



# 2020 Survey of Canadians

## REPORT 2: The DIVISION of POWERS and RESOURCES

### Final Report

AUGUST 2020

**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

**CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION**

  
CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE  
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

**IRPP**  
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH  
ON PUBLIC POLICY



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER  
UNIVERSITY  
BRIAN MULRONEY  
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

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

#### **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.bmig.ca](http://www.bmig.ca)

---

#### **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.

**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

**CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION**

  
CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE  
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

  
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH  
ON PUBLIC POLICY



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER  
UNIVERSITY  
BRIAN MULRONEY  
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

# Contents

- Introduction ..... 1
  - Background ..... 1
  - About this report ..... 2
  - Technical note ..... 2
  - Acknowledgements ..... 2
- Executive summary ..... 3
- The fairness of federal transfers ..... 5
  - Fair share of transfers ..... 6
  - Support for equalization ..... 8
- The division of powers ..... 12
  - Adjusting the division of powers ..... 13
  - Equality or asymmetry? ..... 14
  - The powers of municipal governments ..... 15
- Leadership and representation ..... 16
  - Which government best represents your interests? ..... 17
  - Generational change in Quebec (Part One) ..... 21
  - Change over time ..... 22
  - Which government do you trust more? ..... 23
  - Generational change in Quebec (Part Two) ..... 26
  - Federal or provincial policies? ..... 28
  - Educational attainment and support for federal policies ..... 30
  - Balancing national and regional interests ..... 31
- Appendix ..... 32

# Introduction

## Background

Strains within the Canadian federation are nothing new. For over 150 years, questions have been raised about the fairness of the country's federal system of government, whether viewed in terms of the balancing of diverse provincial and territorial interests in national decision-making, the equitable sharing of the country's wealth and resources, or the respectful treatment of different cultures and peoples.

In the last few months of 2019 and the first few of 2020, however, a number of familiar fissures appeared to widen. The October 2019 federal election resulted in a government caucus and cabinet with no representatives from Saskatchewan and Alberta; an official opposition that was all but shut out in central Canada's two metropolises; and a resurgent Bloc Québécois as the third largest party in the House of Commons. This, combined with the lingering economic crisis affecting the oil and gas industry, and related frustrations about the slow progress in pipeline construction and a perceived disproportionate focus on climate change mitigation, fuelled suspicion among many Albertans in particular that the federal system was rigged against their province's interests.

By the start of 2020, discontent was growing among a number of First Nations as well. While the autumn election campaign had featured some discussion of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and while legislation implementing UNDRIP was adopted later in 2019 in the province of British Columbia, these steps proved unable to forestall the eruption in early 2020 of a conflict over plans to complete construction of a natural gas pipeline through the traditional territories of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. When the police attempted to dismantle a blockade erected in Wet'suwet'en territory, other First Nations and their supporters established their own blockades of railway lines in other parts of Canada, disrupting the movement of passengers and goods for

several weeks, and highlighting conflicting interpretations within Canada of what exactly was required to advance reconciliation between the country's Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

It was against this backdrop that the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 Survey of Canadians was conducted. The survey builds directly on the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 Survey, conducted roughly 12 months earlier, by exploring the attitudes of Canadians toward the practice of federalism and their federal community. The study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with four leading public policy organizations across the country: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, the Canada West Foundation, the Centre d'analyse politique – constitution et fédéralisme, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at Saint Francis Xavier University.

The study consists of a national public opinion survey of 5,152 Canadians (aged 18 and over) conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories) between January 13 and February 20, 2020. Most responses were collected in the last week of January, prior to the escalation of the conflict over pipeline construction through Wet'suwet'en territory into a national crisis and, even more importantly, prior to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic to Canada.

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). Results are weighted by several factors, including age, gender, region, home language, immigration status and Indigenous identity, to provide results that are representative of the Canadian population as a whole. Many of the questions included on the survey were asked in 2019, as well as in previous national surveys stretching back to the 1980s. This provides the basis for identifying how public opinion has changed (or not) over time.

## About this report

This report is the second in a series that presents the results of this research. It focuses on how resources and powers are shared within the federation, and on the expectations that citizens have of the different orders of government when it comes to addressing the key issues that affect the country. All the reports in this series will be available on the website of the Environics Institute at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org). Detailed data tables are also available on the website, presenting the results of each survey question. All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

### Technical note: data for the three territories

In order to better present the survey results for each individual territory and for the North as a region, the survey sample for the three territories was weighted separately on the basis of gender, age, territory, education and Indigenous identity. When the results for the territories are combined with those for the provinces, the national survey weighting is used; however, results for individual territories or the North, when shown separately, are generated using the territorial weighting. This same territorial weighting was applied to data from the 2019 survey. Readers should note that, for this reason, territorial results for 2019 in this report may differ slightly from those found in the 2019 survey reports. This version should be treated as more authoritative.

## Acknowledgements

This research was made possible with the support of a number of organizations and individuals. The Environics Institute would like to thank all of its partners on the project, and in particular Keith Neuman and Charles Breton for their assistance with question wording and methodology. The study partners would like to acknowledge the contributions of Darcy Zwetko and Rick Lyster at Elemental Data Collection Inc., Saif Alnuweiri for research assistance, and Steve Otto and Cathy McKim for their excellent work in the final report production. Finally, much appreciation is expressed to the 5,152 Canadians who took the time to share their perspectives on the Confederation of Tomorrow.

# Executive Summary

In any federation, conflicts often arise over the distribution of powers and resources. Both must be apportioned “vertically” between the federal and provincial or state governments, and shared “horizontally” among the federated provinces or states. Views may differ over whether each government has adequate powers and resources (transfers or access to tax revenue) to enable them to deliver the programs and services that citizens expect, and whether they have their fair share of powers and resources compared to their federal partners.

Contemporary politics also makes strict delineations of responsibilities difficult to uphold. Policy areas such as those related to public health, the environment or the economy can no longer be classified as entirely local, national or even international in nature. Whatever the constitutional division of powers may stipulate, different orders of government are compelled to find ways to collaborate to address public priorities.

## The fairness of federal transfers

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 Survey of Canadians reveals a gap between opinions in the three biggest provinces and those in the rest of the country on the question of whether one’s jurisdiction receives its fair share of the money the federal government spends. In Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia (taken together), just over one in three say their province receives less than its fair share of transfers; in the rest of the country, closer to two in three hold this view. In the West, the region’s two biggest provinces are trending in opposite directions, with British Columbians becoming less likely to say they are not treated fairly, and Albertans becoming more likely to feel that way.

Nine in ten Canadians agree that all Canadians should have access to high-quality public services such as health care and education, regardless of where in the country they live. Three in four also support the equalization program more specifically, under which the federal government transfers

money to the poorer provinces, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. Across the different provinces, support for equalization has changed very little, if at all, since last year, with the exception of Alberta, where support increased six points. At the same time, a plurality of Canadians cannot say whether or not their province receives equalization payments. The proportion that cannot say is just as high in provinces that currently receive equalization payments as it is in those that do not.

## The division of powers

Canadians appear comfortable with their highly decentralized federation: only about one in five citizens favour a transfer of powers from the provinces or territories to the federal government. At the same time, a majority of Canadians prefer that the provinces be treated equally in terms of the distribution of powers, while one in four prefer a more “asymmetrical” arrangement that would allow the federal government to offer more powers to those provinces that want them. The concept of “asymmetrical federalism” continues to be perceived quite differently in the various parts of the country. In Quebec, those who favour a transfer of powers from Ottawa to the provinces are *more* likely to favour an asymmetrical distribution of powers. In the rest of Canada, decentralists are *less* likely to favour asymmetrical arrangements.

The issue of the division of powers also touches on the powers of municipal governments. The survey shows that, on this issue, a plurality of Canadians is comfortable with the status quo, while about three in ten say that the provincial government should give their municipal governments more power compared to now, and just under one in five say it should have less. Responses to this question do not vary significantly between those who live in one of Canada’s six biggest cities, and the rest of the country.

## Leadership and representation

Canadians are about twice as likely to say that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests as they are to say the same of the federal government or their municipal government. However, about one in three Canadians do not choose any government as best representing their interests. Among those who identify as First Nations, a small plurality say their Indigenous government best represents their interests.

Francophone Quebecers are twice as likely as Canadians outside of the province to say that their provincial government best represents their interests. But there is a significant difference of opinion across generations in Quebec. Among Quebec francophones, baby boomers (those age 55 and older) are twice as likely as millennials (those under the age of 40) to say the provincial government best represents their interests. There is no comparable generational difference in the rest of Canada.

Neither order of government has a monopoly on the extent to which they are trusted to make the right decisions on key issues: in each of five policy areas mentioned in the survey, both the federal and the provincial or territorial government attract at least some level of trust, while a significant portion of the public trusts both governments equally, and about one in five trust neither. A comparison to the results from 2019 show that Alberta is the only province where the proportion trusting the federal government more to make the right decisions increased by more than five points in each of the five policy areas.

Again, there is a significant difference among the generations in Quebec that does not appear in the rest of the country. For instance, francophone Quebecers age 55 and over are twice as likely to trust the provincial government more on both health care and immigration as are francophone Quebecers between the ages of 18 and 39.

On several key issues, a plurality of Canadians also favour having the federal government set one national policy for

the country, rather than having provinces and territories set policies that would differ across jurisdictions. This view is more likely to be expressed in the case of pharmacare and climate change policy, where almost one in two favour a federally-led approach that would be the same across the country. As is often the case, the views of Quebecers are different from those of other Canadians. In three of the four areas, pluralities of francophone Quebecers prefer that each province set its own policy. The differences between francophone Quebecers and other Canadians are largest in the case of pharmacare and immigration.

The one policy area where the views in Quebec and the rest of Canada (as a whole) do not differ significantly is climate change. On this issue, it is Saskatchewan that stands out: it is the only jurisdiction where the proportion favouring each province setting its own policy is larger than that favouring one national policy set by Ottawa.

