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# The Common Good: Who Decides?

## *A Canadian public perspective*

The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation's  
9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Public Policy  
Edmonton, AB  
November 22-24, 2012





**Study Sponsor**



UNIVERSITY OF  
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**Who decides the  
common good?**















Source: Elections Canada





# CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS



CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

1992 June, Tue. 23/06/92

Tuesday, June 23, 1992

40¢ (GST incl.)

Week-end Page 2

## THE ANSWER IS NO

Newfoundland, N.B. and PEI the only provinces to give accord strong support

By [illegible]

OTTAWA — Canada's people have only one answer to the question of sovereignty.

They said it yesterday: No. No. No. The overwhelming majority of Canadians say that the country has found a better way to live.

The vote was a resounding one, and the people have found a better way to live.

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and strong support for the accord, with the exception of Newfoundland, N.B. and PEI.

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**QUEBEC**  
**Bourassa accepts sovereignty fight**



**ONTARIO**  
**Close vote deals defeat to Rae**



Accord









**So who decides the common good  
in Canada  
today?**

**Is there still such a thing as  
“the common good”?**



# Trudeau Foundation National Survey

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## Defining the common good

- Do Canadians believe they share a common set of values/priorities for the country?
- Does the public actually share such a common set of values/priorities?

## Reconciling differences

- Do Canadians have confidence in elected representatives balancing competing interests?
- Is there a role for citizen activism in addressing major disagreements?

# Survey methodology

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- Telephone survey – representative sample of 2001 Canadians (18+)
- Conducted October 2 – 14, 2012
- Margin of sampling error:  $\pm 2.2\%$  (19 in 20 samples)



# Main Findings

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- There is no fully shared common good in Canada, although there is public consensus on a few values like gender equality and representative gov't
- Canadians believe they do share important values and aspirations, although aren't exactly sure what they may be
- The public continues to have confidence in their political institutions, but it is qualified and likely eroding
- Canadians endorse grassroots citizen action – provided it respects the law

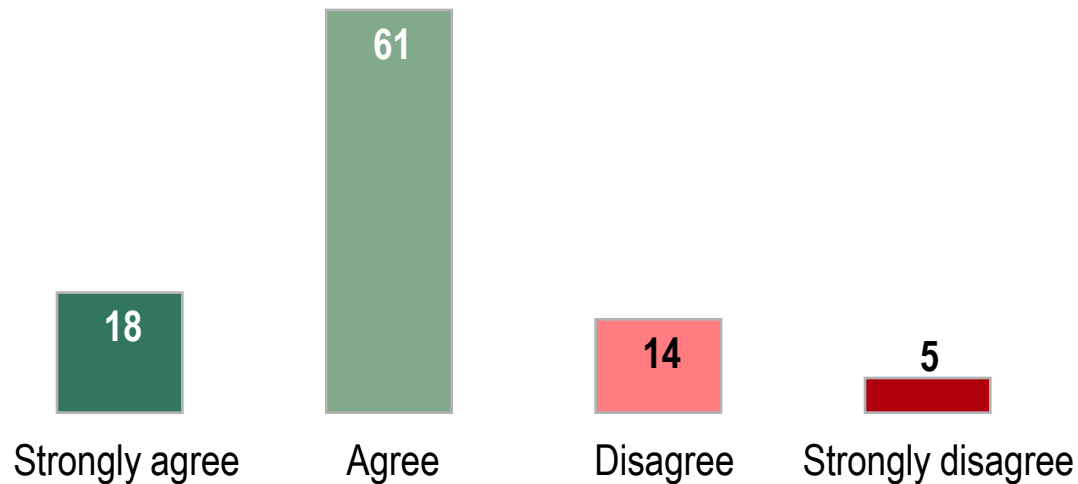


**Defining the common good**

# Public sense of sharing common national values

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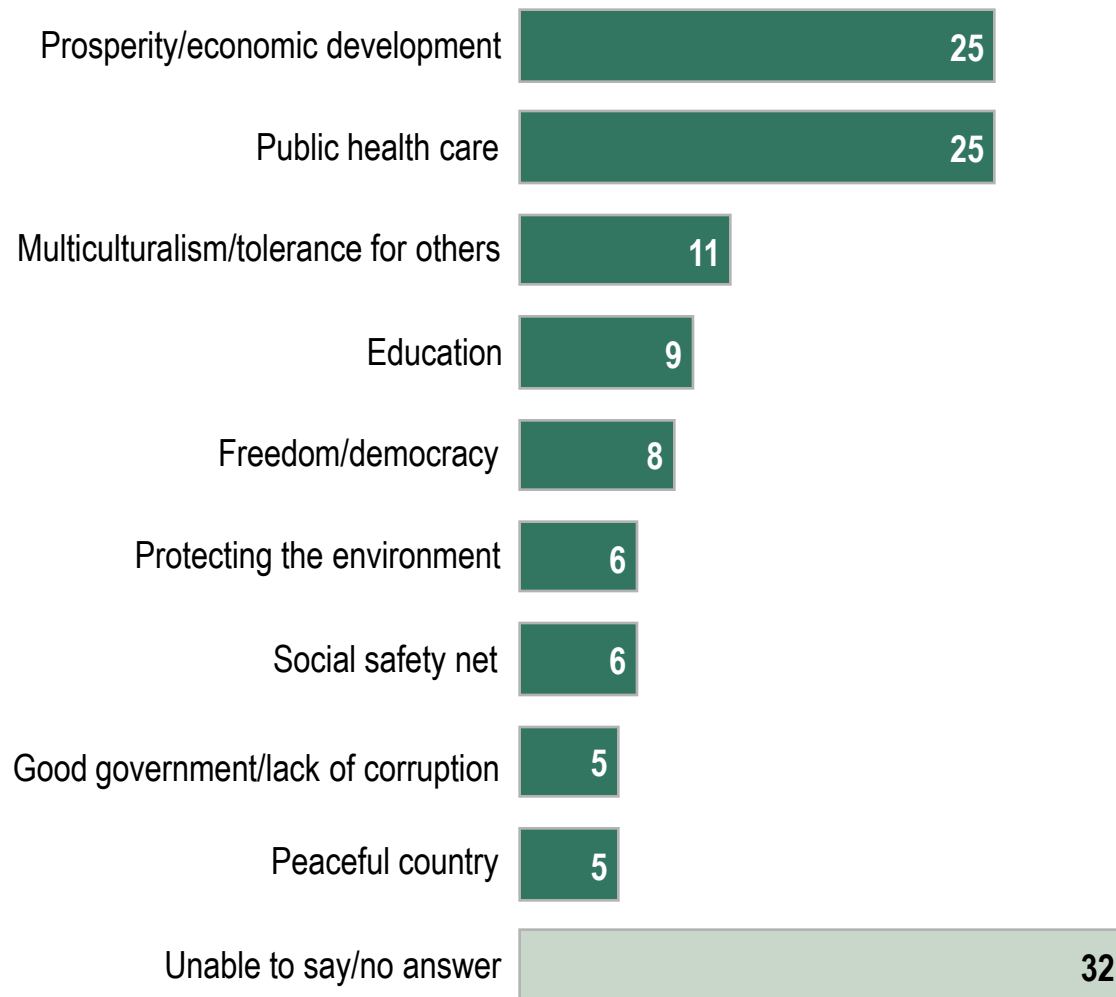
Agree-Disagree: *“Despite Canada’s size and diversity, most Canadians share a common set of values and priorities about what is good for the country”*





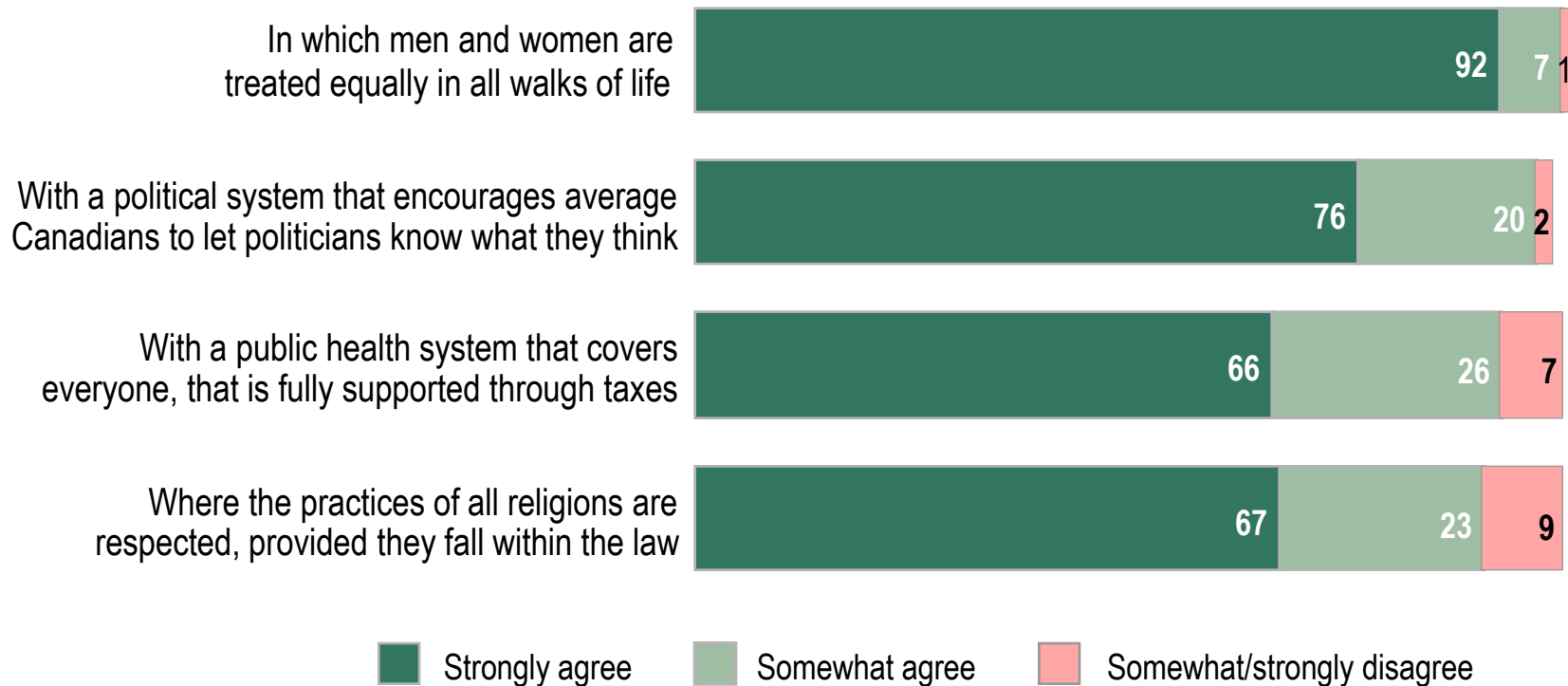
# On what values do most Canadians agree?

