



confederation
of tomorrow

2019 Survey of Canadians

MAKING FEDERALISM WORK:
LEADERSHIP, TRUST & COLLABORATION

Executive Summary

JUNE 2019

**Environics
Institute**
For Survey Research

Mowat Centre
ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY

**CANADAWEST
FOUNDATION**


CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

IRPP INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH
ON PUBLIC POLICY


ST. FRANCIS XAVIER
UNIVERSITY
BRIAN MULRONEY
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

Introduction

Background

For much of the late 20th century, Canadian politics was dominated by high-stakes attempts to remake or dismantle the country's federation. First ministers met regularly for mega-constitutional deal-making, while successive Quebec and federal governments wrestled with iterations of pre- and post-referendum strategies. The 1990s alone witnessed a national referendum on the Constitution, a second and closely-contested referendum on Quebec independence, and two new regionally-based political parties – Reform and the *Bloc Québécois* – taking turns as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

In recent years, it has appeared that such storms have now finally passed. A new generation of Canadians has come of age with no direct memories of national unity crises. Regional party fragments have once again coalesced around the traditional left-centre-right national options. And as other countries wrestle with the rise of inward-looking nativism, Canada appears to offer hope as a successful example of multiculturalism and multinational federalism capable of reconciling unity and diversity.

In fact, Canada's sesquicentennial in 2017 marked one of the only times the country has been able to celebrate a significant birthday in the absence of a serious national unity crisis. Canada's 50th birthday fell in the midst of the First World War and a crisis over conscription that split the country between British and French. The country's 75th birthday found it fighting another world war, with a second conscription crisis just over the horizon. The centennial, while full of optimism, coincided with the Quiet Revolution, and preceded the founding of the *Parti Québécois* by only one year. The country's 125th birthday, in 1992, was almost forgotten in the run-up to the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord – with the dramatic electoral gains of the *Bloc Québécois* and the Reform Party, and the re-election of a *Parti Québécois* government soon to follow.

Even though such events have receded into the past, the current political agenda remains full of unresolved issues that can easily divide Canadians along the fault lines of region and identity. Controversies over transnational pipelines are pitting erstwhile regional allies against one another, while the country's plan to meet international climate change obligations is at risk from several provinces challenging the wisdom of carbon pricing. As the resource-led boom in and around Alberta turned to bust, Albertans' support, not only for environmental policies, but also for broader wealth-sharing arrangements within the federation has come into question.

Meanwhile, the Quebec government's position paper on its "way of being Canadian" was launched in 2017 without sparking a serious reply from its partners in Confederation. This was followed by the province's only avowedly federalist political party not only losing power but receiving its lowest ever share of the popular vote. Atlantic Canada, for its part, continues to search for ways to offset its declining demographic and economic clout. In the North, the three territories are implementing different forms of devolution of power, both from Ottawa to territorial governments, and from territorial government to forms of Indigenous self-government. And the lack of concrete actions to match verbal commitments toward reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples threatens to undermine the country's harmony at home, as well as its reputation abroad.

In short, as Canada moves past its 150th birthday, once again new dimensions and challenges to the structure and governance of Canada are demanding greater attention. These issues are being considered by governments, think-tanks and universities, but it is also important to hear from the rest of Canadians, who have both a say and a stake in the outcomes. And it is important to hear what a new generation of citizens has to say, both about the unresolved challenges they have inherited and the emerging challenges they are called upon to confront.

Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey

This is the goal of the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey. The name “Confederation of Tomorrow” is taken from the landmark Confederation of Tomorrow conference, convened and hosted in November 1967 by Premier John Robarts of Ontario. The event allowed political leaders from all 10 provinces to share their perspectives on the country’s promising future, and to lay the foundations for a stronger federation amid the energy and excitement of the country’s centennial. It was a conference whose purpose was not to pretend that there were simple solutions to complex problems, but to ensure that there was an opportunity for each region’s distinctive perspectives on the country to be expressed and heard.

It is in that spirit that the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey was conducted with representative samples of Canadians from every province and territory, to hear their perspective on the country’s federal system as it is today and what it might be. The research draws from previous national surveys conducted over the past several decades to understand not only what Canadians think today, but how public perspectives have evolved over time.

The research was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with five leading public policy organizations across the country: the Canada West Foundation, the Mowat Centre, the Centre D’Analyse Politique – Constitution et Fédéralisme, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at Saint Francis Xavier University.

