

Social Capital

“Social capital” is the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks, and the extent to which there is trust and reciprocity within a community and among individuals. It is the essential “lubricant” that makes it possible for societies to function and for people to get along peacefully even when they have little in common. There is ample evidence that high levels of such reciprocity, trust and connection are not simply “feel good” notions, but key ingredients to making communities productive, healthy and safe.

Social capital typically refers to two distinct concepts: i) a behavioural concept entailing the connections and networks through which individuals have ties to other people, groups and organizations (through memberships and activities); and ii) a subjective concept describing the degree of trust one has in others, and a felt sense of belonging. As well, there are two complementary dimensions of social capital, defined as “bonding” capital (connections within one’s own group) and “bridging” capital (connections with members of other groups), the latter being of particular importance in diverse multicultural societies.

The term “social capital” has been in use for more than a century, but gained widespread prominence in the 1990s

through the work of U.S. sociologist Robert Putnam. In his seminal book *Bowling Alone*, Putnam found evidence of a significant decline in social capital across American society, as expressed through diminishing participation in politics, service clubs and informal activities like bridge. In later work, Putnam found evidence from his research in the USA that increasing ethnic diversity is associated with declining (bridging) social capital, as individuals share less in common with people from other cultures, and so are less likely to trust them and support a multicultural society. In the past decade, Canadian researchers found that this trend, by and large, is not evident in this country.²

This one landmark Canadian study aside, there has been surprisingly little research on social capital in this country, a notable gap given the centrality of the concept and the implications for many areas of society. With this in mind, Focus Canada in 2012 takes the first steps in directly exploring the strength of social capital across the country, through measurement of a few key indicators of the trust aspect of social capital, including a couple drawn from the previous Canadian study.³

² Keith Banting, Will Kymlicka, Richard Johnston and Stuart Soroka. 2011. “Are Diversity and Solidarity Incompatible?” *Inroads: The Canadian Journal of Opinion* 28: 36-48.

³ Richard Johnston & Jonathan R. Kesselman, 2002. Equality, Security and Community Survey. Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), grant #412-97-0003.

SENSE OF BELONGING TO LOCAL COMMUNITY.

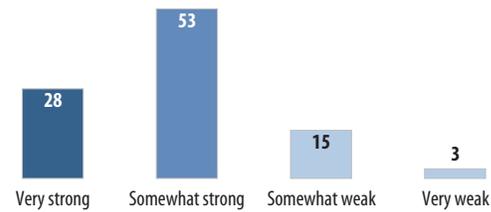
One indicator of social capital is an individual's sense of belonging to a greater whole, such as one's local community. Canadians are most likely to describe their own sense of belonging to be "somewhat strong" (53%), compared with those who say "very strong" (28%) on the one hand, and "somewhat weak" (15%) or "very weak" (3%) strong on the other.⁴

A sense of community belonging varies somewhat by province, community size and age cohort. As might be expected, a strong sense of belonging is most evident among Canadians aged 60 plus (38%) and those living in rural communities (40%). Across the country, this strength of connection is also more apt to be felt in Saskatchewan (32%), Ontario (32%), Manitoba (31%) and B.C. (31%), and less so in Quebec (21%) and Alberta (23%) (where more than one in five describe their connection as weak).

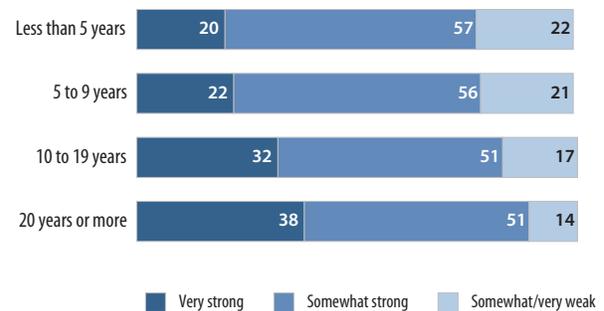
Notably, there is relatively little difference across income and education strata, although Canadians in the lowest income bracket express somewhat weaker attachment. Allophones and immigrants from outside the USA and Europe are as likely as other Canadians to say they feel a strong sense of belonging to their local community, but at the same time are also somewhat more likely to make up the group that expresses a weak attachment.