Unprompted response – Top mentions



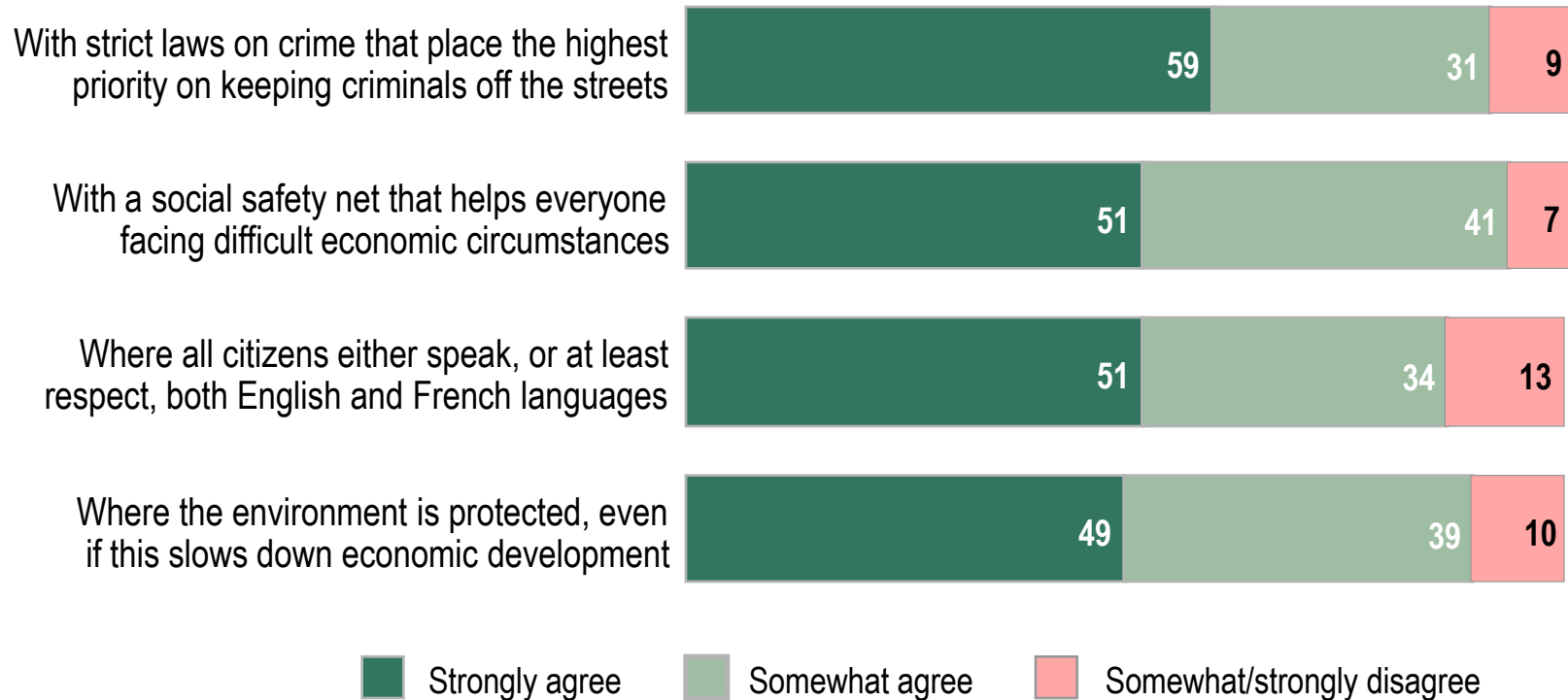
# Aspirational values - public consensus

Canada should be a country ...



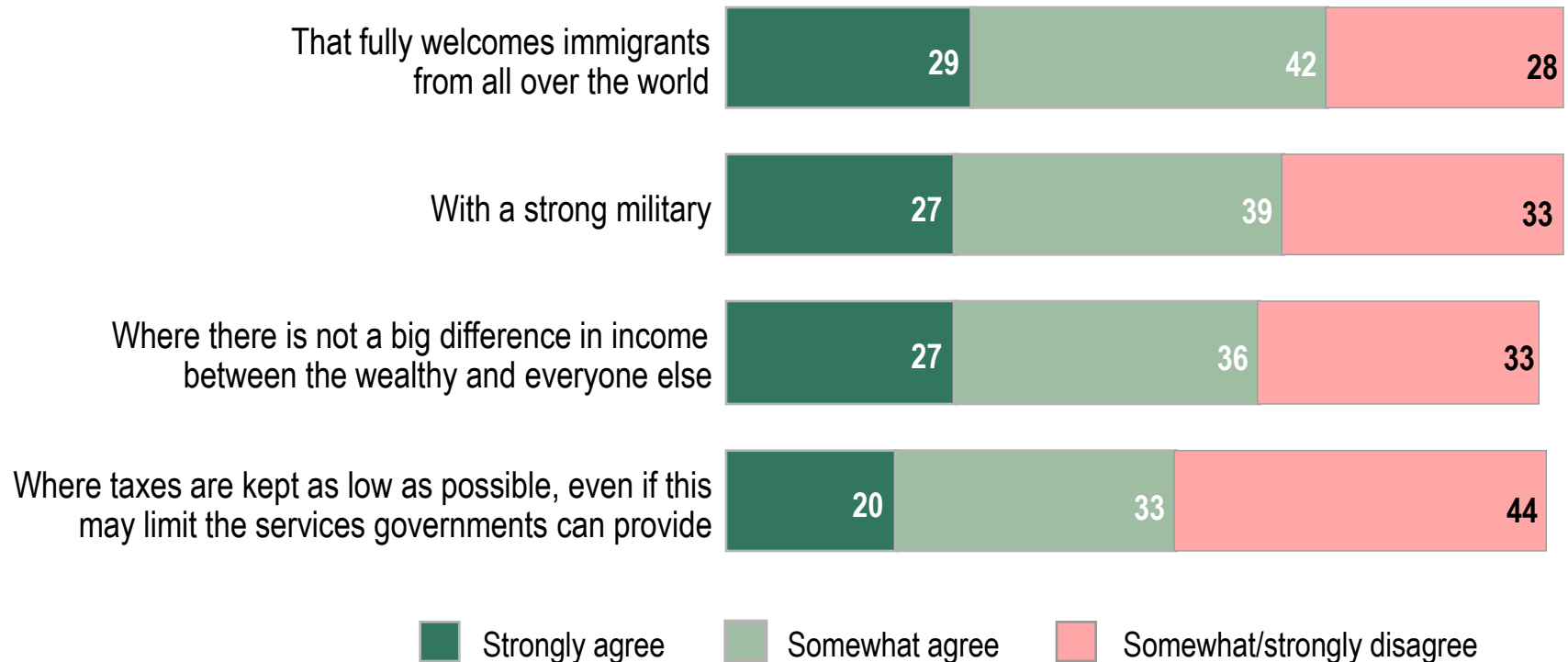
# Aspirational values - widespread agreement

Canada should be a country ...