The research consisted of a national public opinion survey conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories) with a representative sample of 5,732 Canadians (ages 18 and over) between December 14, 2018 and January 16, 2019. The survey sample was stratified to provide for meaningful representation in all 13 provinces and territories, as well as the country’s Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit). Many of the questions included on the survey were drawn from previous national surveys stretching back to the 1980s. This provides the basis for identifying how public opinion has changed (or not) over time. Further details on the survey methodology and previous research are provided in the Appendix.

About this report

This report is the second of three that presents the results of this research. It focuses on the ways in which the country’s federal, provincial and territorial governments should work together as federal partners to address key issues. The first report, *Canada: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?*, was published earlier this year. Additional details are provided under separate cover that provides the results for each survey question by region and jurisdiction, demographic characteristics and other population segments. All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible with the support from a number of organizations and individuals. The study partners would like to acknowledge the contributions of Erich Hartmann, Kiran Alwani and Stefanie Folgado at the Mowat Centre; Darcy Zwetko and Tom Hatry at Elemental Data Collection Inc.; and Steve Otto, Cathy McKim, and Elaine Stam for their excellent work in the final report production. Finally, much appreciation is expressed to the 5,732 Canadians who took the time to share their perspectives on the Confederation of Tomorrow.

Executive Summary

The first report from the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey, *Canada: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?*, highlighted significant tensions within the federation. Large majorities in a number of jurisdictions outside of Central Canada feel that their province or territory does not get the respect it deserves, has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, and receives less than its fair share of federal spending. And while political support for Quebec sovereignty appears to have cooled, there has been no notable warming in the province in support for federalism.

This second report shows that, these tensions notwithstanding, there remains considerable support among Canadians for sharing and collaboration across jurisdictions. Many Canadians may be dissatisfied with the way the federation is working, but this does not mean that they are prepared to turn their backs on one another. That said, there are some notable variations in views across the country that speak both to the existence within Canada of distinct provincial and territorial political cultures and, more generally, to the country's underlying diversity and complexity.

Sharing the Wealth

Equalization: Since the economic downturn in the country's oil and gas sector, the federal equalization program – through which a portion of the revenues collected by the federal government is redistributed to provinces that would have difficulty funding adequate public services on their own – has come in for increasingly pointed criticism by political leaders in Alberta and Saskatchewan, who frame it as yet another penalty imposed on their provinces by their federal partners. This criticism notwithstanding, three in four Canadians support the country's equalization program. Even in provinces that typically do not receive equalization payments, support for the program outweighs opposition by a factor of more than two to one. Support, however, has softened somewhat over the past two decades, particularly in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In Alberta, only a very thin majority remains supportive.

Natural resources: Many Canadians also appear open to sharing the country's resource wealth. More than two in five

say that natural resources are part of the country's wealth, and so the royalties earned on them should be used to benefit all Canadians. By contrast, only one in five believe that natural resources, and the royalties they generate, belong to the province or territory in which they are found. Importantly, however, another one in three Canadians do not pick sides, saying it depends on the resource or how it is shared. Preference for the view that natural resources belong to the province or territory in which they are found is higher in the oil and gas producing provinces of Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan; but even in these provinces, views are more divided than hardline, with about as many saying that natural resources are part of the country's wealth, and an even larger proportion saying that it depends.

The economic union: There is a stronger consensus on the question of the right of Canadians to move from one jurisdiction to another in order to find employment. Nine in ten Canadians agree that workers in Canada should have the right to move to another province or territory, and be eligible for a better job than the one they currently have. In the case of barriers to the movement of goods, however, Canadians are much less certain. Three in ten say that their provincial or territorial government should be allowed to favour local businesses by preventing businesses from elsewhere in Canada from selling their products in their province or territory, while fewer than one in four disagree. A plurality, however, is not definitive either way, saying that it depends on circumstances, such as the type of product or business.

Politics of compromise: Finally, a small majority of Canadians is generally supportive of the politics of compromise. More than half want their provincial or territorial government to try to find a balance between its economic interest and that of other parts of Canada, even if that means compromising on some of the policies that might be best for them. Fewer than one in three, by contrast, prefer that their provincial or territorial government put its jurisdiction's economic interests first, even if that means implementing policies that weaken the economies of other parts of Canada.