There is a difference in views on how best to manage energy resources, but this difference is not along traditional regional lines (e.g., the dividing line is not the West versus the East). In those jurisdictions whose economies are more closely tied to energy resources (Saskatchewan, Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and the three territories), a plurality favour having each province or territory set their own energy policy. In the rest of the country (the Maritimes, Ontario, Manitoba and B.C.), a plurality favour having one national energy policy set in Ottawa.

Finally, while provinces and territories exist to give representation and expression to the distinct interests of their respective populations, this does not mean that Canadians expect their provincial or territorial governments to disregard broader, national interests altogether. In fact, the opposite is the case: one in two Canadians want their provincial or territorial government to find a balance between its own interests and the economic interests of other parts of Canada, while three in ten prefer that their provincial or territorial government put its own economic interests first.

# The fairness of federal transfers

## Highlights

- *About two-thirds of residents of Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan and Nunavut feel that their jurisdiction receives less than its fair share of the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories.*
- *In the West, the region's two biggest provinces are trending in opposite directions, with British Columbians becoming less likely to say they are not treated fairly, and Albertans becoming more likely to feel that way.*
- *Nine in ten Canadians agree that all Canadians should have access to high-quality public services such as health care and education, regardless of where in the country they live.*
- *Three in four Canadians support the equalization program more specifically. There is only a small difference in the level of support for the program between provinces that currently receive equalization payments and those that do not.*
- *A plurality of Canadians cannot say whether or not their province currently receives transfers from the federal government under the equalization program. The proportion that cannot say is just as high in provinces that currently receive equalization payments as it is in those that do not.*

One of the main points of friction in the federation arises over the amount of funding provided to the provinces and territories in the form of transfers from the federal government. Four major federal transfer programs – the Canada Health Transfer, the Canada Social Transfer, Equalization and Territorial Formula Financing – provided almost \$80 billion per year in funding to provinces and territories at the time of the 2020 survey.<sup>1</sup> Disputes typically arise concerning both the overall adequacy of the amounts transferred, and the fairness in the way in which they are distributed across the jurisdictions. Most recently, following its election victory in 2019, the government of Alberta vocally criticized the equalization program for reallocating federal taxes paid by Albertan individuals and companies to other provincial governments at a time when the Albertan resource-based economy was in crisis.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the information provided by the Government of Canada at <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/programs/federal-transfers.html>.

# Fair share of transfers

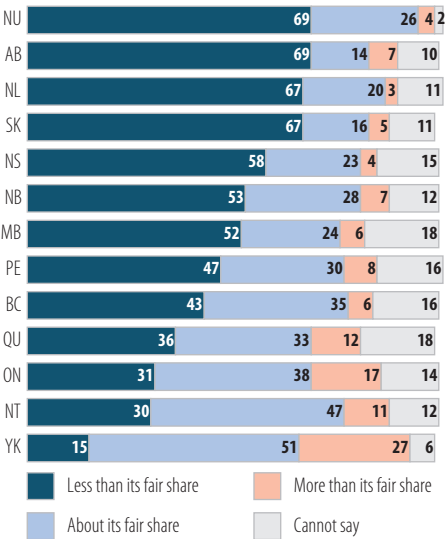
The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey asked Canadians whether the jurisdiction where they live receives its fair share of the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories.

- In four jurisdictions, about two-thirds of residents feel that their province receives less than its fair share: Alberta (69%), Nunavut (69%), Newfoundland and Labrador (67%), and Saskatchewan (67%).
- Majorities also hold this view in Nova Scotia (58%), New Brunswick (53%) and Manitoba (52%).
- Those least likely to hold this view include residents of two territories – Yukon (15%) and the Northwest Territories (30%) – as well as those living in Ontario (31%), Quebec (36%) and B.C. (43%).
- There is a gap between the opinions of those in the three biggest provinces and the rest of the country: in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia (taken together), just over one in three (35%) say their province receives less than its fair share of transfers; in the rest of the country, closer to two in three (63%) hold this view.

In Nunavut, the proportion saying the territory gets less than its fair share of transfers increased by 21 points since 2019, from 48 to 69 percent; in the Northwest Territories, the proportion holding this view dropped 14 points, from 44 to 30 percent. While the proportions holding this view in these neighbouring territories were similar in 2019, in 2020 they are 39 points apart.

# Fair share of federal spending

2020

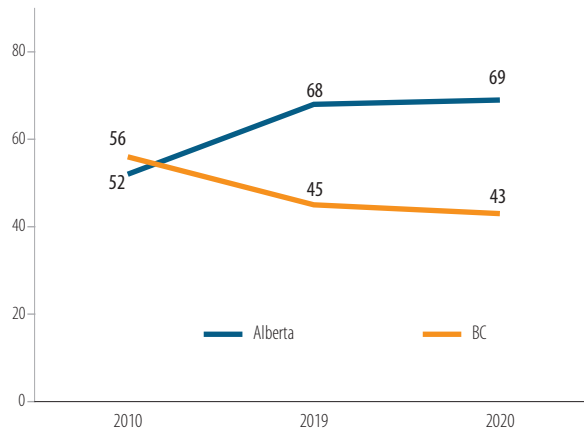


Q.13  
Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives...

Across the provinces, there have been no significant changes in views on this question over the past year. But there are some longer-term trends of note.

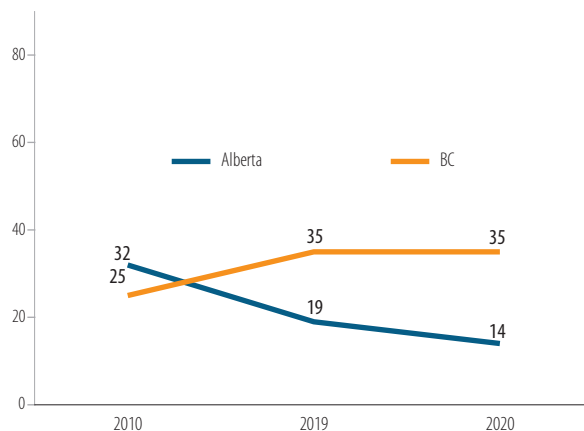
- In Atlantic Canada, there has been little change since the question was first asked over 20 years ago.
- In Quebec and Ontario, the proportion saying their province receives less than its fair share of federal spending has edged down very slightly over the same period.
- In the West, the proportion saying their province receives less than its fair share is the same today as it was 10 years ago, but this overall regional trend is misleading. That is because the region's two biggest provinces are trending in opposite directions, with British Columbians becoming less likely to say they are not treated fairly, and Albertans becoming more likely to feel that way. As was noted in the 2019 survey, Alberta and B.C. have effectively become "decoupled": whereas residents of the two provinces previously expressed similar opinions on the workings of the federation, this is no longer the case. There is now a 26-point gap between the proportions of Albertans and British Columbians that say their province receives less than its fair share of federal transfers.

**Province receives less than its fair share of federal spending**  
2010 – 2020 Alberta and British Columbia



Q.13  
Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives...

**Province receives about its fair share of federal spending**  
2010 – 2020 Alberta and British Columbia



Q.13  
Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives...

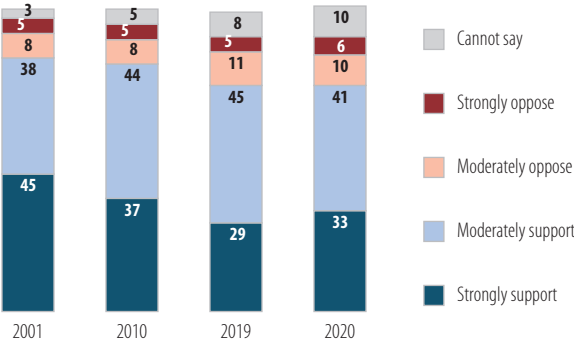
## Support for equalization

Equalization is a transfer provided by the federal government to those provinces whose own ability to raise revenue is insufficient to support the adequate funding of social programs and services. Unlike the major transfers for health care and social services, equalization payments are only provided to some provinces (the less prosperous ones) and not to others.

Before asking about support for the equalization program, the 2020 survey tested support for its underlying principle, namely that all Canadians should have access to high-quality public services such as health care and education, regardless of where in the country they live. This principle attracts extremely high levels of support across all regions of Canada. Specifically, nine in ten Canadians (92%) agree, including 72 percent who strongly agree and 20 who somewhat agree. Five percent disagree (including only 1% who disagree strongly) and three percent cannot say. Agreement reaches 96 percent in Nunavut, and falls no lower than 89 percent in Saskatchewan.

The survey then asked about support for the equalization program more specifically, which was described as the program under which the federal government transfers money to the poorer provinces, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. Three in four (74%) Canadians support the program, including 33 percent who strongly support it and 41 percent who somewhat support it. Sixteen percent are somewhat (10%) or strongly (6%) opposed, and 10 percent cannot say. The overall level of support for equalization has not changed since last year.

Support for equalization  
2001 – 2020

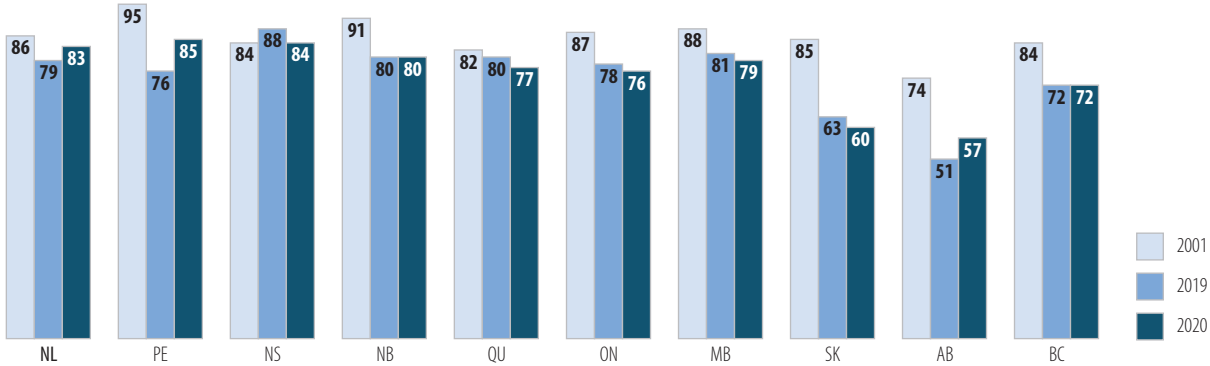


Q.17  
As you may know, under the federal equalization program, the federal government transfers money to the poorer provinces, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. How much do you support or oppose the equalization program?