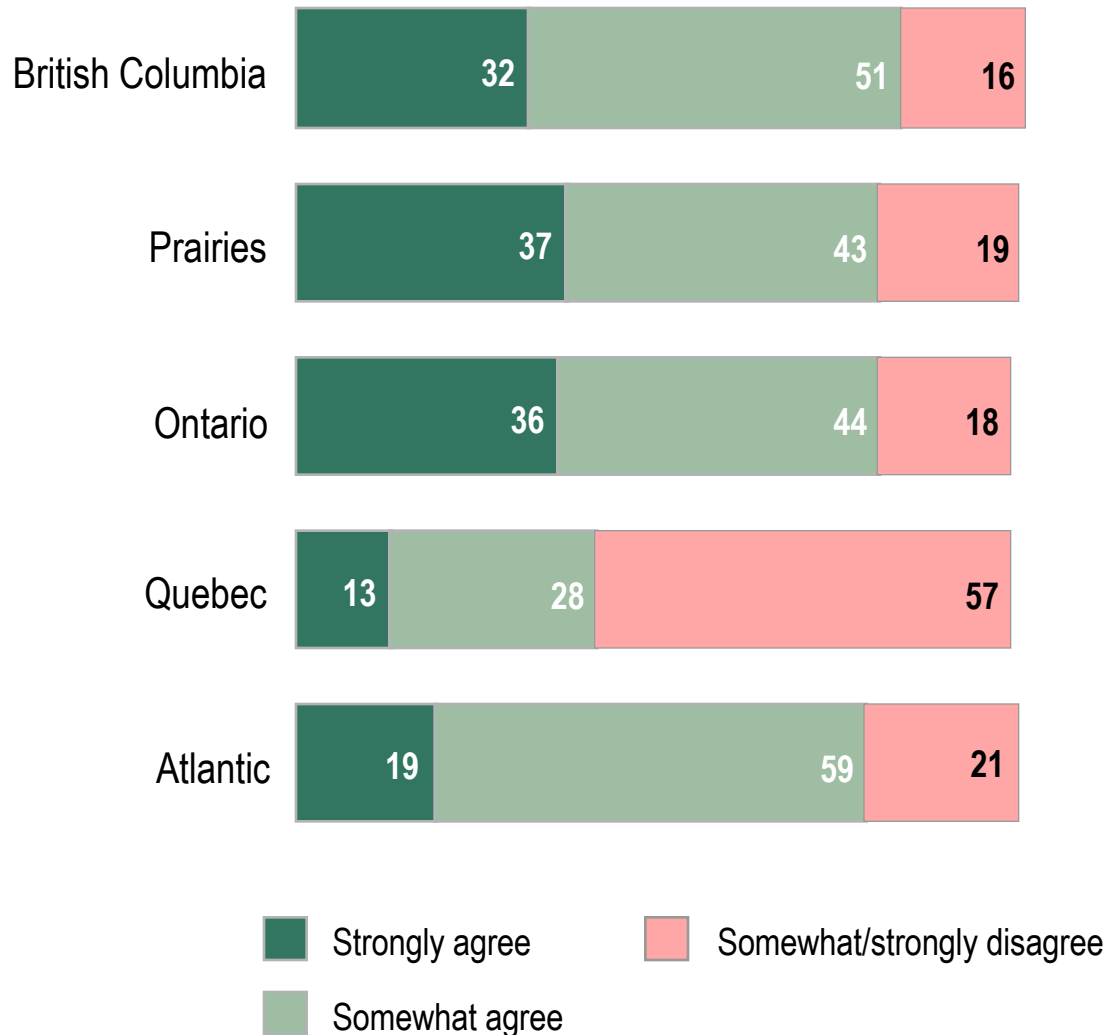
# Aspirational values - qualified agreement

Canada should be a country ...



# *Canada should be a country that fully welcomes immigrants from all over the world*

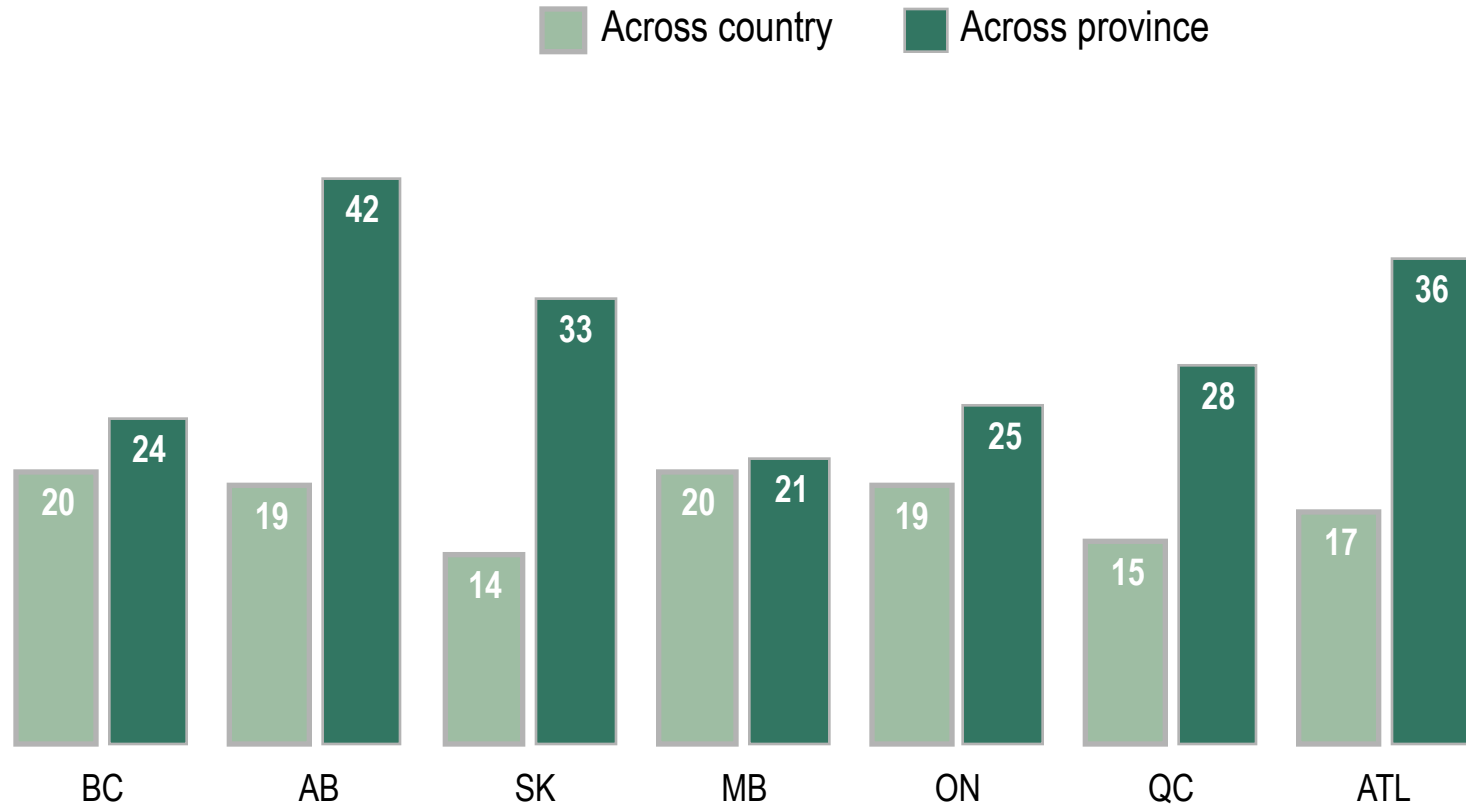
By region





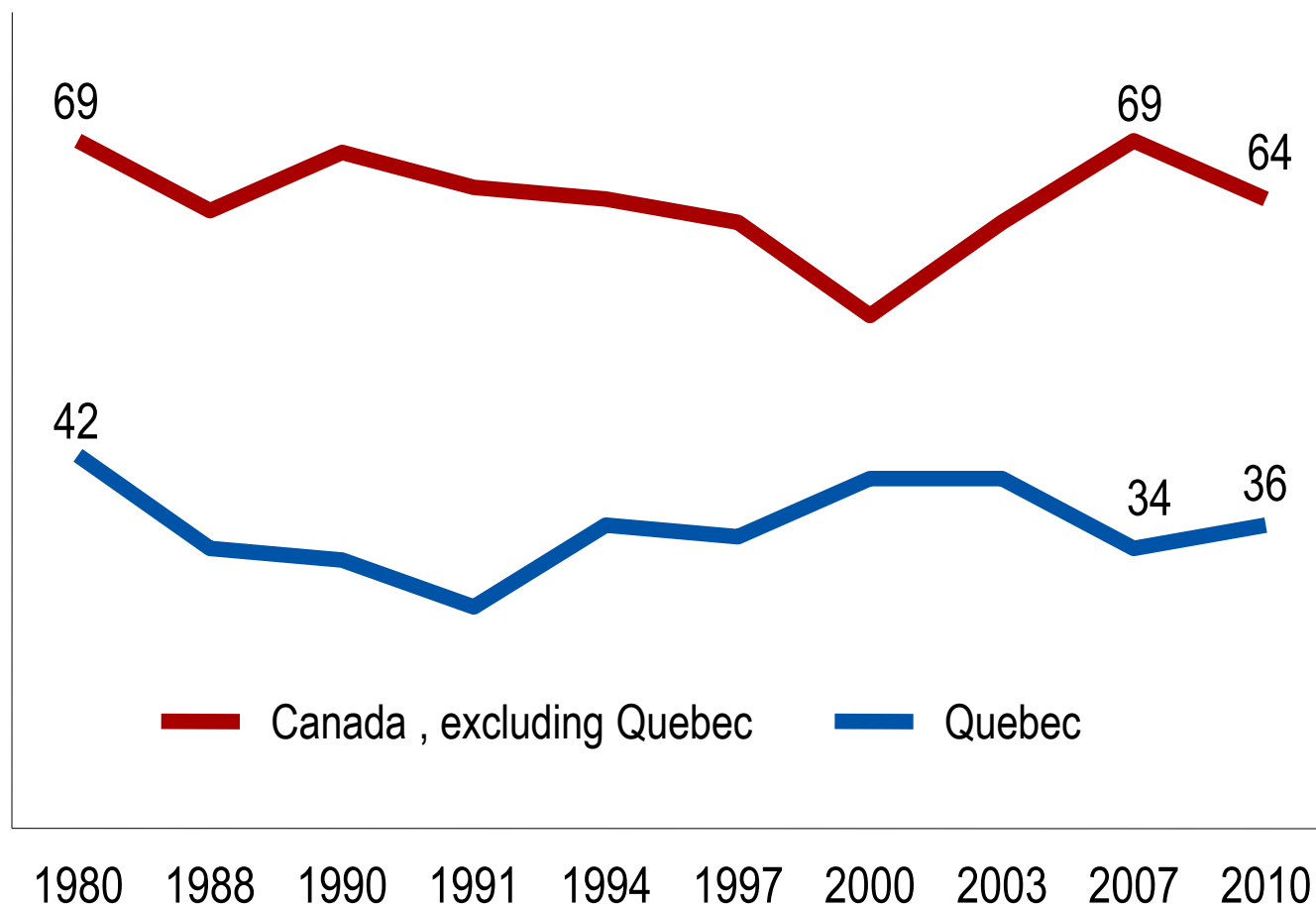
# Strongly agree there is shared set of common values