Managing the Federation

Decentralization: Canada is the most decentralized federation in the developed world. That said, Canadians are more likely to want to see an even greater shift of responsibilities from the federal to their provincial government than vice versa. Just over one in three say that the government of their province should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now. This is twice as many as the proportion who say that the federal government should take charge of many of the things the government of their province does right now. Almost one in three say that the division of powers should remain as it is now. Alberta, Quebec and Saskatchewan stand out as being more supportive of a shift of power from the federal to the provincial level.

Views on the division of powers are linked to perceptions of how the government and federation are working. Canadians who say their province does not get the respect it deserves, does not have its fair share of influence on national decisions, or does not receive its fair share of federal spending, are more likely to say that the government of their province should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now.

Leadership: In terms of which order of government should take the lead on various issues, Canadians shy away from putting too many eggs in the same basket. A plurality of Canadians trust both the federal and their provincial or territorial government equally when it comes to promoting economic growth and job creation, addressing climate change, and managing energy resources. On the issue of health care, a plurality (by a small margin) trust their provincial or territorial government more, and on immigration and refugee settlement, a plurality trusts the federal government more.

The views of Quebecers are somewhat distinct. Quebecers are the most likely to say they trust their provincial government more to manage the health care system. They are also more likely to trust their provincial government more on the issues of energy and immigration, compared with a plurality of Canadians outside Quebec who trust both governments equally when it comes to energy, and the federal government more when it comes to immigration. When it comes to managing energy resources, however, residents of Alberta and Saskatchewan are even more likely than Quebecers to trust their provincial governments more.

Asymmetrical federalism: One way in which the federation can accommodate different views on the division of powers is through the practice of asymmetrical federalism, which means provinces that seek more powers can reach individual arrangements with the federal government to that effect. This practice, however, runs counter to most people's sense of how the federation should work. Three in five Canadians say that the federal government should treat each province the same, so that no province has any more powers than another. Support for the equal treatment of provinces is highest in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Alberta. Support for more asymmetrical arrangements is noticeably higher in Quebec than elsewhere – but even in Quebec, it is the minority position.

Views on whether powers should be distributed equally or asymmetrically among provinces align with other views on federalism in Quebec, but not in the rest of Canada. Only in Quebec are those who are less satisfied with federalism and more favourable to a shift in the division of powers in the province's favour, also more favourable of asymmetry.

Importance of national policy: The survey also asked Canadians whether, in relation to particular issues, they prefer that the federal government set one national policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, or that each province and territory set its own policy. On none of the five issues mentioned does a majority clearly favour one option over the other.

There are notable variations, however, across different issues and jurisdictions. In the case of pharmacare policy, a plurality or a very thin majority in every province except Quebec favours Ottawa setting one national policy that would be the same across all jurisdictions. In the case of energy policy, such as choosing the best sources of energy to develop, Alberta stands out as the only province in which a majority favours each province and territory making its own policy. In four other provinces (Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and British Columbia), the proportion favouring provincial or territorial energy policies is less than 50 per cent, but still outweighs the proportion favouring one national energy policy set by the federal government.

In most provinces, a plurality thinks the federal government should set one national climate change policy (such as

choosing whether to place a tax on carbon emissions). The one clear exception is Saskatchewan, where a plurality favours each province and territory setting its own policy. It is notable that having one national policy in this area is the preference of a majority in Quebec and a plurality in British Columbia, even though these provinces are exempt from the new federal carbon tax precisely because they already have their own policies to reduce carbon emissions. It is possible that the fact that current federal policy leaves room for distinct provincial or territorial policies in this area is why Quebecers and British Columbians are more supportive of the idea of having one national climate change policy. It is also possible that they are supportive of federal intervention in other provinces that so far have not imposed their own taxes on carbon.

Federalism and the Territories: The territories have a distinct position in the federation, and one that has continued to evolve over the past decades, with the creation of Nunavut and the progression of devolution arrangements with Ottawa and self-government arrangements with First Nations. But national surveys are rarely large enough to report separately on how Northerners view the federation.

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey shows that a plurality of residents of the three territories say that their territorial government, rather than the federal government or the government of city or town, is the one that best represents their interests. Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in the territories – and in particular, in Yukon and the Northwest Territories – have distinct views on this question: Indigenous peoples are much more likely to say that their territorial government best represents their interests, whereas, among non-Indigenous peoples, the municipal government is the most likely to be mentioned.