Support for equalization is slightly higher in provinces that currently receive equalization payments (78%) and slightly lower in those that do not (72%), but the difference is not that large (6 points).<sup>2</sup> Only eight percent of those in non-recipient provinces strongly oppose the program. Support is especially high the Maritimes (82%), and lowest in Saskatchewan (60%) and Alberta (57%). Newfoundland and Labrador stands out as the non-recipient province with the highest level of support for the program (83%).

Across the different provinces, support for equalization has changed very little, if at all, since last year, with the exception of Alberta, where support increased six points, from 51 to 57 percent (opposition to the program in that province dropped from 40 to 34 percent). However, support for equalization in Alberta and in neighbouring Saskatchewan is significantly lower now than it was at the start of the 2000s.

**Strength of support for equalization**  
2001 – 2020 Strongly or somewhat support, by province



Q.17  
As you may know, under the federal equalization program, the federal government transfers money to the poorer provinces, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. How much do you support or oppose the equalization program?

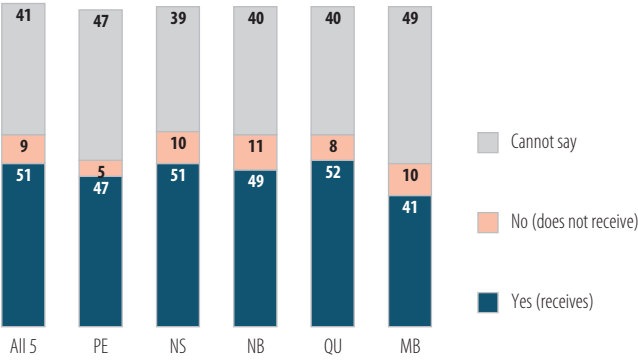
<sup>2</sup> At the time of the survey, PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Manitoba received equalization payments, and Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. did not. See: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/programs/federal-transfers.html>.

The 2020 survey included an additional question about equalization: Canadians were asked whether or not their province currently receives transfers from the federal government under the equalization program. The main finding from this question is that the level of uncertainty (or lack of knowledge) is very high: a plurality (42%) cannot say whether or not their province receives equalization payments. The proportion that cannot say is just as high in provinces that currently receive equalization payments (41%) as it is in those that do not (43%).

At the same time, those living in provinces that currently receive equalization payments are more likely to be aware of their status under the program than those living in provinces that do not. One in two (51%) of those living in recipient provinces correctly say that they are receiving payments, and only nine percent say that they do not. In the case of non-recipient provinces, only one in three (32%) correctly say that they *do not* receive payments, while one in four (25%) incorrectly say that they do.

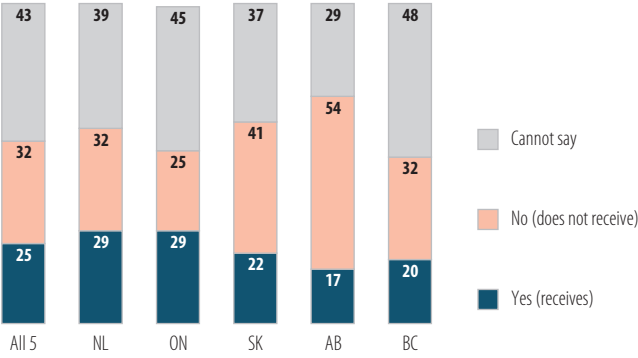
Among non-recipient provinces, residents of Newfoundland and Labrador (29%) and Ontario (29%) are most likely to say incorrectly that their province receives equalization payments. Ontario received payments throughout most of the past decade until 2018-19, the year prior to the survey; whereas Newfoundland and Labrador was a recipient for many years, up until 2008-09. Alberta is the only non-recipient province where a majority correctly says that their province *does not* receive equalization payments, but even there, only just over one in two (54%) give this response.

**Awareness of province’s status under equalization program 2020 Recipient provinces**



Q.18 As far as you know, does [name of respondent’s province] currently receive transfers from the federal government under the equalization program, or not?

**Awareness of province’s status under equalization program 2020 Non-recipient provinces**



Q.18 As far as you know, does [name of respondent’s province] currently receive transfers from the federal government under the equalization program, or not?

Knowledge of whether or not one's province receives payments does relate to support for the program: the highest level of support is found in recipient provinces among those who correctly say their province receives payments (87%), and is lowest in non-recipient provinces among those who correctly say their province *does not* receive payments (63%). However, in both Saskatchewan and Alberta, among those who correctly say their province *does not* receive equalization payments, opposition to the program outweighs support (the figures are: 53% opposed and 41% in support among this group in Saskatchewan, and 50% opposed and 47% in support among this group in Alberta).

The survey findings on these three related questions can be summarized as follows: there is almost universal support for the principle underlying equalization in Canada, and widespread support for the equalization program itself, though a significant proportion of the public is unsure as to whether or not their province receives payments under the program. In the group of the five non-recipient provinces taken together, even a majority of those who are aware that their province does not receive payments are supportive of the equalization program, but this is not the case in Saskatchewan and Alberta individually.

**Support for equalization among those correctly stating whether province receives equalization payments**  
2020

Province/ Region	Equalization status	Proportion correctly saying province receives equalization payments	Support for equalization program among those correctly identifying whether province receives benefits
All recipient provinces	Recipient	51%	87%
Maritimes	Recipient	50%	93%
Quebec	Recipient	52%	86%
Manitoba	Recipient	41%	87%
Province/ Region	Equalization status	Proportion correctly saying province does not receive equalization payments	Support for equalization program among those correctly identifying whether province receives benefits
All non-recipient provinces	Non-recipient	32%	63%
Newfoundland and Labrador	Non-recipient	32%	75%
Ontario	Non-recipient	25%	74%
Saskatchewan	Non-recipient	41%	41%
Alberta	Non-recipient	54%	47%
British Columbia	Non-recipient	32%	67%

# The division of powers

## Highlights

- *Three in ten Canadians want the government of their province or territory to take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now, while one in five prefer that the federal government take charge of many of the things the government of their province or territory does right now. But a larger proportion – one in two – prefers to leave things as they are, or cannot say.*
- *In Quebec, those who favour a transfer of powers from Ottawa to the provinces are more likely to favour an asymmetrical distribution of powers among provinces. But in the rest of Canada, decentralists are less likely to favour asymmetrical arrangements.*
- *About three in ten Canadians say that their provincial government should give their municipal government more power compared to now. Opinions do not differ significantly between those who live in one of Canada's six biggest cities, and the rest of the country.*

Canada's federation is one of the most decentralized in the world. The issue of the most appropriate division of

powers between the federal and provincial or territorial governments, however, remains open. Provincial and territorial governments frequently seek to assert their autonomy and resist attempts by Ottawa to move into what they perceive to be areas under their jurisdiction. A recent case in point is the federal government's carbon tax, implemented as part of its strategy to address climate change, which several provinces challenged in court. At the same time, the federal government is sometimes pressured by citizens or interest groups to expand its powers in order to override perceived shortcomings in existing provincial programs and services. Such is the case with proposals for a national pharmacare program, which some would prefer to the existing array of public drug insurance programs, which differ from one province to another. The issue of the division of powers is also frequently raised in the context of municipal government in Canada. The powers of cities and towns are set by provincial governments, but some feel that the country's larger metropolises, at least, need greater powers and independence to enable them to deliver the full range of services that their citizens require.

## Adjusting the division of powers

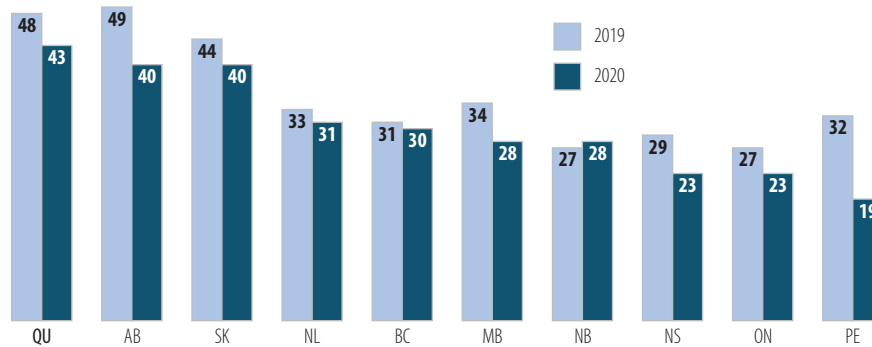
Canadians are divided between those who wish to see the federal-provincial/territorial division of powers adjusted, and those who prefer the *status quo* or who do not have a firm view. But those who seek an adjustment are themselves divided between those seeking a more centralized or a more decentralized federation.

- One in two Canadians want to see a shift in the division of powers, with 31 percent saying that the government of their province or territory should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now, and 19 percent saying that the federal government should take charge of many of the things the government of their province or territory does right now.
- One in two do not seek any change, with 28 percent saying that things should be left pretty much as they are, and 22 percent indicating they cannot say.

At the national level, these responses have not changed significantly over the past year. As mentioned in the 2019 survey report, it is notable that, on the whole, Canadians are comfortable with their decentralized federation: only about one in five citizens favour a transfer of powers from the provinces or territories to the federal government.