By province



# Identify as Canadian rather than as resident of province

1980 - 2010

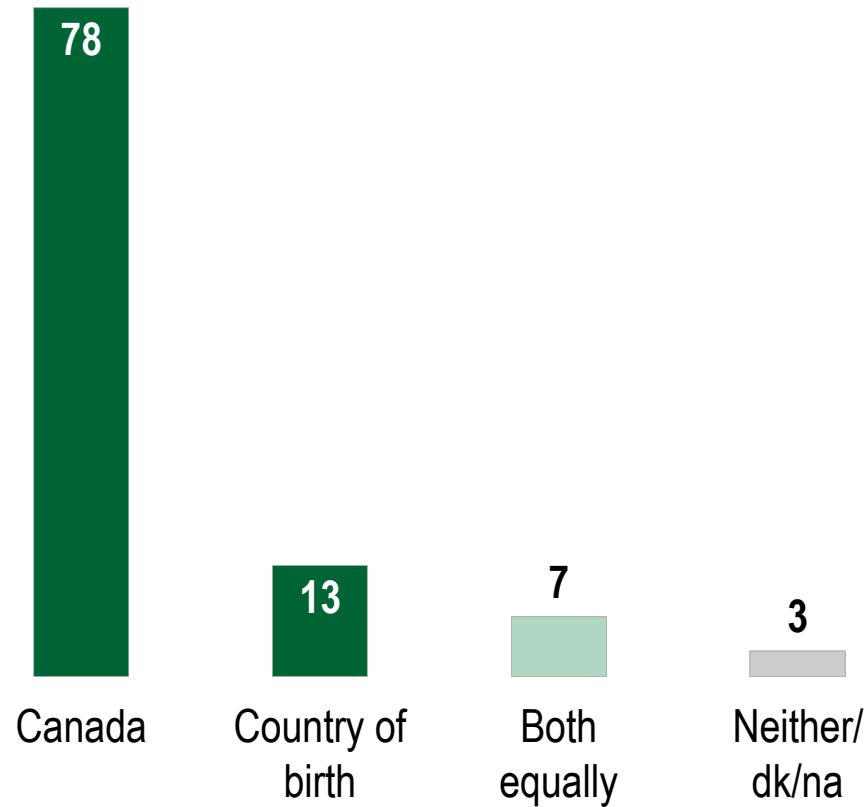


Environics Focus Canada, 2010

# Identification with Canada versus country of birth

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Canadians born abroad



Environics Focus Canada, 2010

# Do other Canadians share your own values?

	Most Canadians	Some Canadians	Few Canadians
With a political system that encourages average Canadians to let politicians know what they think.	71	24	4
In which men and women are treated equally in all walks of life.	68	27	3
With strict laws on crime that place the highest priority on keeping criminals off the streets	65	28	5
With a public health system that covers everyone, that is fully supported through taxes.	61	33	5
With a social safety net that helps everyone facing difficult economic circumstances	47	44	8
Where the practices of all religions are respected, provided they fall within the law.	42	48	7

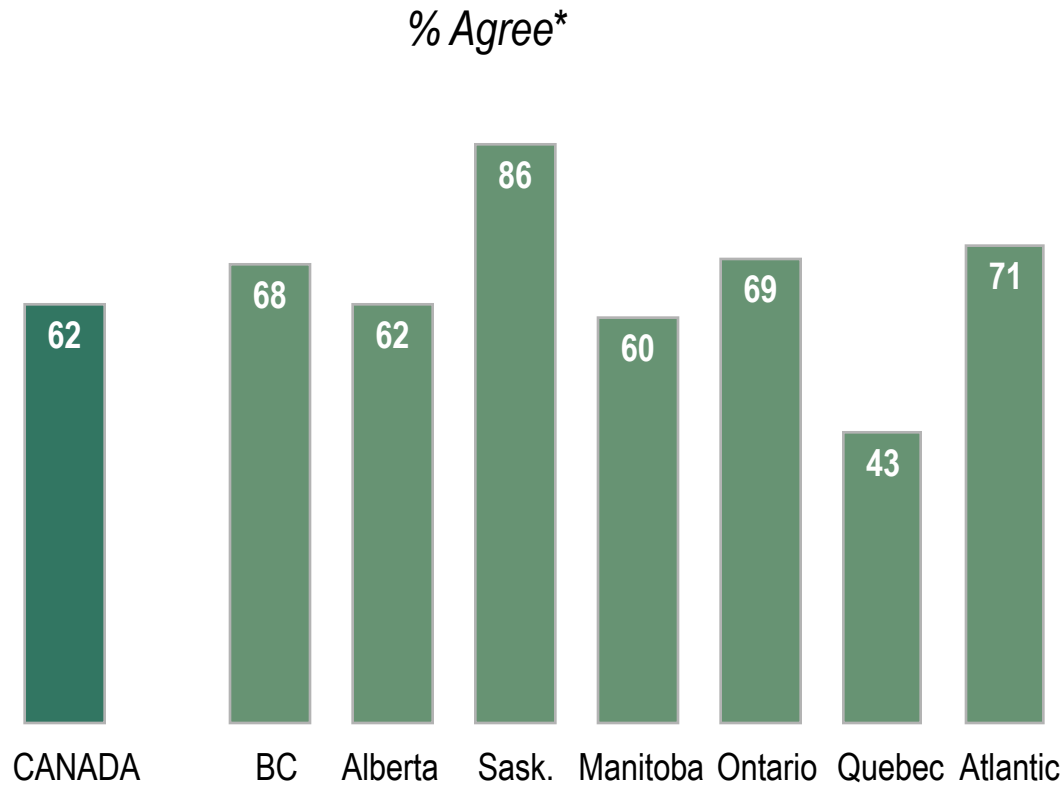
# Do other Canadians share your own values? (continued)

	Most Canadians	Some Canadians	Few Canadians
That fully welcomes immigrants from all over the world	34	56	6
With a strong military	32	53	13
Where all citizens either speak, or at least respect, both English and French languages	32	49	16
Where there is not a big difference in income between the wealthy and everyone else	28	52	17
Where taxes are kept as low as possible, even if this may limit the services governments can provide	25	56	16
Where the environment is protected, even if this slows down economic development	25	59	15



*“Despite differences, we Canadians have many things that unite us”*

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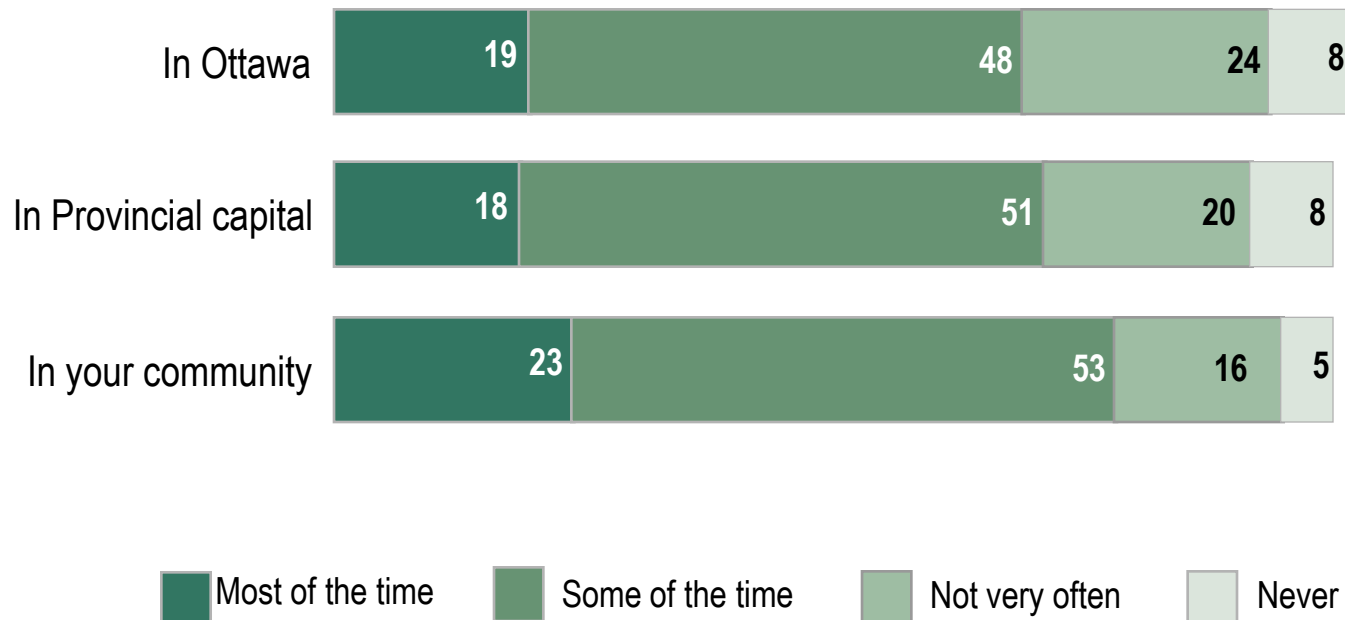
\* 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)



