

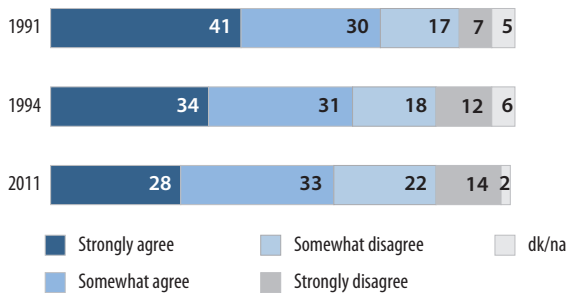
Role of Public Sector Unions

ARE UNIONS TOO POWERFUL? Union membership and influence has been declining in Canada over the past 30 years, but Canadians continue to believe they have too much power for the good of the country, although less so than in the 1990s.

Six in ten strongly (28%) or somewhat (33%) agree that “labour unions have too much power for the good of the country;” compared with more than three in ten who somewhat (22%) or strongly (14%) disagree. This represents a significant shift from 20 years ago when four in ten strongly agreed with this sentiment.

The view that unions are too powerful is most widespread in Ontario and Quebec, and among federal Conservative supporters, and is least evident in union households (especially private sector unions) and among NDP supporters. Since 1994, agreement has declined among most groups, except in Ontario, among university-educated Canadians, members of public sector unions and Conservative supporters.

Labour unions have too much power for the good of the country
1991 - 2011

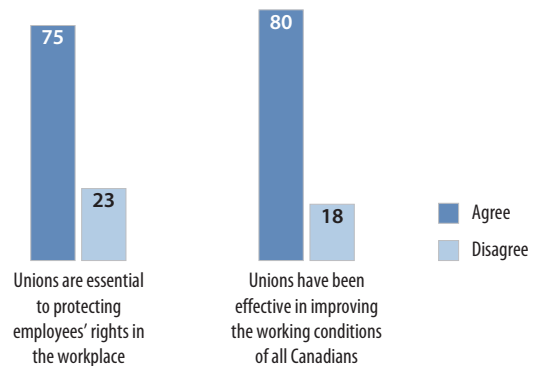


ARE UNIONS IMPORTANT AND EFFECTIVE? Despite public perceptions about the power of unions today, they are also seen by most as important and effective institutions. Three-quarters (75%) of Canadians agree that “unions are essential to protecting employees rights in the workplace” and eight in ten (80%) agree “unions have been effective in improving working conditions for all Canadians.”

This perspective is held by clear majorities across the country, with modest variation in strength. The belief that unions are essential to protecting employee rights is most widespread in Atlantic Canada and Manitoba, with disagreement most evident among higher income Canadians, Vancouverites and allophones. Agreement that unions have improved working conditions for all Canadians is most widespread in Quebec and among rural residents, and least so in Toronto and Vancouver.

For both statements, the largest gap is between supporters of the federal NDP and union households on the one hand, and Conservative supporters on the other (although a majority in this group still agree with both statements).

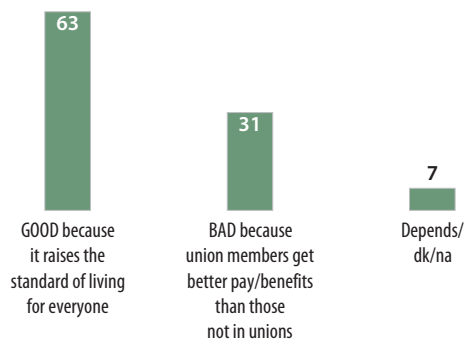
Effectiveness of unions in improving working conditions
2011



Moreover, Canadians largely reject the idea that unions end up benefitting their members to the detriment of other, non-unionized workers. Six in ten (63%) believe it is a good thing when unions negotiate better pay and working conditions for their members because it raises the standard of living and sets an example for other workplaces. In contrast, three in ten (31%) believe such negotiations are unfair because people in unions get better pay and benefits than those not in unions.

Opinions are notably consistent across regions and demographic groups, but vary by political affiliation in a predictable pattern (most positive views among NDP, Bloc and Green Party supporters, least so among Conservative supporters).

Impact of union-negotiated pay/benefits 2011



PUBLIC SECTOR UNION RIGHT TO STRIKE. Positive views about the contribution of unions notwithstanding, the public is divided on the issue of whether public sector unions should have the right to strike when negotiations with management break down. Half (49%) of Canadians believe the collective bargaining process should run its course without interruption even if it sometimes results in a strike, while a similar proportion (46%) say all public sector strikes should be banned and settlements imposed by a third-party arbitrator.

Such division is evident across the country, but union-friendly sentiments are more evident in B.C. and Saskatchewan, among Canadians aged 18 to 29, union households, and NDP and Green Party supporters. Preference for banning strikes is the majority view among top income earners and Conservative supporters.

When public sector negotiations break down ... 2011