The four jurisdictions where residents are most favourable to having their provincial or territorial government take charge of things the federal government does are Nunavut (47%), Quebec (43%), Alberta (40%) and Saskatchewan (40%). In each of the three provinces in this group,<sup>3</sup> the proportion favouring more powerful provincial governments is slightly lower than in 2019; the change is most notable in Alberta, where the figure fell from 49 to 40 percent.

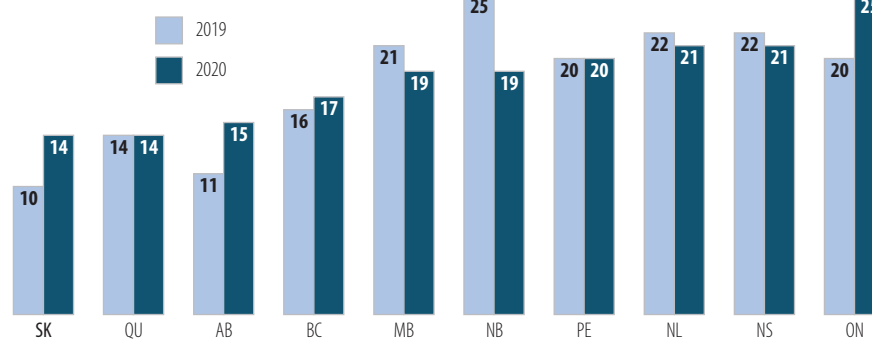
Province should take charge of things federal govt does  
2019 – 2020



Q.23

Which of the following statements is closest to your own view of how governments should work in Canada?

Federal govt should take charge of things province does  
2019 – 2020



Q.23

Which of the following statements is closest to your own view of how governments should work in Canada?

<sup>3</sup> This question was not asked in the Territories in 2019; and so, in the case of Nunavut, a comparison to last year's results is not available.

The jurisdictions most favourable toward having Ottawa take charge of things its provincial or territorial government does now are Ontario (25%) and Nunavut (24%).

At the national level, opinions on this question do not vary much by age group. But a closer examination reveals contrasting trends inside and outside of Quebec. Younger Quebecers are less favourable to a shift of powers toward the province than are older Quebecers; outside Quebec, the reverse is true. Curiously, the net result is that the views of

those under the age of 40 are very similar; both inside (35%) and outside (33%) of Quebec, about one in three in this age group say that the government of their province or territory should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now. But among those age 55 and older, Quebecers (49%) are twice as likely as other Canadians to hold this view (23%). (For Quebec francophones, the figures are 37% for those under the age of 40, and 51% for those age 55 and older.)

---

## Equality or asymmetry?

Still thinking about how powers are distributed between the different orders of government in the Canadian federation, the survey also asked whether Canadians prefer **that each province be treated the same** (so that no province has any more powers than another), or that the federal government should be allowed to offer more powers to those provinces that want them (so that the federal system can respond to the different needs that some provinces may have). A majority of Canadians (59%) prefer that provinces be treated the same in terms of the distribution of powers, while 26 percent prefer a more “asymmetrical” arrangement, and 15 percent cannot say. Support for the federal government offering more powers to those provinces that want them is higher in Quebec (36%) than in the rest of the country (23%). These responses have not changed significantly over the past year, either at the national level or across the individual provinces.

The lack of change on this question in Alberta is worth noting, as the provincial government appointed an advisory panel in late 2019 to explore ideas to enhance its powers, such as establishing a provincial revenue agency to collect both provincial and federal taxes directly within the province, creating an Alberta Pension Plan in place of the Canada Pension Plan, and establishing a provincial police force in place of the RCMP. The Fair Deal Panel “explored ideas that give us [Alberta] a bigger voice within the federation, increase our power over areas of provincial jurisdiction, and advance our vital economic interests, such

as building energy pipelines.”<sup>4</sup> The appointment of this panel was not accompanied by any shift of opinion in favour of asymmetrical arrangements that would allow one province (such as Alberta) to take on more powers than others – although, as seen above, two in five Albertans favour a transfer of powers from Ottawa to Edmonton.<sup>5</sup>

Part of the challenge of forming more of a common front among provinces in favour of “asymmetrical federalism” is that the concept continues to be perceived quite differently in the various parts of the country. In Quebec, for instance, those who favour a transfer of powers from Ottawa to the provinces are *more* likely to favour an asymmetrical distribution of powers. In the rest of Canada, the opposite is the case: decentralists are *less* likely to favour asymmetrical arrangements. Similarly, in Quebec, those who identify as sovereigntists are *more* likely than their federalist counterparts to favour an asymmetrical distribution of powers. In Western Canada, however, there is *no difference* in support for asymmetrical federalism between those who agree and those who disagree that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own.”

As revealed in the report from the 2019 survey, the crux of the issue is that, in Quebec, asymmetry is more likely to be seen as a solution to frustrations with the federation; whereas, in the rest of the country, it is more likely to be viewed as a contributing factor.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.alberta.ca/fair-deal-panel.aspx#toc-0>

<sup>5</sup> Note that the survey was conducted prior to the publication of the panel’s recommendations in June 2020.

## The powers of municipal governments

As mentioned, provinces determine the boundaries, structure and powers of municipal governments. Given the importance of municipal infrastructure and services to citizens' quality of life, some have argued that municipalities – notably the country's big cities – should have more powers and autonomy. The survey suggests, however, that Canadians are more likely to accept the *status quo*.

About three in ten (28%) say that the provincial government should give their municipal governments more power compared to now – including 22 percent who say it should have somewhat more power and six percent who say it should have much more. Sixteen percent say it should have somewhat less (11%) or much less (5%) power, while 42 percent say it should have about the same power as now.

Responses to this question do not vary significantly by province. More importantly, they do not differ significantly between those who live in one of Canada's six biggest cities,<sup>6</sup> and the rest of the country: 27 percent of big city residents say that the provincial government should give their municipal government more power compared to now, compared to 29 percent in the rest of the country. Within the individual provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and B.C., there is no greater support for more powerful cities among big city residents compared to those living in the rest of these provinces.

## Should municipal governments have more power?

2020

	More power	About the same	Less power	Cannot say
CANADA	28	42	16	15
Six biggest cities	27	43	18	13
Outside the six biggest cities	29	41	13	17
Montreal	23	44	18	15
Rest of Quebec	27	42	12	19
Toronto and Ottawa	29	40	19	12
Rest of Ontario	32	40	14	14
Calgary and Edmonton	30	43	15	13
Rest of Alberta	29	35	13	24
Vancouver	22	49	18	11
Rest of B.C.	23	44	14	20

Q.34

How much power do you think the provincial government should give your municipal government compared to now?

<sup>6</sup> These are the metropolitan areas with over a million residents: Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

# Leadership and representation

## Highlights

- Overall, Canadians are about twice as likely to say that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests as they are to say the same of the federal government or their municipal government. However, about one in three Canadians do not choose any government as best representing their interests.
- One in two francophone Quebecers say their provincial government best represents their interests, compared with one in four Canadians outside of the province.
- Among Quebec francophones, baby boomers are twice as likely as millennials to say the provincial government best represents their interests. There is no comparable generational gap in the rest of Canada.
- Among those who identify as First Nations, a small plurality say their Indigenous government best represents their interests.
- The views of official language minority groups are different from those of their majority language counterparts, both inside and outside of Quebec. In Quebec, francophones are four times more likely than anglophones to say that the provincial government best represents their interests; outside of Quebec, anglophones are twice as likely as francophones to hold this view.
- Neither order of government has a monopoly on trust: in each of five policy areas, both the federal and the provincial or territorial government attract at least some level of trust, while a significant portion of the public trusts both governments equally, and some trust neither.
- Alberta is the only province where the proportion trusting the federal government more to make the right decisions increased by more than five points (since 2019) in each of the five policy areas mentioned in the survey.
- Francophone Quebecers age 55 and over are twice as likely to trust the provincial government more on both health care and immigration as are francophone Quebecers between the ages of 18 and 39.
- One in two Canadians outside of Quebec prefer the federal government to set one national pharmacare policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, compared to one in three francophone Quebecers.
- In those jurisdictions whose economies are more closely tied to energy resources (Saskatchewan, Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and the three territories), a plurality favour having each province or territory set its own energy policy. In the rest of the country (the Maritimes, Ontario, Manitoba and B.C.), a plurality favour having one national energy policy set in Ottawa.
- One in two Canadians want their provincial or territorial government to find a balance between its own interests and the economic interests of other parts of Canada, while three in ten prefer that their provincial or territorial government put its own economic interests first.

Canadians are represented and governed by several different governments at once, including federal, provincial or territorial, regional and municipal governments – and in some cases, First Nations governments as well. Citizens might naturally look to each of these authorities to take care of the issues that properly fall under its jurisdiction. At the same time, they might also find they are more supportive of one government or the other, either because they feel closer to it geographically, more aligned with it ideologically, or more interested in or affected by the types of issues it is called upon to address.

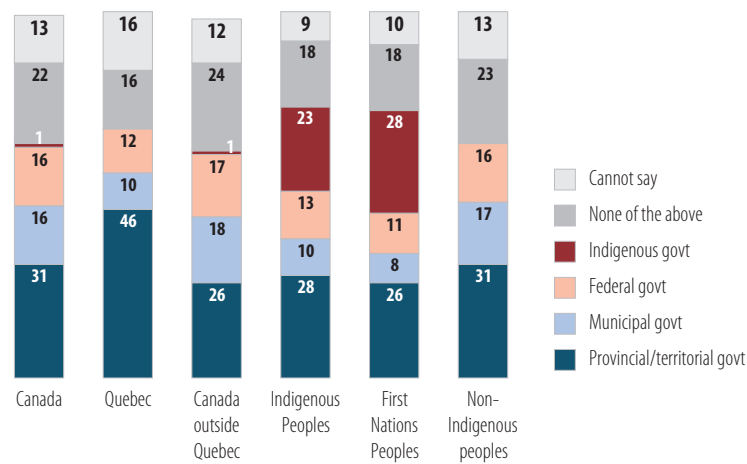
The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey included a number of questions about which government Canadians feel best represents them; and which they look to to address different types of issues.