**Reconciling differences**

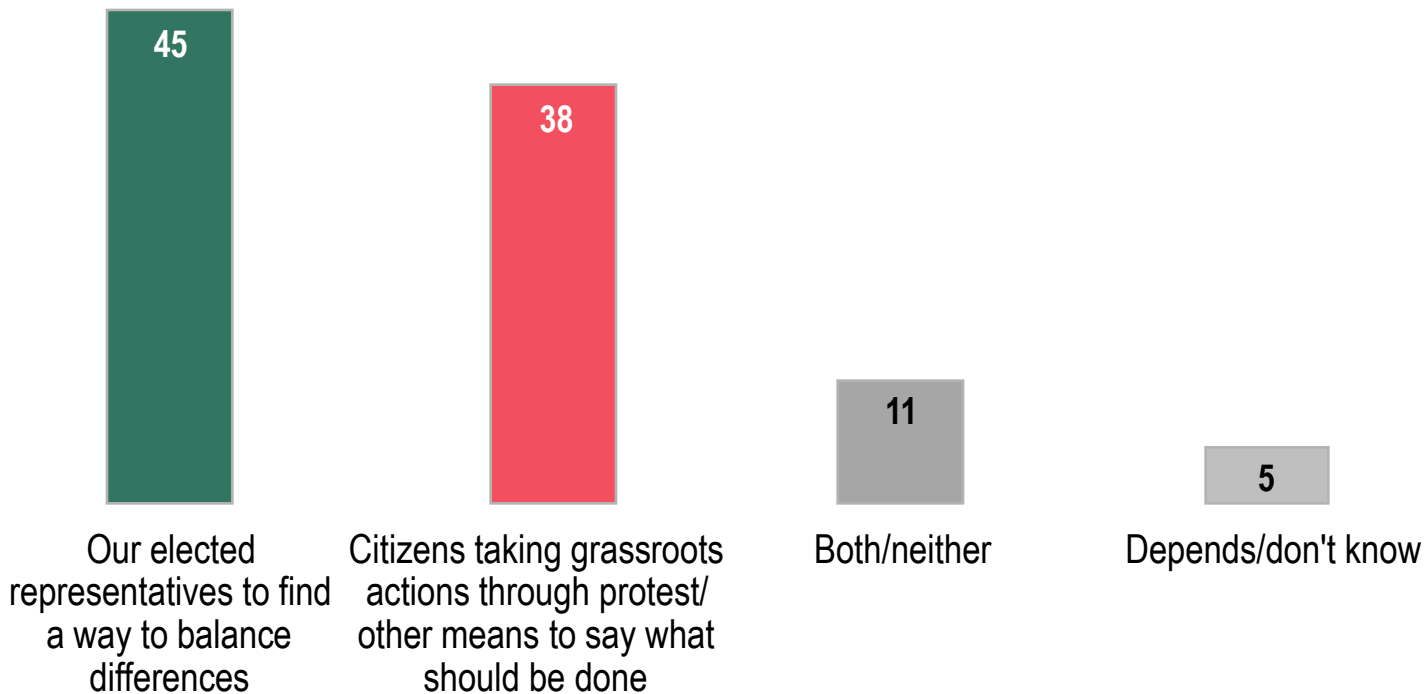
# How often politicians effectively balance competing interests on important issues

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# Who can best address major disagreements about important values and priorities?

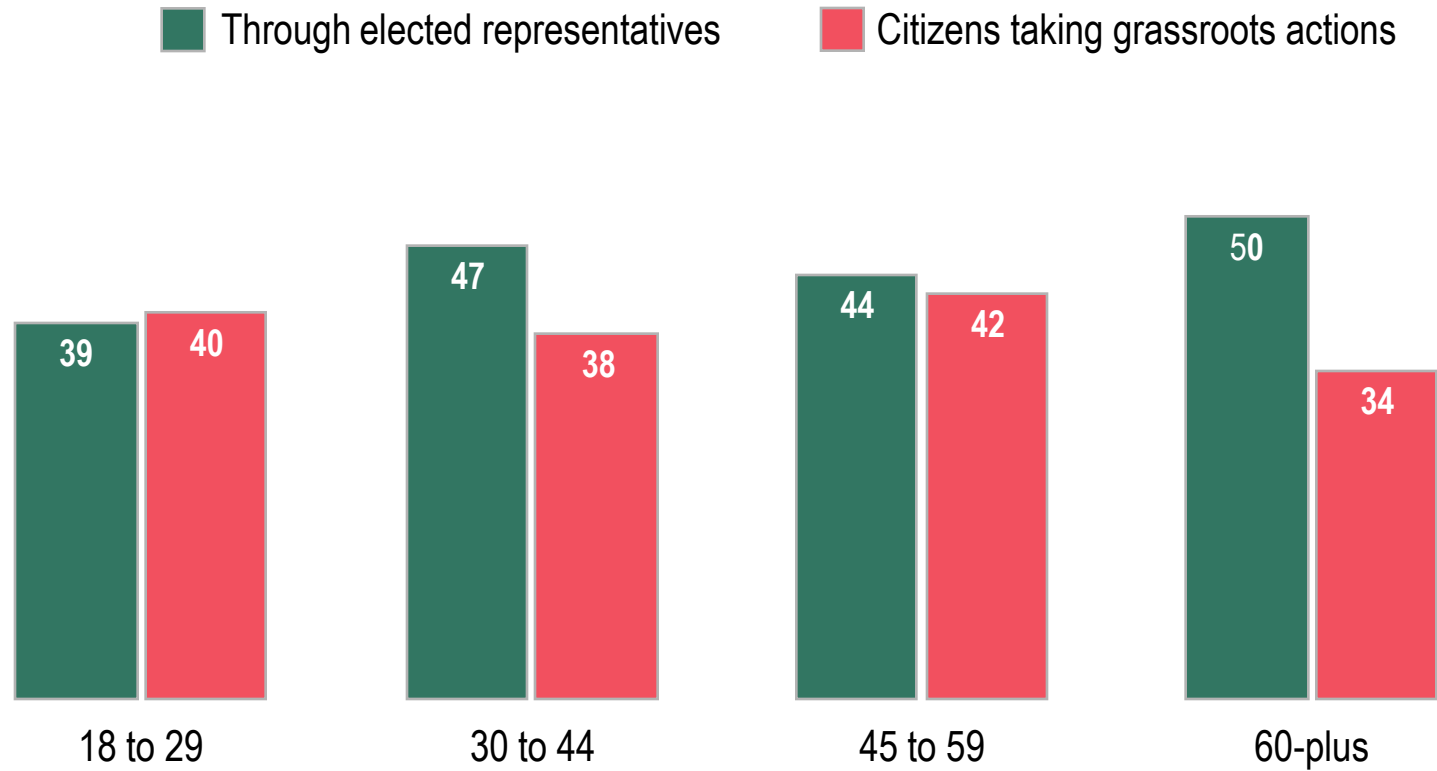
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# Who can best address major disagreements about important values/priorities?

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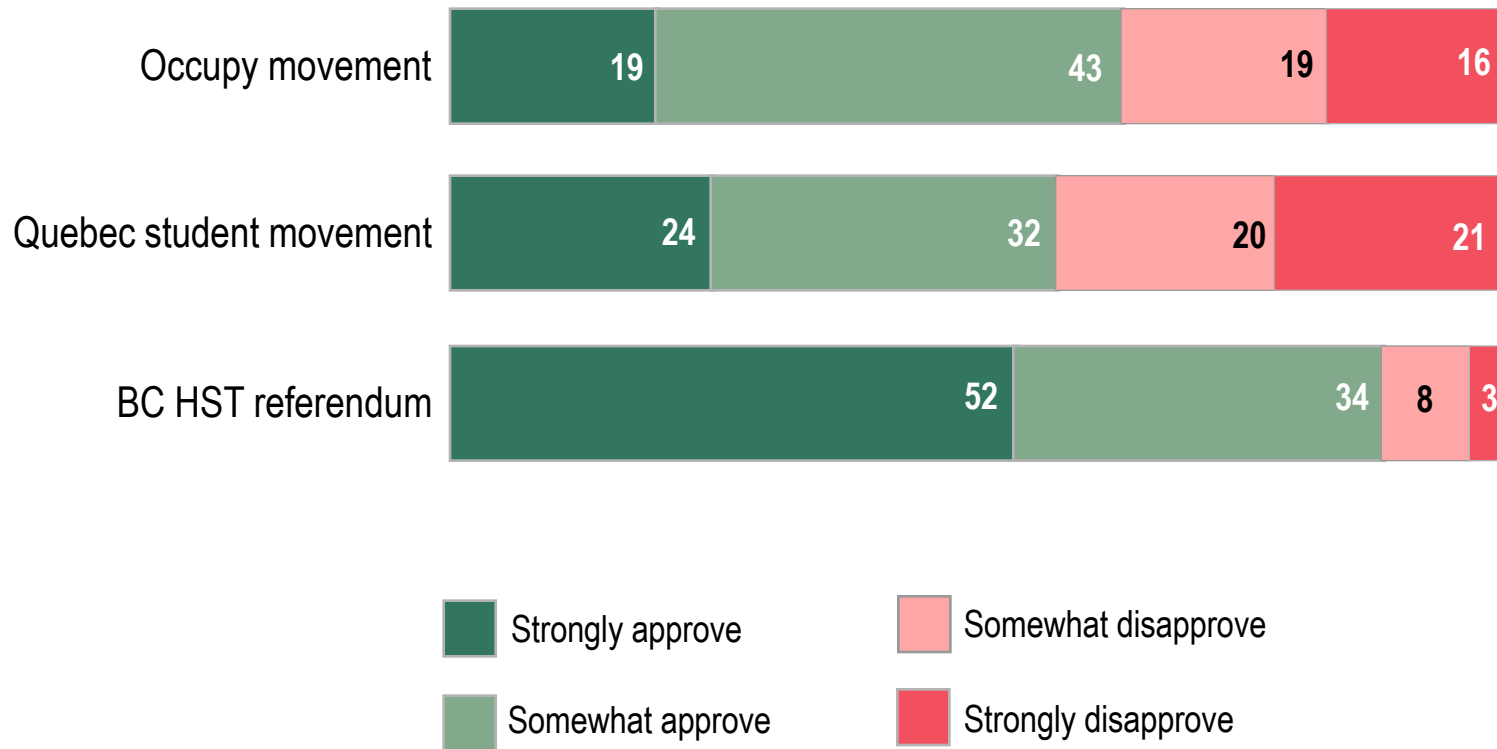
By age