Consistent with other research, a sense of belonging is also a function of how long one has been living in the same neighbourhood. Very strong local ties are reported by 20 percent of Canadians who have lived at the same address for less than five years, almost doubling to 38 percent among those with tenure of at least 20 years (and this relationship holds across age cohorts, although more weakly among Canadians under 30).

Sense of belonging to local community
2012



Sense of belonging to local community
By years at same address 2012



Q.18

How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?
Would you say it is...?

⁴ This question is taken from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) conducted every couple of years by Statistics Canada. A direct comparison of these results with those from CCHS surveys has not been done due to methodological differences (e.g., sample composition, placement of questions).

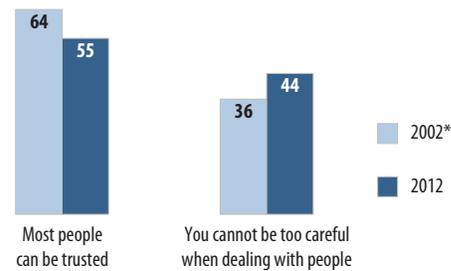
TRUST IN OTHERS. Also central to the concept of social capital is the degree to which individuals have a level of trust in others in the society in which they live. In 2012, Canadians' sense of trust in others is somewhat divided, based on a question drawn from the previous national study. A small majority (55%) say that, generally speaking, most people can be trusted, compared with 44 percent who maintain that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people. This reflects a noticeable decline over the past decade when the balance was more positive (64% most people can be trusted, versus 36% cannot be too careful).

This declining trust in others is evident across most of the country, with the notable exception of British Columbia, and is most significant in Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Trust levels are now highest in B.C. (66%, although lower in Vancouver at 60%) and lowest in Quebec (43%).

As in 2002, trust in others varies most dramatically by socio-economic status, especially education level where the gap has widened over the past 10 years; trust in others is expressed by 68 percent of Canadians with a university degree, but only 29 percent of those without a high school diploma. By comparison, trust levels between the young and old have narrowed, and no longer differ significantly (as trust has decreased by a greater proportion among Canadians 45 and older).

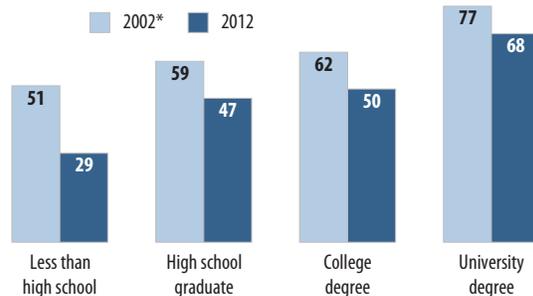
Notably, country of birth does not appear to be a significant factor in Canadians' sense of trust in others. Immigrants are as likely as native-born to express such trust, with those born in the USA/Europe even more so (70%). Not surprisingly, trust in others is strongly associated with a general sense of belonging to one's local community, and this holds regardless of age.

Trust in others 2002 – 2012



*Johnston, et al., 2002

Most people can be trusted By education 2002 – 2012



*Johnston, et al., 2002

Q.19

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?

RECOVERING A LOST WALLET. One of the most well-known indicators of social capital measures people's confidence in having a lost wallet or purse containing \$200 returned by each of several types of individuals (someone who lives close by, clerk in a nearby store, police officer, stranger).

Predictably, Canadians' confidence in recovering a lost wallet with money inside varies significantly depending on who might find it. But in contrast to the general trust question presented above, such confidence has held notably steady over the past 10 years.