## Which government best represents your interests?

Overall, Canadians are about twice as likely to say that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests (31%) as they are to say the same of the federal government (16%) or their municipal government (16%). However, about one in three Canadians do not choose any government as best representing their interests, either because they believe that none of them do (22%) or because they cannot say (13%).

Those who identify as Indigenous also had the option of selecting their Indigenous government as the one that best represents their interests. Overall, 23 percent of Indigenous peoples make this choice. Among those who identify as First Nations, 28 percent say their Indigenous government best represents their interests, compared to 26 percent who say it is their provincial or territorial government, 18 percent who say it is no government, 11 percent who say it is the federal government, and eight percent who say it is their municipal government.

### Which government best represents your interests? 2020



Q.15  
Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

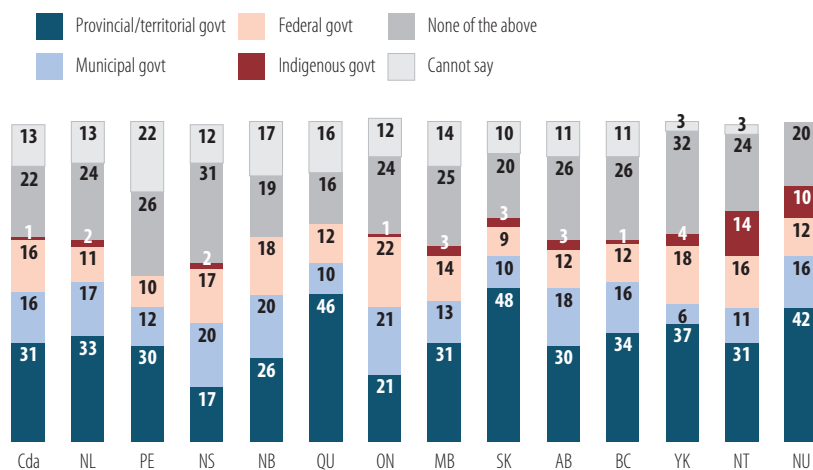
The pattern of responses to this question varies significantly across provinces and territories.

- In the first instance, there is a difference between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Almost one in two (46%) Quebecers – including 51 percent of francophone Quebecers – say their provincial government best represents their interests, compared with one in four (26%) Canadians outside of the province. But the difference between the proportion of Quebecers and other Canadians that say the federal government best represents their interests is not nearly as large (12% to 17%).
- That said, it is Saskatchewanians (48%), and not Quebecers (46%), who are the most likely to say that their provincial government best represents their interests. In Nunavut, the proportion saying their territorial government best represents their interests is also comparatively high (42%).
- Compared to those in the West (34%), those in Atlantic Canada (25%) are less likely to say that their provincial government best represents their interests. However,

Atlantic Canadians (15%) are only slightly more likely than Westerners (12%) to look to Ottawa as their best representative.

- Ontarians (22%) are the most likely to say that the federal government best represents their interests, and Saskatchewanians are the least likely to say so (9%). Ontarians (21%) are also the most likely to say their municipal government is the one that best represents them. Ontarians’ preferences are actually more or less evenly distributed, with roughly equal proportions in the province choosing the provincial government (21%), the municipal government (21%), the federal government (22%), and no government (24%) as their best representative.
- Nova Scotia stands out as the jurisdiction whose residents are most likely to say that no government best represents their interests (31%).
- In the North, 10 percent say that their Indigenous government best represents their interests; this figure is higher (19%) among Northerners who are Indigenous.<sup>7</sup>

### Which government best represents your interests? 2020



Q.15  
Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

<sup>7</sup> The unweighted sample size for this group is 125.

It is not surprising to see that, overall, provincial and territorial governments are more likely than the federal government to be seen as the best representative: provinces were originally intended to provide representation for distinct regional interests; and over time, the areas of provincial responsibilities (in matters such as health care and education) have only grown in importance. Beyond this, however, there are several factors that relate to responses to this question that are worth noting.

First, there is a natural relationship between the concepts of representation and identity: compared to those who identify as Canadians only or first, those who identify as residents of their province or territory only or first are more likely to say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interest, and less likely to say the federal government does. Among those who identify as residents of their province or territory only or first, 49 percent say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests, while eight percent point to the federal government. Among those who identify only or first as Canadians, the figures are 20 percent and 24 percent, respectively.

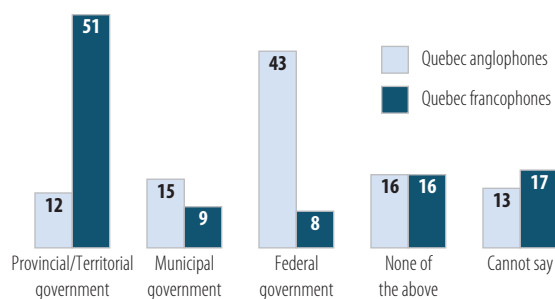
The difference in views between these two identity groups, however, is much starker in Quebec than in the rest of Canada. In other words, the contrast between the views of the different identity groups is more striking *within* Quebec than between Quebec and the rest of Canada. This suggests that identity (in terms of identifying more as Canadian or as a resident of one's province) has more political salience (is more strongly related to the issue of representation) in Quebec than in other parts of the country.

It is also notable that, even among Canadians outside Quebec who identify as Canadians only or first, only 22 percent say that the federal government best represents their interests – roughly the same as the proportion choosing their provincial government (21%), their municipal government (20%) or no government (25%). This reinforces the finding mentioned above, namely that while Quebecers differ from other Canadians in being more likely to identify their provincial government as their best representative, the inverse is not necessarily true: other Canadians are not that much more likely to see the federal government as their best representative than are Quebecers.

Second, responses to this question vary among different demographic groups.

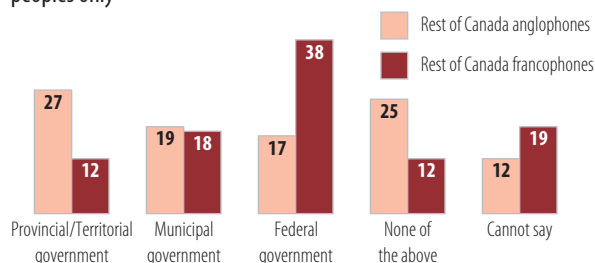
- Younger Canadians are slightly more likely to say the federal government best represents their interests, while their older counterparts are more likely to select their provincial or territorial government, or no government. However, this difference among age groups is largely driven by significant generational change in Quebec (see text box on p.21).
- Educational attainment is also a factor: compared to those who did not attain a post-secondary education, those with a university degree are more likely to see the federal government or their municipal government as their best representative; those who did not attain a post-secondary education are more likely to say that no government best represents their interests, or to offer no opinion.
- Recent immigrants are more likely to say that the federal government best represents their interests.
- The views of those living in one of Canada’s six largest cities<sup>8</sup> are not significantly different from those of other Canadians; notably, big-city dwellers are no more likely than other Canadians to say their municipal government best represents their interests. Within both Ontario and Alberta, however, those living outside of the biggest cities are more likely than those living within them to say that no government best represents their interests. (In Ontario, 18 percent of those living in Toronto or Ottawa say that no government best represents their interests, compared to 31 percent of those in the rest of the province; in Alberta, the figures are 24 percent for those living in Calgary and Edmonton, and 31 percent for those living in the rest of the province.)
- The views of official language minority groups are different from those of their majority language counterparts, both inside and outside of Quebec. In Quebec, 43 percent of anglophones say that the federal government best represents their interests, compared to only eight percent of francophones. Outside of Quebec, 38 percent of francophones say that that the federal

### Which government best represents your interests? 2020 Quebec By home language, non-Indigenous peoples only



Q.15  
Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

### Which government best represents your interests? 2020 Canada outside Quebec By home language, non-Indigenous peoples only



Q.15  
Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

government best represents their interests, compared to 17 percent of anglophones. Francophones in Quebec are four times more likely than anglophones to say that the provincial government best represents their interests; outside of Quebec, anglophones are twice as likely as francophones to hold this view.

<sup>8</sup> See note 6.

## Generational change in Quebec (Part One)

In Canada as a whole, there are small differences among age groups in terms of which government is seen as the best representative. For instance, while 29 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 39, and 28 percent of those between the ages of 40 and 54, say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests, this figure rises to 36 percent among those age 55 and over.<sup>9</sup>

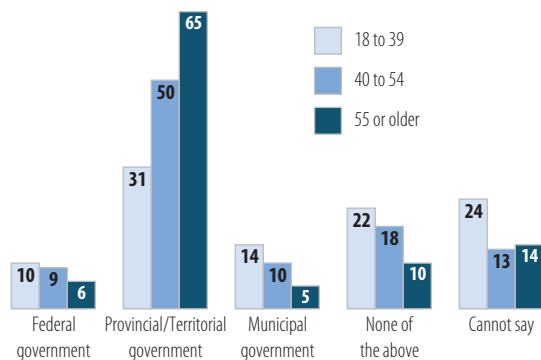
What this country-wide pattern disguises, however, is that this minor difference is driven entirely by a major difference within Quebec. While the differences among age groups outside Quebec are hardly noticeable, there is a significant generational cleavage within that province.

In Quebec, 31 percent of francophones<sup>10</sup> between the ages of 18 and 39 say their provincial government best represents their interests. This figure rises to 50 percent among those between the ages of 40 and 54, and to 65 percent among those age 55 and older. Among Quebec francophones, then, baby boomers are twice as likely as millennials to say the provincial government best represents their interests. There is no comparable generational difference in the rest of Canada. (Baby boomers in Quebec were born in the midst of the Quiet Revolution and came of age in the era marked by the election of the first Parti Québécois government in 1976, the 1980 referendum on sovereignty, and the patriation of the Constitution in 1982. Most millennials in the province came of age following the constitutional and referendum debates of the early 1990s.)