Taking the three territories together, the territorial government emerges as the one that is more likely to be trusted to make the right decisions on three of the five issues mentioned in the survey: managing the health care

system; promoting economic growth and job creation; and managing energy resources. Both the territorial government and the federal government are equally likely to be trusted to address climate change, and the federal government is more likely to be trusted to manage immigration and refugee settlement.

The pattern, however, differs in each territory. In Nunavut, the territorial government is more likely to be trusted on each of the issues, with the exception of immigration. In the Northwest Territories, the territorial government is much more likely to be trusted on health care, and somewhat more likely to be trusted on energy and climate change. However, the territorial and federal governments are equally likely to be trusted on the economy. In Yukon, the territorial government is trusted more on the economy and energy, but the federal government is trusted more on climate change.

Views in the three territories also differ on the question of whether the federal government should set one national policy on climate change that would be the same across all jurisdictions, or whether the territorial government should set their own policies. A majority in Nunavut supports territorial policies, a majority in Yukon supports one national policy set by Ottawa, and views are evenly split between the two options in the Northwest Territories.

Overall, these results speak to one of the general findings of the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey, which is that the concept of region is not always the most salient one to use to capture patterns of opinions on the federation in Canada. There are significant differences within the North on the questions of which government is the best representative or the most trusted. Residents of each individual territory have distinct perspectives, as do, in some cases, Indigenous peoples in the region, and, among Indigenous peoples, Inuit peoples (related to the distinctiveness of Nunavut).

Making Federalism Work

While majorities in individual provinces and territories may be frustrated with how their jurisdiction is treated within the federation, this second report from the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey finds little evidence that Canadians are turning their backs on each other. A majority remains supportive of sharing the country's wealth through the existing equalization program, and only a minority thinks that the royalties from natural resource development should only benefit the jurisdiction in which those resources are found. More often than not, Canadians look to both orders of government, rather than only one or the other, to address key issues such as the economy, energy and climate change. While more Canadians lean towards a shift of powers from Ottawa to the provinces than vice versa, there remains considerable support for federal

leadership to advance pan-Canadian policies in areas such as pharmacare and climate change. Finally, Canadians are more likely to favour the politics of compromise – wherein their provincial or territorial government seeks to find a balance between their jurisdiction's interest and the national one – than a zero-sum approach.

Beneath these broad patterns, there remain a number of exceptions, with specific jurisdictions holding distinct views on some, though not necessarily all, of these questions. These exceptions are important to note, as they speak to the underlying diversity and even complexity of the country. These exceptions and differences notwithstanding, the survey results taken as a whole paint a picture of a federation whose citizens continue to prefer collaboration over polarization.

This study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the following organizations:

THE MOWAT CENTRE

The Mowat Centre is an independent public policy think-tank located at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto, and Ontario's non-partisan, evidence-based voice on public policy. We undertake collaborative applied policy research, propose innovative research-driven recommendations, and engage in public dialogue on Canada's most important national issues. <https://mowatcentre.ca/>

THE CANADA WEST FOUNDATION

The Canada West Foundation focuses on the policies that shape the West, and by extension, Canada. Through independent, evidence-based research and commentary, the Canada West Foundation provides practical solutions to tough public policy challenges facing the West at home and on the global stage. <http://cwf.ca>

LE CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE – CONSTITUTION ET FÉDÉRALISME (CAP-CF) À L'UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL (UQAM)

CAP-CF's mission is to stimulate research on constitutional politics and federalism, and to advance in innovative ways the analysis and understanding of contemporary constitutional issues in Canada and other federations. <https://capcf1.wixsite.com/accueil>

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY

Founded in 1972, the Institute for Research on Public Policy is an independent, national, bilingual, not-for-profit organization. The IRPP seeks to improve public policy in Canada by generating research, providing insight and informing debate on current and emerging policy issues facing Canadians and their governments. <http://irpp.org>

THE BRIAN MULRONEY INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

Established in 2018, the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at St. Francis Xavier University aims to find creative solutions to complex national and global public policy and governance questions. Its public outreach activities, combined with its four-year undergraduate program in Public Policy and Governance, are intended to inform and shape national and international discourse on political, economic, security, and social issues. www.stfx.ca/mulroney-institute-government

ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE FOR SURVEY RESEARCH

Environics Institute for Survey Research conducts relevant and original public opinion and social research related to issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it has been changing, and where it may be heading.