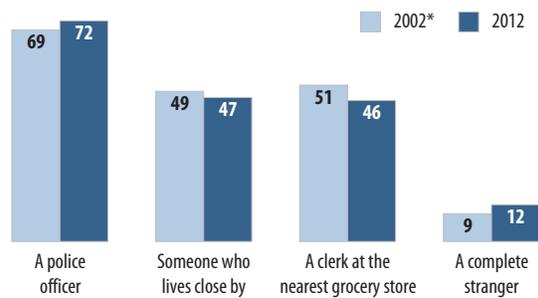
If found by a police officer. Among the four scenarios, Canadians are, by far, most likely to expect they would recover a lost wallet if found by a police officer. Seven in ten (72%) say this would be very likely, up marginally from 2002. The remainder say this would be somewhat likely (23%) or not at all likely (5%).

Strong confidence in this case is lowest in Quebec, but it is this province that has seen the largest increase since 2002 (to 54%, up 12 points). Those most likely to believe a police officer would return their wallet include residents of Manitoba, higher income Canadians, anglophones and those who feel strong connection to their community. Across age cohorts, confidence has increased most noticeably among Canadians aged 18 to 29 (to 71%, up 9).

If found by someone who lives close by. As in 2002, just under half (47%) of Canadians think it would be very likely to have a lost wallet returned by someone who lives close by, with 41 percent saying this is somewhat likely, and another 12 percent not at all likely.

Confidence in the good deeds of people living nearby is highest in Atlantic Canada (56%) and Saskatchewan (54%), but in both cases is less widespread than 10 years ago. This opinion is also most evident among rural residents, older Canadians and anglophones, and least evident among Quebecers (31%), those living in major urban centres (especially Montreal) and those under 30 (although the gap between young and old has narrowed over the past decade). As might be expected, sense of community belonging is a strong predictor of confidence in recovering a lost wallet from a neighbour.

Very likely to recover a lost wallet found by ...
2002 – 2012



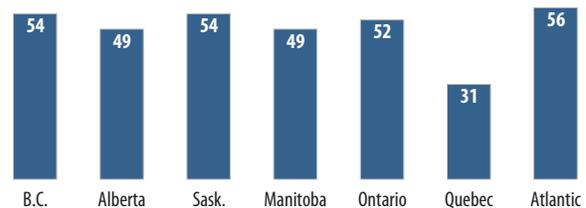
*Johnston, et al., 2002

Q.20a-d

If you lost a wallet or purse that contained \$200, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found...? Would it be very likely, somewhat likely or not at all likely?

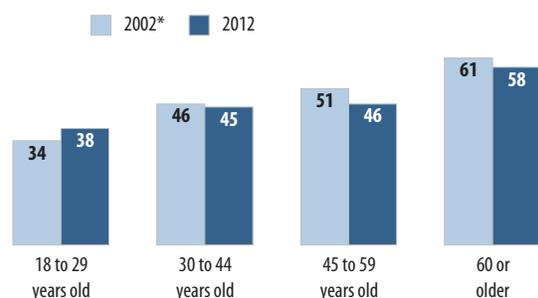
Very likely to recover a lost wallet found by someone who lives close by

By province 2012



Very likely to recover a lost wallet found by someone who lives close by

By age 2002 – 2012



*Johnston, et al., 2002

Q.20a

If you lost a wallet or purse that contained \$200, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found if it was found by someone who lives close by? Would it be very likely, somewhat likely or not at all likely?

If found by a clerk in the nearest grocery store. Canadians express a comparable level of trust in recovering a lost wallet found by a clerk in the nearest grocery store, although somewhat less so than in 2002. Fewer than half (46%) say this would be very likely (down 5 points), compared with 43 percent who say somewhat likely and 11 percent who do not think this would happen.

Declining confidence in recovering a wallet from a store clerk is most noticeable in Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan, among men, higher income Canadians and those without a high school diploma, while rising among those under 30. As with other scenarios, confidence remains strongest in Atlantic Canada (57% very likely), the Prairies (57%) and among rural residents (61%), and weakest in Quebec (30%).