One curious result of these changes is that the generations inside and outside the province are becoming more similar in outlook over time. Among those age 55 and older, there is a 38-point difference in the proportion of francophone Quebecers saying their provincial government best represents their interests, compared to their counterparts outside Quebec. Among those under the age of 40, this difference has been reduced to an insignificant two points.

### Which government best represents your interests?

2020 Quebec francophones By Age

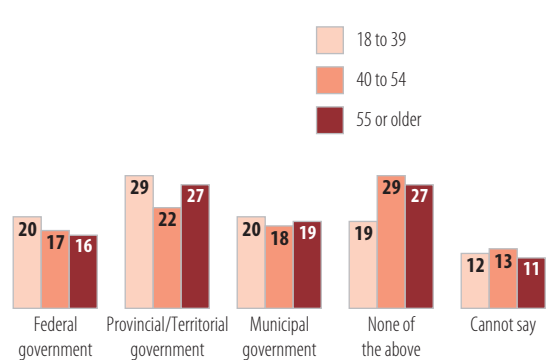


Q.15

Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

### Which government best represents your interests?

2020 Canada outside Quebec By Age



Q.15

Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

<sup>9</sup> This analysis focuses only on non-Indigenous respondents, who were asked a version of the question that did not mention Indigenous governments.

<sup>10</sup> The overall pattern is similar when non-francophones are included; however, as this discussion focuses implicitly on the issue of Quebec nationalism, the most relevant opinions to consider are those of francophones in the province.

## Change over time

Broadly speaking, opinions on which government is the best representative have changed very little over time. In a Focus Canada survey in 1986, Canadians were asked a similar question: which of the three levels of government do you think best represents your interests? The 1986 and 2020 questions are not identical, mostly because the option of selecting no government was volunteered in 1986 but prompted in 2020.<sup>11</sup>

That said, in both 1986 and 2020, about one in three Canadians say that their provincial government best represents their interests, about twice as many as the proportion that identify the federal government. Compared to 1986, fewer Canadians in 2020 say their municipal government best represents their interests, and more say no government does (especially in regions outside of Quebec). While this latter shift is partly due to the change in the format of the question, it is notable that, despite the growth in the size and importance of Canada's big cities over the past three decades, fewer Canadians today say they are best represented by their municipal government.

Finally, it is notable that only in Quebec did the proportion saying that they are best represented by their provincial government increase between the two surveys (from 34% in 1986, to 46% in 2020).

---

<sup>11</sup> The 1986 telephone survey recorded responses for a combination of governments or no government, but these were not prompted by the interviewer. The 2020 online survey allowed respondents to say no government best represents their interests, but not a combination of governments. The 1986 survey question also did not mention Indigenous governments for respondents identifying as Indigenous.

## Which government do you trust more?

Despite the division of powers written into the Constitution, in practice both the federal and provincial governments are drawn into action in many of the same areas of policy – whether in a collaborative or a contested manner. Even if one order of government would prefer to let the other deal with tricky problems, citizens’ expectations in areas such as health care, the economy, social services and the environment often make inaction a risky strategy. For various reasons, however, citizens may come to trust one of the two governments more to address a given problem, or they may feel that neither is able to deliver what they want.

The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys asked Canadians which order of government they trust more to make the right decisions in five policy areas:

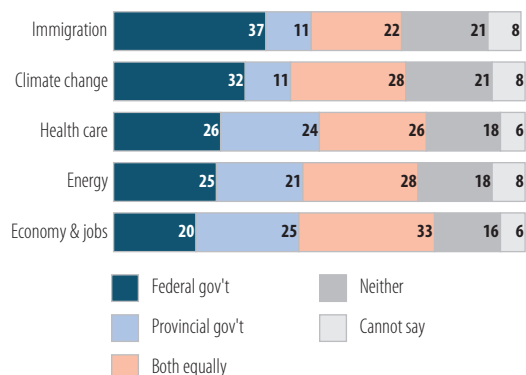
- managing the health care system;
- promoting economic growth and job creation;
- addressing climate change;
- managing energy resources;
- managing immigration and refugee settlement.

The results show that no order of government has a monopoly on trust: in each area, both the federal and the provincial or territorial government attract at least some level of trust, while a significant portion of the public trusts both governments equally, and some trust neither.

- In 2020, the federal government enjoys the greatest trust on the issues of immigration (34%) and climate change (30%), but is less likely to be trusted *on its own* on the economy (19%).
- Provincial or territorial governments enjoy the greatest trust on the issues of health care (27%) and the economy (26%), but are less likely to be trusted *on their own* on the issue of climate change (12%).
- Pluralities of Canadians say that they trust both levels of government equally when it comes to making the right decisions in the areas of the economy (34%) and energy (28%).
- Just under one in five Canadians tend to trust neither government to make the right decisions in these areas.

## Which level of government is trusted more to address key issues?

2020 Canada outside Quebec

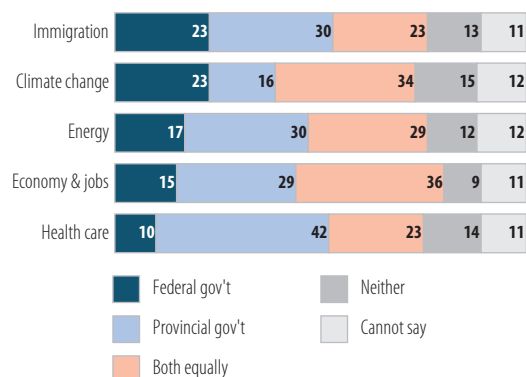


Q.25

Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

## Which level of government is trusted more to address key issues?

2020 Quebec francophones



Q.25

Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

There are, however, some differences between the views of Quebecers and other Canadians on these issues. In general, Quebecers are more likely to trust their provincial government than are other Canadians (taken together). The differences are greatest in the areas of health care (39% of Quebecers trust their provincial government more in this area, compared with 24% of other Canadians), and immigration (28% vs. 11%).<sup>12</sup> (Immigration is a policy area where the Quebec government exercises more autonomy than do the other provincial governments.) But while Quebecers are more likely to trust their provincial government, this does not mean that they look exclusively toward Quebec City for leadership. In three of the five areas mentioned (the economy, climate change and energy), pluralities of Quebecers trust both the federal and their provincial government equally.

While the views of Quebecers are often distinct from those of other Canadians taken together, there is also some variation in the views of residents of the other individual provinces.

- When it comes to **managing the health care system**, residents of Yukon (34%) the Northwest Territories (31%), and Saskatchewan (31%) are (along with Quebecers) more likely than average to trust their provincial or territorial government more. Nova Scotians (30%) are much more likely than residents of any other jurisdiction to trust neither government. This is notable because, as seen in the first report in this series,<sup>13</sup> Nova Scotians are also much more likely to say that health care is the most important issue facing Canadians today.
- Residents of Yukon (43%), Nunavut (35%), Saskatchewan (35%) and Alberta (34%) are more likely than others to

trust their provincial or territorial government more to promote **economic growth and job creation**.

- Ontarians (38%) are much more likely than other Canadians to trust the federal government more to **address climate change**.
- Residents of Saskatchewan (39%) and Alberta (38%), along with Northerners (36%), are much more likely than other Canadians to trust their provincial or territorial government to **manage energy resources**.
- Ontarians (40%) and Northerners (47%) are the most likely to trust the federal government more to **manage immigration and refugee settlement**. Residents of Ontario's biggest cities (Toronto and Ottawa) (44%) are even more likely than those in the rest of the province (37%) to trust the federal government more to make the right decisions in this area. Despite the importance of immigration to Ontario's (and Toronto's) population and economic growth, only nine percent of the province's residents trust the provincial government more on this issue.

At a Canada-wide level, there have been few significant changes in opinion since last year. However, there are some noticeable changes in specific provinces.<sup>14</sup>

- In Quebec, the proportion trusting the provincial government more has declined on a number of issues, including managing the health care system and energy resources (down 8 points each).
- In Ontario, the proportion trusting the federal government more has increased on a number of issues, including promoting economic growth (up 8 points) and managing energy resources (up 6 points).

---

<sup>12</sup> While Quebecers are more likely than other Canadians (taken together) to trust their provincial government more in the cases of economic growth and climate change, the differences are much smaller than in the other areas, and not statistically significant.

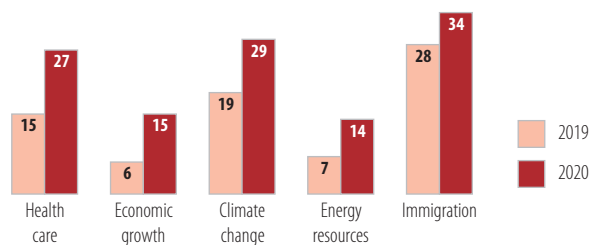
<sup>13</sup> Environics Institute for Survey Research, *Regional Perspectives on the Economy and Climate Change* (Toronto: Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2020); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/confederation-of-tomorrow-2020-survey-of-canadians-regional-perspectives-on-the-economy-and-climate-change>.

<sup>14</sup> A direct comparison of the results for 2019 and 2020 in the territories is not possible because, in 2019, the question asked in the territories had a slightly different format.

- In Alberta, the proportion trusting the federal government more has increased on a number of issues, including managing the health care system (up 12 points), addressing climate change (up 10 points), and managing energy resources (up 7 points). Alberta is the only province where the proportion trusting the federal government more increased by more than five points in each of the five areas mentioned in the survey.

In addition to region, there are two other notable factors that affect responses to these questions.<sup>15</sup> One of these is age, as younger Canadians are more likely to trust the federal government more to manage the health care system, while older Canadians are more likely to trust their provincial or territorial government more. However, the relationship between opinions on this question and age is much stronger in Quebec than in the rest of Canada (see text box on p.26).