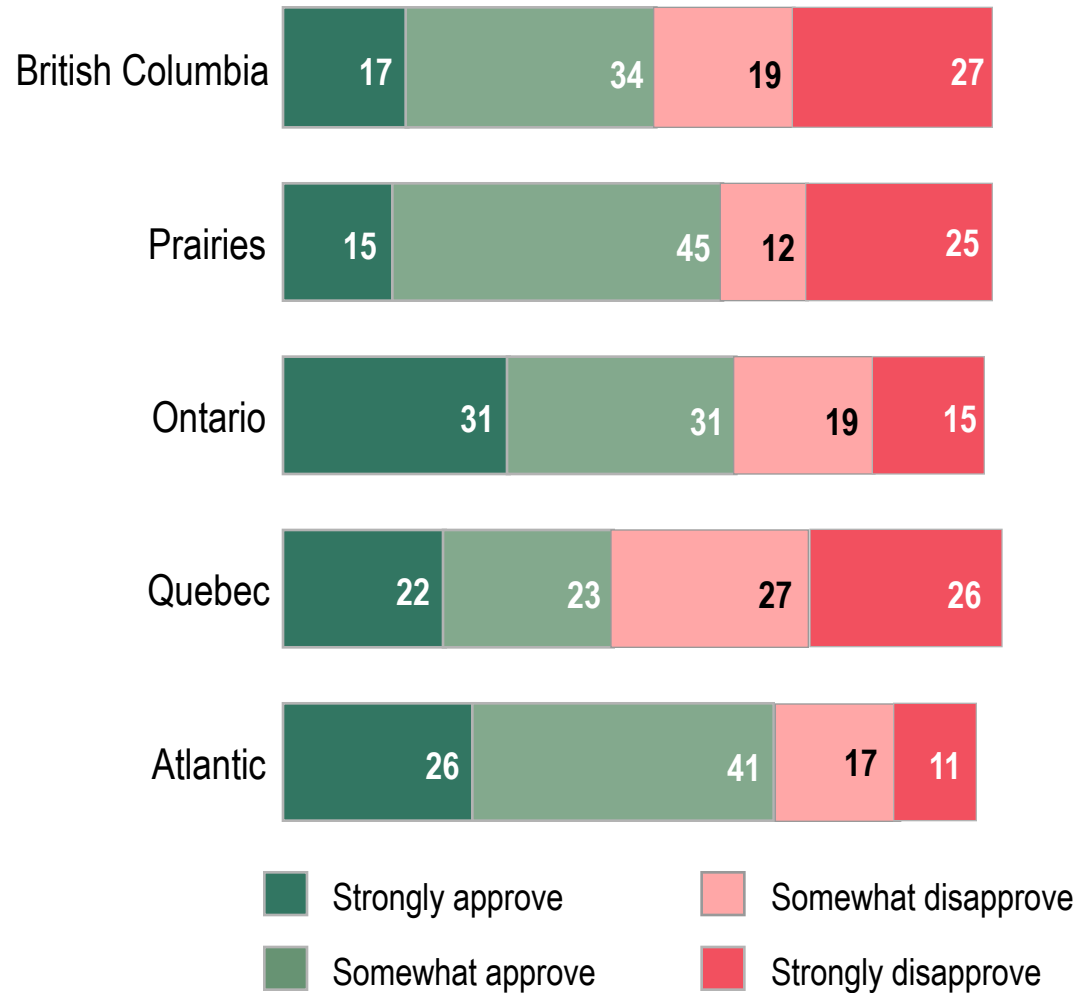
# Public support for grassroots citizen actions

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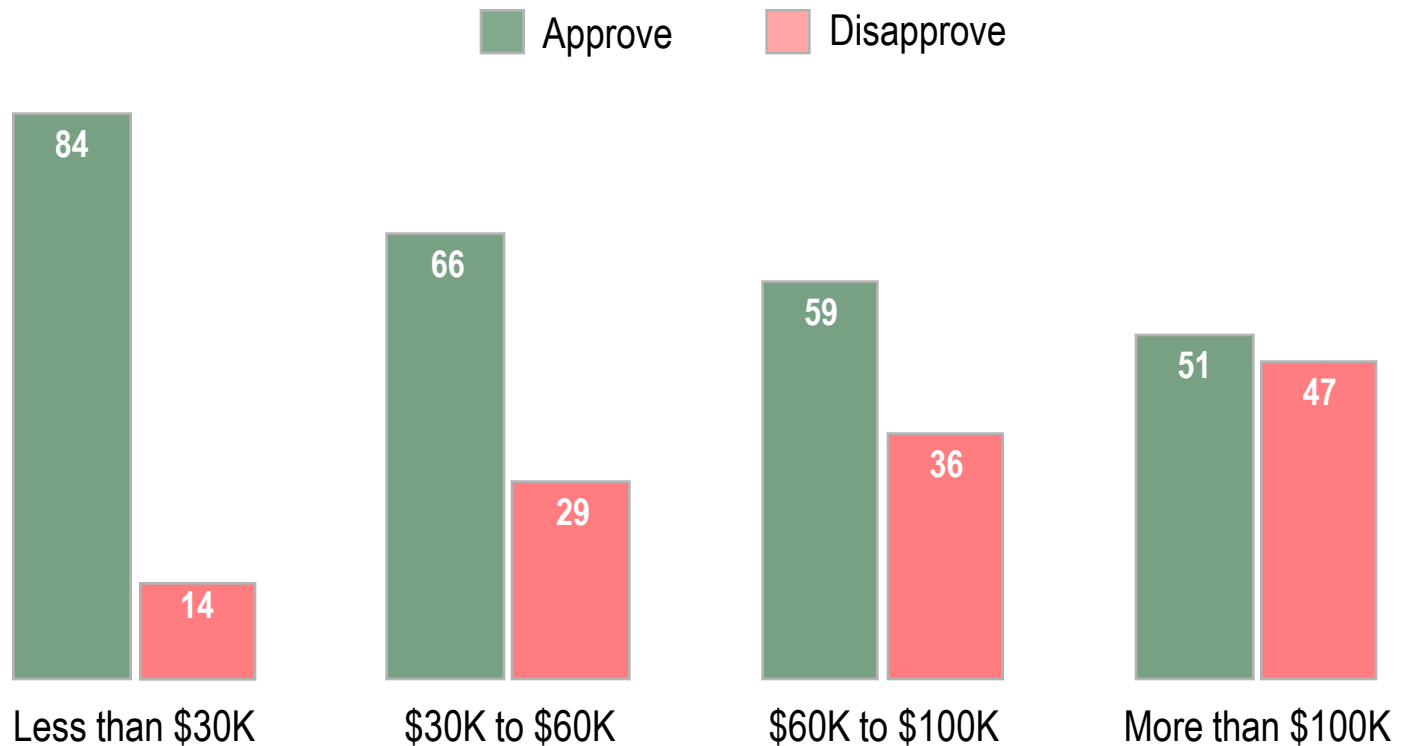
# Support for Quebec student movement