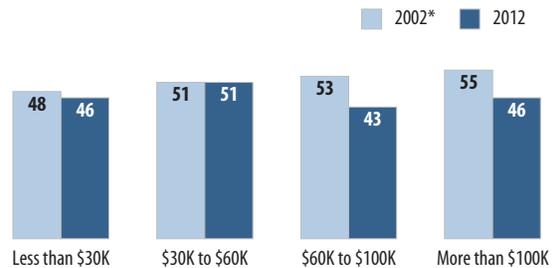
If found by a complete stranger. Predictably, Canadians are least likely to expect a lost wallet to be returned by a complete stranger, although they are a bit more optimistic than a decade ago. Just over one in ten (12%) think this is very likely (up 3 points), compared with a majority (55%, up 2) who believe it is somewhat likely and one-third (32%, down 4) who say not at all likely.

Opinions about the honesty of strangers is largely consistent across the country, although Atlantic Canadians (20%) continue to stand out as being the most trusting, and Quebecers (5%) the least so. Expectations are very similar across socio-economic status, and older Canadians are only marginally more optimistic than younger ones. Once again, trust in recovering a lost wallet in this scenario increases along with strength of belonging to one's local community.

More surprising are the results by community size: strong confidence in recovering a lost wallet from a stranger is the same regardless of community size, but it is rural residents who are most likely to expect they would never see this wallet again.

Very likely to recover a lost wallet found by a clerk in the nearest grocery store

By household income 2002 – 2012



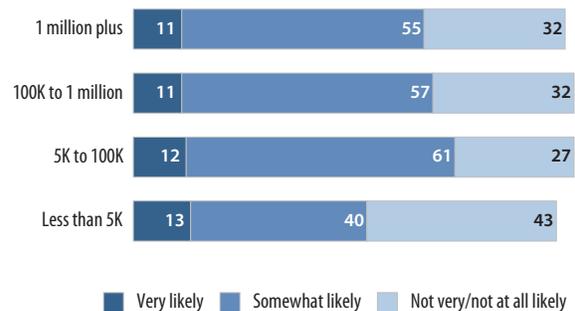
*Johnston, et al., 2002

Q.20b

If you lost a wallet or purse that contained \$200, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found by a clerk in the nearest grocery store? Would it be very likely, somewhat likely or not at all likely?

Very likely to recover a lost wallet found by a complete stranger

By community size 2012



Q.20d

If you lost a wallet or purse that contained \$200, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found by a complete stranger? Would it be very likely, somewhat likely or not at all likely?

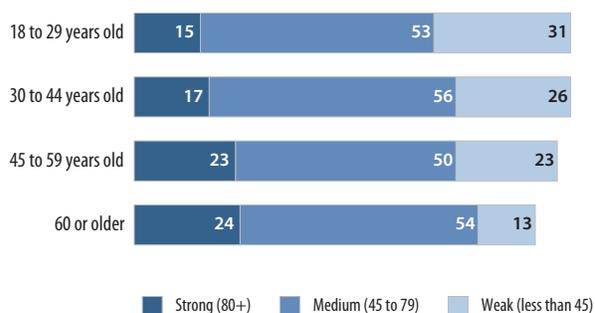
SOCIAL CAPITAL INDEX. The social capital indicators presented above were also combined into a single index that captures the variance into a single measure (with a range from “0” to “100”). Across the Canadian population, the mean social capital scores fall within a relatively narrow range, with most groups between 55 and 65 (out of 100). Differences are more apparent when the focus is placed on the top and bottom quintiles.

Strong social capital scores (80 and over) are most evident in Toronto (26%) and rural communities (28%), among high-income Canadians (25%) and those aged 60 plus (24%), and least so in Quebec (10%, compared with 38% in the lowest group which includes index scores under 45), among Canadians under 30 (15%), and those with the lowest levels of income (15%) and education (14%).

Finally, the impact of housing tenure on social capital appears to operate differently for younger and older cohorts. Among Canadians under 45, more years at the same address reduces the likelihood of having weak social capital, but does not improve the chances of having strong social capital. For those aged 45 and older, social capital increases in a linear fashion along with years at the same address.

Social capital index*

By age 2012



* Index measured on a scale from “0” (weak) to “100” (strong)