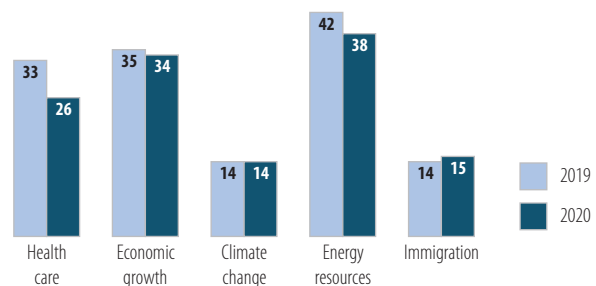
Trust the federal government more to address key issues  
2019 – 2020 Alberta



Q.25  
Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

The second notable factor relates to the positions that people take on specific issues. For instance, those who *agree* that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs are more likely to trust the federal government more to address climate change, but less likely to trust their provincial government more to promote economic development. Similarly, those who *agree* that there is too much immigration to Canada are less likely to trust Ottawa more on the immigration issue. Finally, those who support government regulations to prohibit public servants from visibly displaying their religious affiliation when providing services to the public are less likely to trust the federal government more to manage immigration and refugee settlement.

Trust the provincial government more to address key issues  
2019 – 2020 Alberta



Q.25  
Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the factors mentioned here, responses also tend to vary somewhat on the basis of gender (with men being more likely to say they trust the federal government or the provincial government more, and women more likely to say they trust both governments equally or to take no position), and of education and income, with those with less education and lower incomes being more likely to say they trust neither government.

## Generational change in Quebec (Part Two)

On a Canada-wide basis, younger Canadians are somewhat more likely to trust the federal government more to manage the health care system. Outside Quebec, however, the differences among age groups are small. Three in ten (31%) of those under the age of 40 trust the federal government more in this area, compared to under one in four (23%) of those age 55 and older. And there is no difference in the proportion trusting their provincial government more (24%).

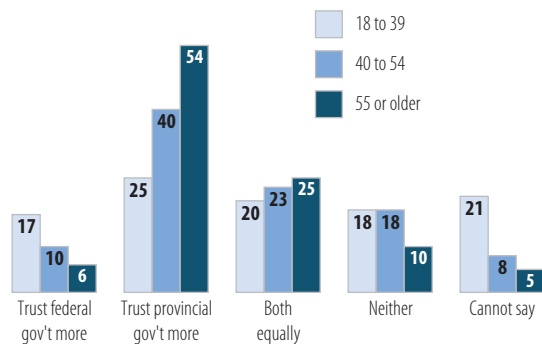
In Quebec, the differences among age groups are much more significant. Francophone Quebecers age 55 and over are twice as likely to trust the provincial government more on health care as are francophone Quebecers between the ages of 18 and 39 (the figures are 54% and 25%, respectively).

There is also an important difference in views among age groups in Quebec (but not in the rest of Canada) on the question of which government to trust to manage immigration and refugee settlement. Again, francophone Quebecers age 55 and over are twice as likely to trust their provincial government more on this issue as are francophone Quebecers between the ages of 18 and 39 (the figures are 38% and 18%, respectively).

In short, those who came of age in Quebec in the period marked by the Quiet Revolution, the election of the first Parti Québécois government in the province in 1976, and the first referendum on sovereignty are much more likely to look to the provincial government for leadership in these policy areas than those who came of age afterwards.

### Which level of government is trusted to manage the health care system?

2020 Quebec francophones, by age

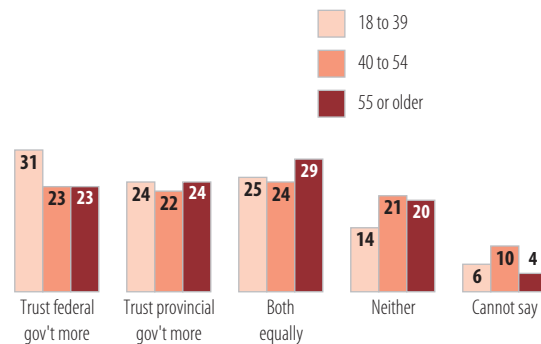


Q.25

Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

### Which level of government is trusted to manage the health care system?

2020 Canada outside Quebec, by age



Q.25

Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

Each of these patterns is more pronounced in some regions and provinces than others. This reflects the fact that views on which level of government is more trustworthy on given issues are closely linked both to the positions that citizens take on these issues and the degree to which these issues have become points of friction between their premiers and the federal government. To illustrate:

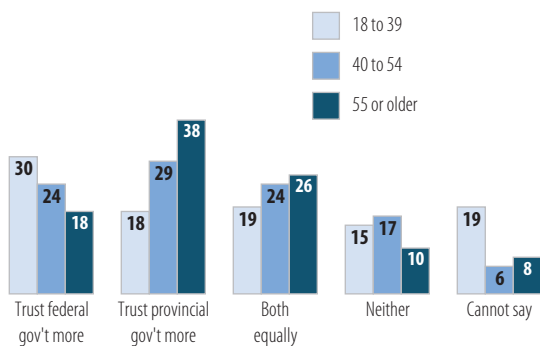
- The relationship between views on the environment and which government is trusted more on climate change is especially strong in Alberta and Saskatchewan;<sup>16</sup> in these provinces, compared to those who disagree (19%), those who agree (42%) that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs are more than twice as likely to trust the federal government more to address climate change. Notably, compared to those who agree, those who disagree with the proposition are only slightly more likely to trust their provincial government more, but are twice as likely to trust neither government. Manitoba

and B.C. differ from their Western neighbours, however, in that pluralities (39% and 41%, respectively) of those who agree that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs say they trust both governments equally to address climate change – reflecting the fact that in those provinces, the provincial governments have taken a less oppositional position to the federal climate change strategy.

- In Quebec, a plurality (39%) of those who support government regulations to prohibit public servants from visibly displaying their religious affiliation when providing services to the public trust the provincial government more to manage immigration. Outside of Quebec, however, a plurality of those who hold this view (32%) trust neither government on immigration. This likely reflects the fact that the Quebec provincial government has acted to implement regulations to this effect.

### Which level of government is trusted to manage immigration and refugee settlement?

2020 Quebec francophones, by age

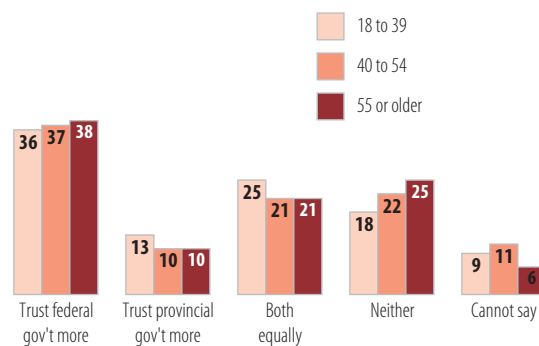


Q.25

Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

### Which level of government is trusted to manage immigration and refugee settlement?

2020 Canada outside Quebec, by age



Q.25

Which level of government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

<sup>16</sup> The results for the two provinces are combined in this paragraph to increase the sample size used in the analysis of the relationships between the two questions; however, the same pattern holds for each of the two provinces individually.

## Federal or provincial policies?

One of the advantages of federalism is that it can allow for variations in policy across jurisdictions in a manner that reflects the preferences of specific communities. Not everyone, however, sees this as an advantage. Some take a stand on principle, arguing that Canadians in every region should have access to the same types of programs and services. Others take a more case-by-case approach, simply calling on the federal government to apply one policy across the country in cases where they disagree with the direction taken by their province or territory.

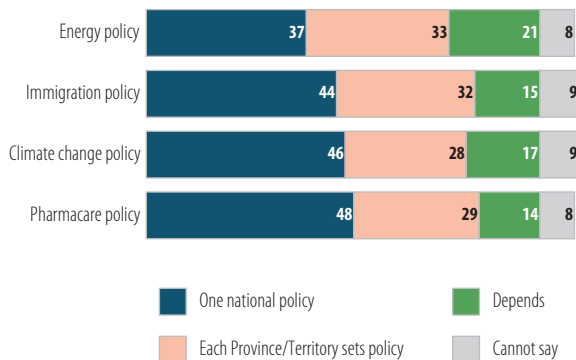
In the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey, Canadians were asked whether, in four different policy areas, they preferred that the federal government set one national policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, or that each province and territory should be able to set its own policy (and therefore that there be no national policy). The four areas are:

- immigration policy, such as choosing how many immigrants and where they can settle in Canada;
- pharmacare policy, such as choosing who can receive benefits to cover the costs of prescription drugs;
- climate change policy, such as choosing whether to place a tax on carbon emissions; and
- energy policy, such as choosing which are the best sources of energy to develop.

In each of the four areas, pluralities favour having the federal government set one national policy. This view is more likely to be expressed in the case of pharmacare (48%) and climate change (46%) policy. Somewhat fewer (but still pluralities) favour having one national policy for immigration (44%) and energy (37%). Opinions in each case are broadly similar to those expressed last year.

## Need for one national policy?

2020



Q.26

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think the federal government should set one national policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, or whether there should be no national policy and that each province and territory should be able to set its own policy:

As is often the case, the views of Quebecers (and especially francophone Quebecers) are different from those of other Canadians. A plurality of Canadians outside of Quebec favour having the federal government set one national policy in each of the four policy areas. In three of the four areas in Quebec, by contrast, pluralities of francophones prefer that each province set its own policy. The differences between francophone Quebecers and other Canadians are largest in the case of pharmacare (52% of Canadians outside of Quebec favour having one national policy, compared to 32% of francophone Quebecers) and immigration (where the figures are 48% and 29%, respectively).