By region



# Support for Occupy movement

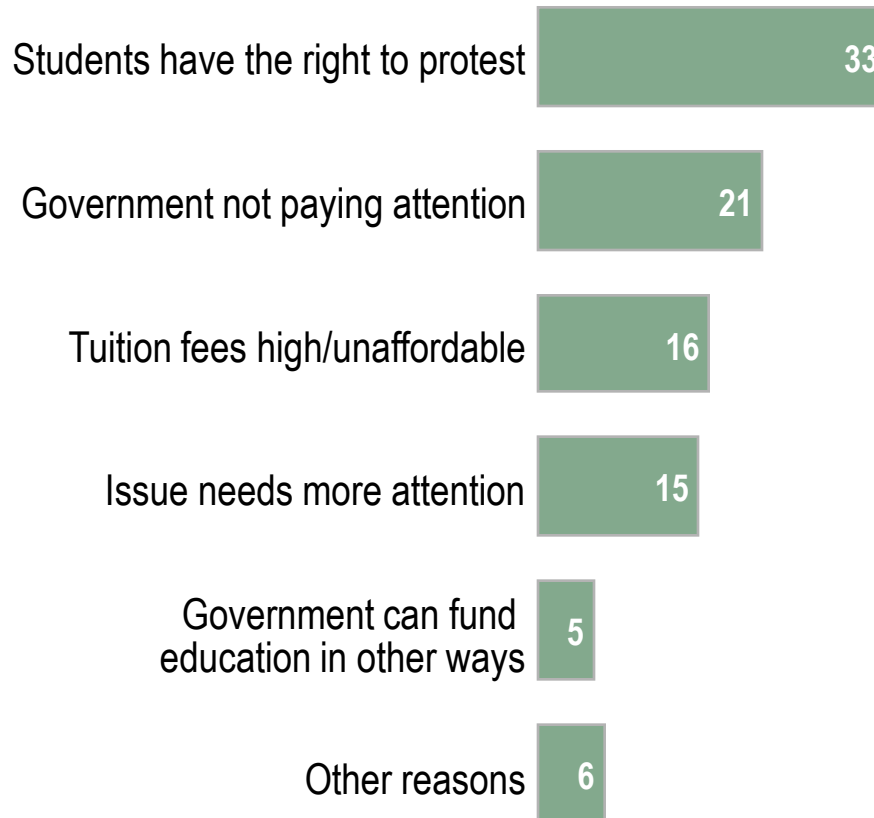
Overall approval, by household income



# Why approve of Quebec student movement

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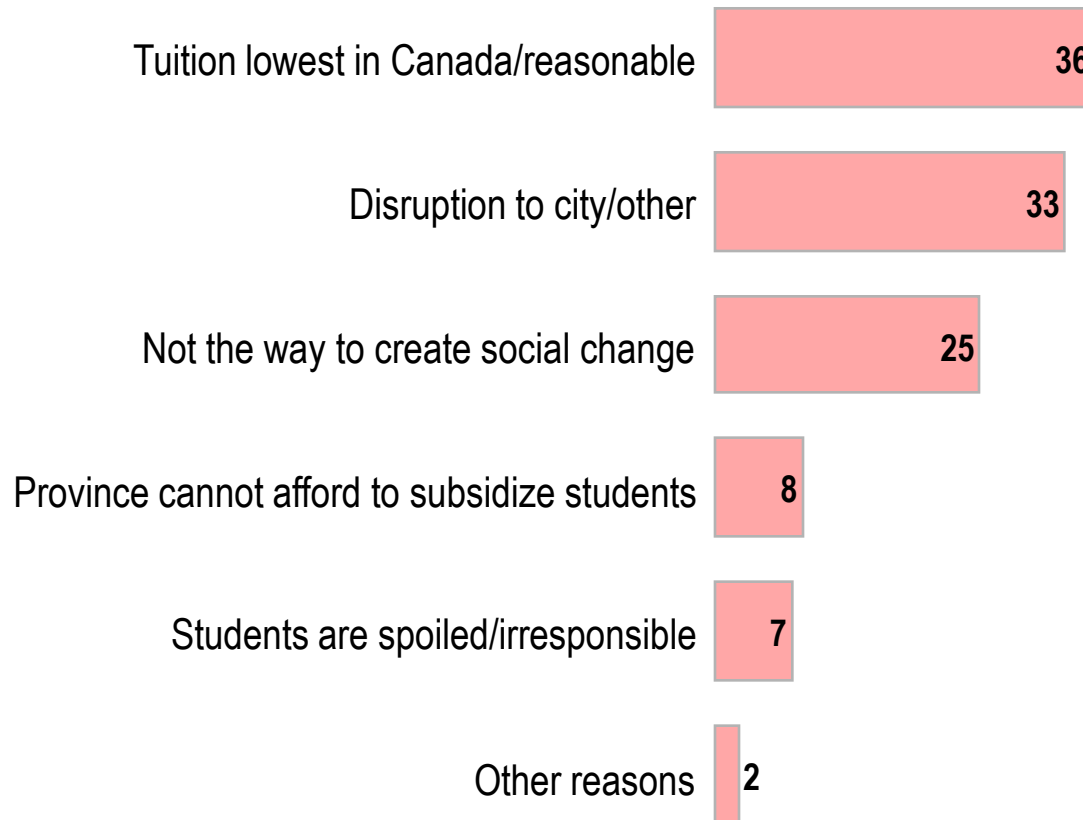
Unprompted mentions



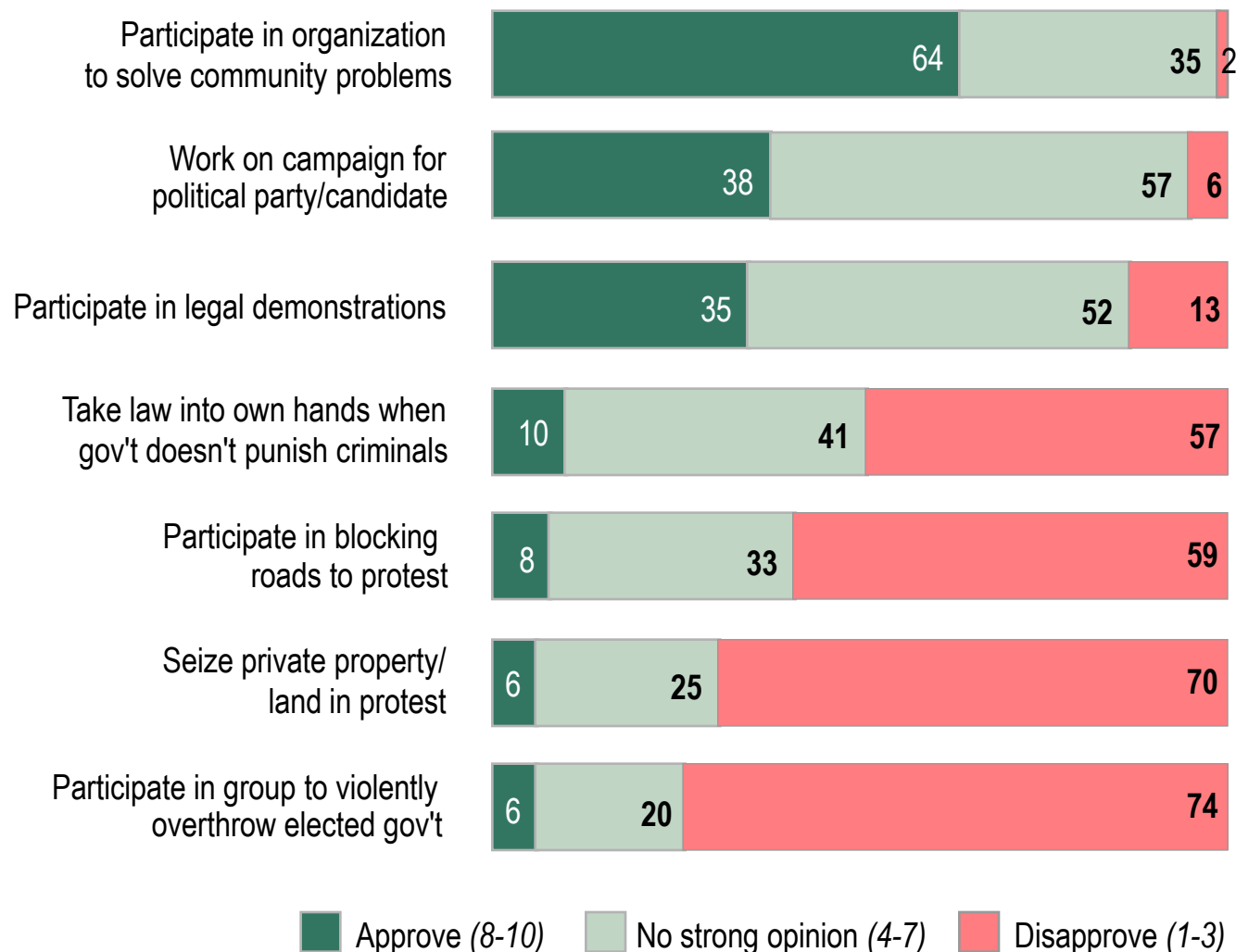
# Why disapprove of Quebec student movement

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Unprompted mentions



# Approval of peoples' actions to achieve political goals

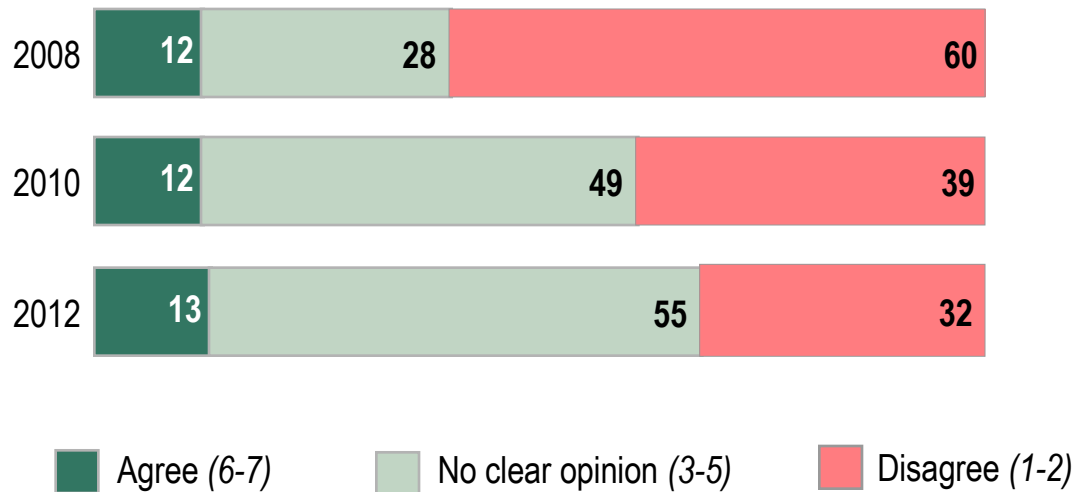




# Support for government by the people

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Agree – Disagree: *“The people should govern directly rather than through elected representatives.”*



