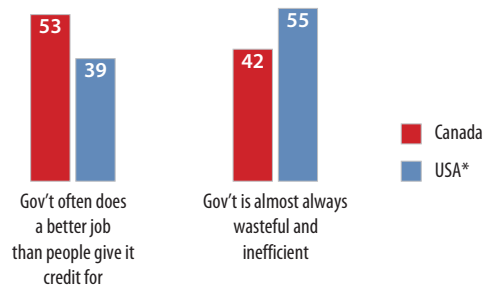
\* Environics Institute survey, Jan. 2012

Canadians are not quite as positive about the efficiency with which governments operate. Four in ten (42%) believe government is almost always wasteful and inefficient, compared with 53 percent who say government often does a better job than people give it credit for. The negative perspective stands out most clearly in Quebec and among Bloc supporters.

U.S. public opinion is even less forgiving, with 55 percent describing their government as always wasteful and inefficient versus 39 percent who say it is better than people give it credit for (based on a February 2011 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center).

**View about government**

Canada and USA 2011



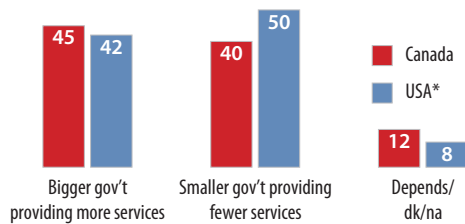
\* Pew Research Center, Feb. 2011

**IS THE SIZE OF GOVERNMENT TOO LARGE?** Growing tensions between increasing demand for public services and the rising cost of providing them raises new questions about the size of government that taxpayers are prepared to support. Canadians are evenly divided on the broad question of whether they prefer a bigger government providing more services (45%) or a smaller government providing fewer services (40%).

This division exists across the population, but bigger government is more popular among non-European immigrants and NDP supporters, and especially among young Canadians (68%; compared with only 33% among those aged 60 plus).

The proportion advocating for smaller government doesn't exceed 50 percent, except among Conservative supporters (52%), whose views are closest to that of Americans who are more likely to favour smaller government with less services (50%) than bigger government with more services (42%) (based on a February 2011 Pew survey).

**Type of government you would rather have**  
Canada and USA 2011

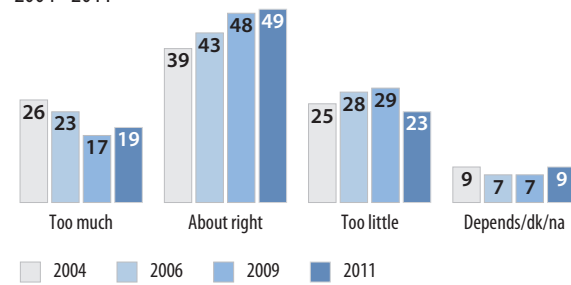


\* Pew Research Center, Feb. 2011

**GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF BUSINESS.** The degree of government regulation of business has not been especially controversial in Canada for a number of years, and the public appears to be increasingly comfortable with the status quo. Half (49%) now say the amount of government regulation of business in Canada is about right, essentially unchanged since 2009. The remainder are split between those who say there is too little regulation (23%, down 6 points) or too much regulation (19%, up 2).

Belief in too little regulation is most evident in Quebec (especially among Bloc supporters) and among NDP supporters. Those who say there is too much regulation of business are most apt to be Conservative supporters or have no current party affiliation.

**Amount of gov't regulation of business today**  
2004 - 2011



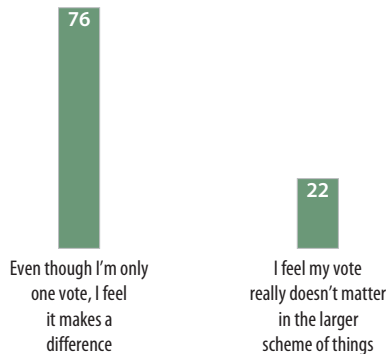
## Political engagement

**SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT.** Declining voter turnout is an unmistakable trend across the country, but most Canadians feel voting makes a difference. Three-quarters (76%) of eligible voters agree with the view that “even though I’m only one vote, I feel it makes a difference,” compared with 22 percent who share the perspective “I feel my vote really doesn’t matter in the larger scheme of things.”

Opinions are largely similar across the country, but a sense of empowerment is most widespread among women, university graduates, and Canadians aged 60 and older. Those least apt to share this view are Green Party supporters and Canadians without a high school diploma.

Notably, a strong sense of political empowerment is at the national average among two groups that might potentially feel otherwise – Canadian youth (who are much less likely to vote) and voters dissatisfied with the current direction of the country.

View about voting in federal elections  
2011



**REASONS FOR NOT VOTING.** When Canadians are asked (unprompted) why they think others are voting less than before, a range of reasons are offered, most of which fall into two broad categories. Two-thirds cite reasons having to do with the current system of government and politics, most notably that it doesn't make a difference who is elected or runs the government (30%), that politicians are no longer honest or inspiring (18%), that government is no longer effective in addressing important problems (8%), and there are not enough choices of candidates or parties (5%).

Half identify reasons that have more to do with voters themselves, particularly in terms of apathy about politics and government (31%), with fewer stressing lack of attention among youth (7%), people's busy schedules (5%) or general laziness (5%).

Responses to this question are notably consistent across regions, demographic subgroups and federal party affiliation.

### Reasons for not voting

Unprompted responses 2011

#### Political system

Doesn't make a difference who is elected/runs government	30
Politicians don't inspire people	18
Government no longer effective in addressing important issues	8
Not enough choice of parties or candidates	5
Voting system is no good	4
Too many/unnecessary elections	2

#### Voters themselves

Apathy/people no longer care	26
Young people don't care about politics/elections	7
Politics no longer as important to people	5
Laziness/people can't be bothered	5
Busy schedules/people don't have time	5
People don't know enough	3

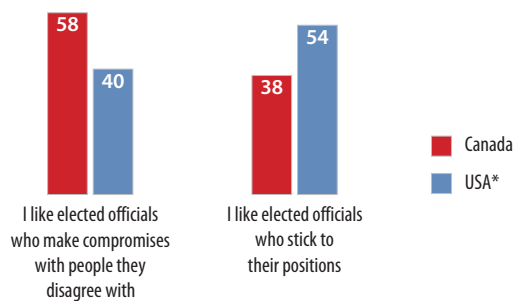
**SHOULD POLITICIANS COMPROMISE?** Federal politics has grown increasingly partisan over the past few years, which may be another factor driving voter disengagement. Six in ten (58%) Canadians say they prefer elected officials who make compromises with people they disagree with, compared with 38 percent who prefer elected officials who stick to their positions.

This preference for compromise is evident across the country, but is strongest in Quebec, among Canadians with higher levels of education and income, and supporters of the NDP, Bloc and Green parties. By comparison, Conservative supporters are evenly split between those wanting officials who compromise and those who prefer politicians who stick to their positions.

Partisanship is notably stronger in the U.S., where the public prefers politicians who stick to their positions (54%) over those who compromise (40%) (based on a February 2011 Pew survey).

## Type of politician preferred

Canada and USA 2011



\* Pew Research Center, Feb. 2011