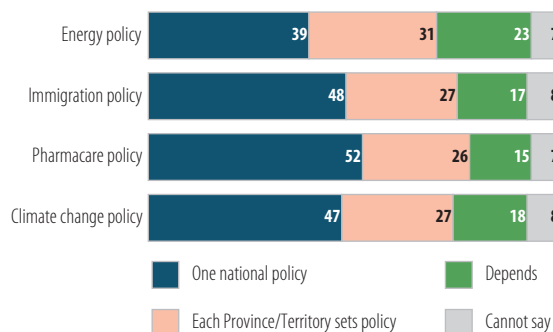
The one policy area where the views inside and outside Quebec do not differ significantly is climate change, where 47 percent of Canadians outside of Quebec and 45 percent of francophone Quebecers favour having one national policy. On this issue, it is the **Prairie provinces** that stand out: in that region, the proportion favouring each province setting its own policy ranges from 35 percent in Manitoba, to 38 percent in Alberta, to 43 percent in Saskatchewan – the three highest proportions among the 10 provinces.<sup>17</sup> Saskatchewan is the only jurisdiction where the proportion favouring each province setting its own policy (43%) is larger than that favouring one national policy set by Ottawa (30%).

There is also a difference in the views between those in Saskatchewan and Alberta (but not Manitoba) and other Canadians on the issue of how best to manage energy policy. More generally, the country can roughly be sorted into two groups. In one group – formed by not only Saskatchewan and Alberta, but also Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and the three territories – a plurality (41%) favour having each province or territory set its own energy policy, and only 30 percent favour having one national energy policy set in Ottawa. In the rest of the country (the Maritimes, Ontario, Manitoba and B.C.), the reverse holds: only 28 percent favour having each province or territory set their own energy policy, and a plurality (42%) favour having one national energy policy set in Ottawa. On this issue, the division line is not quite regional in a strict geographic sense (e.g., the West versus the rest), but between those for whom energy development is seen as synonymous with provincial or regional economic development, and the rest of the country.

<sup>17</sup> The proportion taking this view is also high in Yukon, at 41 percent.

## Need for one national policy?

2020 Canada outside Quebec

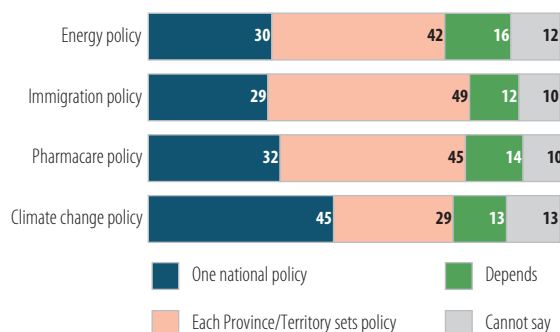


Q.26

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think the federal government should set one national policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, or whether there should be no national policy and that each province and territory should be able to set its own policy:

## Need for one national policy?

2020 Quebec francophones



Q.26

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think the federal government should set one national policy for Canada that would be the same for every province and territory, or whether there should be no national policy and that each province and territory should be able to set its own policy:

## Educational attainment and support for federal policies

It is not unusual for opinions on political issues to vary on the basis of educational attainment. In some cases, this is because those with fewer years of formal education (typically, those who did not attain a post-secondary education) are more likely to remain undecided, perhaps because they lack the information or the self-confidence to express an opinion. This is the case in the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey questions regarding the choice between having one national policy set by the federal government, or different policies set by each provincial and territorial government. On the question of whether there should be one national climate change policy, for instance, 31 percent of those who did not attain a post-secondary education either say it depends or do not take a position, compared to 19 percent of those with a university degree.

That said, in the cases of both climate change policy and immigration policy, the differences by educational attainment in support of a single national approach are particularly significant. In the case of climate change, 57 percent of those with a university degree favour having one policy for all of Canada, compared to 41 percent of those who did not continue their education past high school. In the case of immigration policy, the figures are 56 percent and 39 percent, respectively. Those with a university education are also more likely to trust the federal government more to make the right decisions on both of these issues than are those without a post-secondary diploma or degree (the proportion of each group trusting the federal government more on climate change is 39% and 26%, respectively; in the case of managing immigration and refugee settlement, the figures are 45% and 28%).

As the Confederation of Tomorrow study deals mainly with the dynamics of federalism, the focus of the analysis has been on the differences in opinion across regions. But on certain prominent issues, such as climate change and immigration, it is important to consider other potential fault lines as well, such as that related to educational attainment.

## Balancing national and regional interests

Provinces and territories exist to give representation and expression to the distinct interests of their respective populations. But this does not mean that Canadians expect their provincial or territorial governments to disregard broader, national interests altogether. In fact, the opposite is the case: Canadians tend to favour a more balanced approach in which provincial or territorial governments seek to find a compromise between their own interests and those of other parts of the country.

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey finds that 52 percent of Canadians want their provincial or territorial government to try to find a balance between its own interests and the economic interests of other parts of Canada, even if that means compromising on some of its preferred policies. Three in ten (30%) take the opposite view, preferring that their provincial or territorial government put its own economic interests first, even if that means implementing policies that weaken the economies of other parts of Canada. An additional 18 percent cannot say. These results have changed very little since last year.

Across the country, residents of the three territories (64%) are the most likely to prefer an approach that aims to balance their regional interests with those of other parts of Canada, followed by Ontarians (58%) and British Columbians (54%). In Atlantic Canada (49%), the Prairies (46%) and Quebec (46%), just under one in two prefer this option – still a plurality in each case. Support for having provincial or territorial governments put their own economic interests

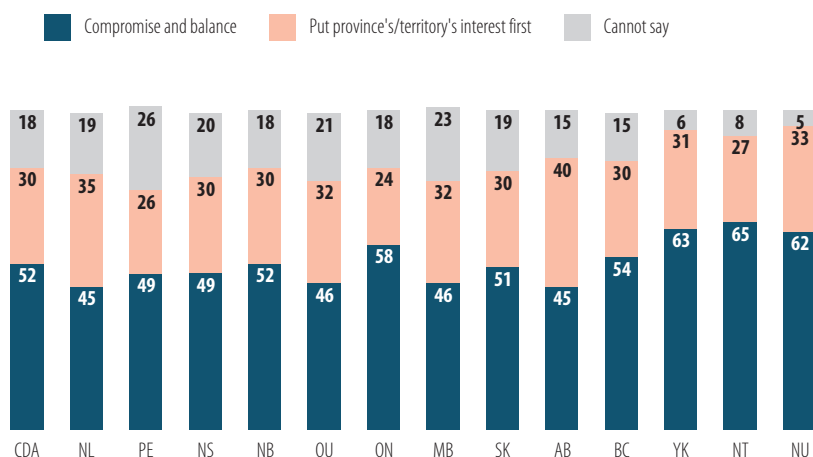
first, even if that means implementing policies that weaken the economies of other parts of Canada, is highest in Alberta (40%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (35%).

Responses to this question also vary somewhat by age, with younger Canadian more likely to prefer an approach that sees provincial or territorial governments put their own economic interests first. This is especially the case in the West. In that region, 44 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 34 prefer that their governments find a balance between regional and national interests, compared to 61 percent of those age 55 and older. Conversely, only 27 percent of those age 55 and older prefer the less conciliatory approach, compared to 40 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 34. This means that, while there is a 34-point gap between the two positions within the older age group, it is a mere four points within the younger age group.

Gender is also a factor, with men being somewhat more likely than women to favour the less conciliatory approach. Within the West, however, it is worth considering gender and age together. The relationship with age mentioned above is more pronounced among men, such that younger men in the West are actually more likely to favour having provincial or territorial governments put their own economic interests first (47%) than they are to favour an approach that seeks compromise (41%). This is not the case for younger women in the region. While among older Westerners, the views of men and women are similar, among younger Westerners there is a considerable gender gap.

## Balancing provincial / territorial interests and the national interest

2020



Q.27

Which of the following statements about the role of the [PROV/TERR] government best describes your view? a) My provincial government should put [PROV/TERR]'s economic interests first, even if that means implementing policies that weaken the economies of other parts of Canada; or b) My provincial government should try to find a balance between [PROV/TERR]'s and the economic interest of other parts of Canada, even if that means compromising on some of the policies that might be best for [PROV/TERR]; c) Cannot say

# Appendix

## Source material

This research references a number of previous public opinion surveys, from which the current survey draws comparisons. The details of this previous research is presented below.

**Surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC).** Between 1998 and 2006, CRIC conducted a series of public opinion studies on a range of national unity issues, including the evolution of support for federalism and sovereignty in Quebec, regionalism, relations with Aboriginal Peoples, Canadian identity, bilingualism, multiculturalism, Canada-U.S. relations, globalization and civic engagement. The specific surveys cited in this report are Portraits of Canada, an annual survey on attitudes toward the federation, and the New Canada survey on Canadian identity, conducted in 2003. Many of the reports and questionnaires for these surveys are available online from the Carleton University library at <https://library.carleton.ca/find/data/centre-research-and-information-canada-cric>. Selected data tables are available upon request from the authors.

**Surveys conducted by Environics Research and the Environics Institute for Survey Research.** Focus Canada is an ongoing public opinion research program that has been surveying Canadians on public policy and social issues since 1977. Between 1977 and 2009, Focus Canada was conducted on a quarterly basis as a syndicated research project by Environics Research (available to subscribers for an annual fee). Starting in 2010, Focus Canada has been conducted as a non-profit, public interest research study several times a year by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, and is available online at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org).

**Surveys conducted by the Mowat Centre.** The Mowat Centre conducted two studies on the evolution of attitudes toward the federation. The first, entitled *The New Ontario: The Shifting Attitudes of Ontarians Toward the Federation*, was a national survey conducted in 2010. The second, entitled *Portraits 2017*, was a survey of Ontario and Quebec that focused on a range of issues, including the federation. Survey reports are available from the Mowat Centre at: [www.munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre](http://www.munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre)



**Environics  
Institute**

**The Environics Institute  
for Survery Research**

900-33 Bloor Street East  
Toronto, ON M4W 3H1

416 969 2457  
[www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org)