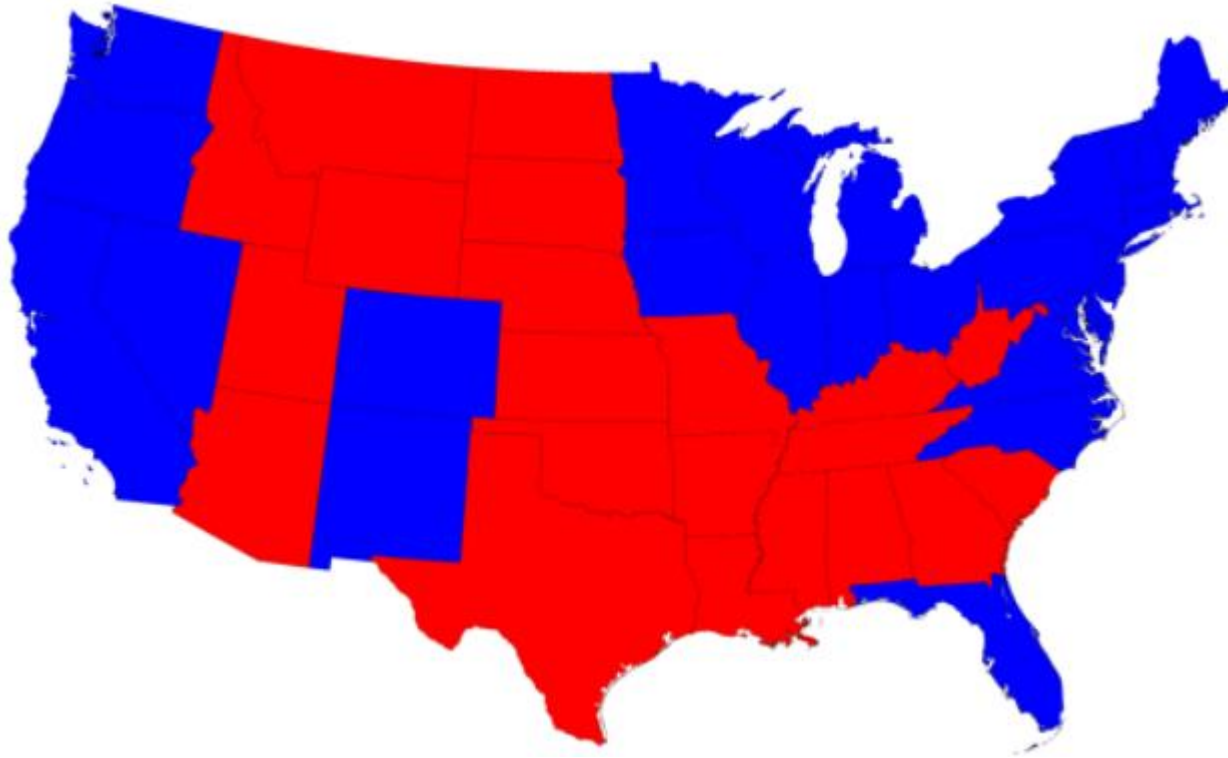
# Concluding Thoughts



# What this research tells us

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- There is little shared sense of common good among Canadians – but it may not matter
- What matters is how we confront and manage the differences
- Public support for grassroots citizen action - good or bad indicator?
  - Good: Increasing political agency and engagement?
  - Bad: Declining confidence in our institutions?
- Canadians have found a way to “agree to disagree”



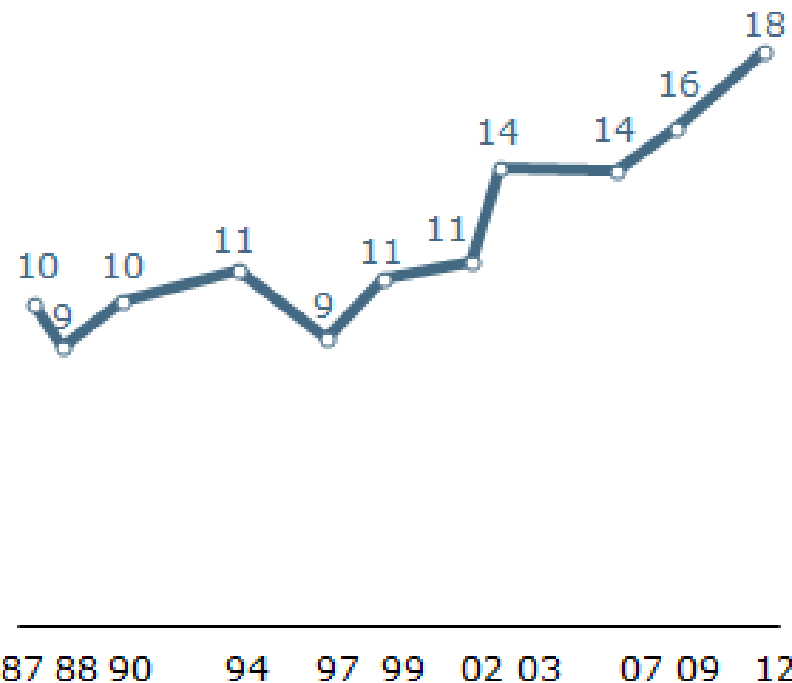
## What we don't have in Canada

# US partisanship is at an all-time high

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## Widening Partisan Differences in Political Values: 1987-2012

**How to read the chart:** Average percentage-point difference between Republicans and Democrats on 48 values questions asked over past 25 years.



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PEW RESEARCH CENTER 2012 Values Survey.

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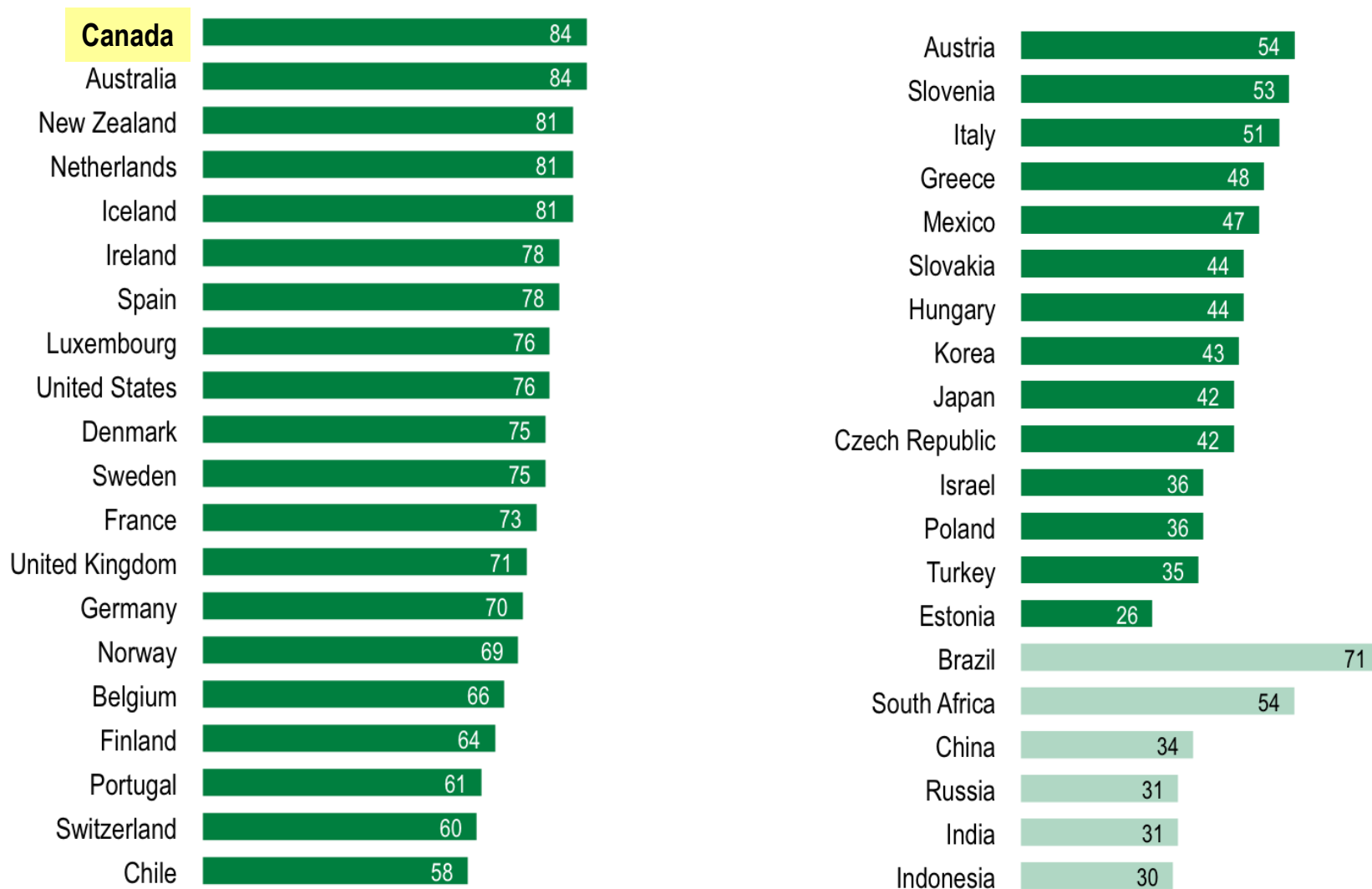


**What we don't have in Canada**



# Tolerance of others who are different

OECD + other countries - 2010





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