

BACKGROUND

Human Rights and Dignity A National Survey of Canadians

*Commissioned by The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation,
in collaboration with McGill University*

Purpose:

Prior to the 10th annual Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Conference (November 21-23, 2013), the Environics Institute for Survey Research conducted a national survey of Canadians covering the Foundation's four defining themes, one of which is "human rights and dignity." How do Canadians view the country's record on protecting human rights at home and abroad, and to what extent does Canadian society discriminate against minority groups?

Highlights:

- Canadians give their country a lukewarm rating for its performance in protecting human rights at home and abroad over the past decade, with few expressing strong opinions either way. In comparative terms, the public believes Canada's record is as good or better than other western democracies, although opinions have slipped marginally since 2010.
- Large majorities of Canadians believe there is discrimination in this country against minority groups, including Aboriginal peoples, Muslims, Blacks, gays and lesbians, and new immigrants, although there is considerable difference in perceptions about the extent of such discrimination across groups. Almost half of Canadians now say that discrimination happens often against Aboriginal Peoples, and this view has strengthened since 2004, and especially in Quebec and BC over the past two years. Canadians are most likely to blame government policies for such discrimination, but a significant minority says that Aboriginal peoples are themselves most responsible for their own victimization.
- Four in ten Canadians believe that Muslims experience frequent discrimination, essentially unchanged since 2004, a view most widely held in Quebec as well as among well-educated Canadians. One in three say that new immigrants to Canada are often discriminated against, and apportion this responsibility equally among government policy, public attitudes and new immigrants themselves. Smaller proportions believe that frequent discrimination takes place against gays and lesbians, and against Blacks; in both cases this view has declined modestly since 2011.
- The public is more likely to place greater priority on governments investigating terrorist threats even if doing so intrudes on personal privacy, than on protecting citizens' personal privacy even if this limits the ability to investigate terrorist threats. These opinions roughly mirror those expressed by Americans on a recent US survey.

Research Findings in Detail

CANADA'S RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS

1. *How would you rate Canada's record over the past 10 years in protecting the human rights and dignity of its own citizens, including those most vulnerable in the population?*

Canadians give their country a lukewarm assessment with respect to its record in protecting human rights over the past decade, with few expressing strong opinions either positive or negative. Just over half say the country has done an excellent (11%) or good (44%) job, compared with four in ten who give ratings of only fair (30%) or poor (12%).

<i>How do you rate Canada's record over the past 10 years in protecting the human rights and dignity of its own citizens?</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent	11
Good	44
Only fair	30
Poor	12

Opinions are similar across the country. Excellent ratings are highest among residents of Toronto (16%) and Alberta (18%) and among Canadians in the top income brackets (17%), while “only fair” or “poor” ratings are most evident in Atlantic Canada (51%), among rural residents (50%), Canadians aged 60 plus (48%) and those with the lowest incomes (50%). Immigrants from outside of Europe/the USA are the most positive, while immigrants from these countries are least so.

2. *Thinking about Canada's record on human rights over the past 10 years, would you say it is better, worse, or about the same as the human rights record of other western democracies?*

The public's so-so view of their country's domestic human rights record notwithstanding, Canadians generally believe their country has done as well or better than other western democracies. More than four in ten say that Canada's record over the past decade is much (16%) or somewhat (28%) better than that of other western democracies, compared with just one in ten who say it has been somewhat or much worse (11%), and another 40 percent who rate it to be about the same. These results reflect a modest decline from 2010 when half (49%) said Canada had a comparatively better record (based on a 2010 Trudeau Foundation survey).

<i>Would you say that Canada's human rights record is better, worse, or about the same as other western democracies . . .</i>	<i>2010 %</i>	<i>2013 %</i>
Much better	16	16
Somewhat better	33	28
About the same	36	40
Somewhat worse	5	8
Much worse	2	3

Public opinion about Canada's human rights record compared with that of other western countries is largely consistent across the country. Positive views are most evident in Ontario (47% better), Saskatchewan (48%) and Alberta (52%), and lowest in Atlantic Canada (35%), but in no group do more than 16 percent say Canada has a worse record. Immigrants from outside Europe/the USA (52%) and allophones (55%) are among the most positive in their assessment of Canada's human rights record in comparison with that of other western democracies.

3. *How would you rate Canada's record over the past 10 years in taking whatever steps are possible to promote human rights and dignity in other parts of the world?*

Canadians are more positive than negative in their opinion of the country's record in promoting human rights and dignity abroad. Just over half believe Canada's record over the past 10 years is excellent (8%) or good (45%), compared with four in ten who consider it to be only fair (34%) or poor (8%). Positive views are most evident in Alberta (66% excellent or good) and Manitoba (63%) as well as among immigrants from outside Europe/the USA (67%) and allophones (65%). Negative views are more prevalent among Atlantic Canadians (50% only fair or poor) and Montrealers (50%).

<i>How do you rate Canada's record over the past 10 years in taking whatever steps are possible to promote human rights and dignity in other parts of the world . . .</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent	8
Good	45
Only fair	34
Poor	8

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MINORITY GROUPS

4. *For each of the following groups, please tell me whether you think they are often, sometimes, rarely or never the subject of discrimination in Canadian society today: Blacks, Muslims, Aboriginal peoples, gays and lesbians, new immigrants?*

Large majorities of Canadians believe there is ongoing discrimination against certain types of people within Canadian society today, and this view has held largely steady since 2011.

Aboriginal peoples. More than eight in ten Canadians believe the country's Aboriginal peoples experience discrimination often (48%) or sometimes (35%), up noticeably from 2011 and continuing a trend back to 2004 when only 36% felt this happened "often." Perceptions of frequent discrimination are most widespread in western Canada (especially in Saskatchewan at 63%), as well as among more educated Canadians and those 18 to 29 years of age. Since 2011, perceptions of ongoing discrimination have increased most significantly in Quebec and BC, as well as among Canadians under 30.

Muslims. Eight in ten Canadians say Muslims experience discrimination often (42%) or sometimes (39%), with this proportion up marginally since 2011. Perceptions of frequent discrimination have held largely steady since 2004 (based on previous Environics surveys). In 2013, one in six believe such discrimination happens rarely (11%) or never (4%). Those most likely to see such

discrimination occurring often include Quebecers (56%) and Canadians with higher levels of education and income, and those born in Canada. This view is least apt to be shared by Manitobans (26%) and British Columbians (32%), as well as allophones (31%).

<i>Are each of the following groups subjects of discrimination?</i>		2011 %	2013 %
Aboriginal peoples	Often	42	48
	Sometimes	33	35
	Rarely/Never	21	15
Muslims	Often	42	42
	Sometimes	36	39
	Rarely/Never	16	15
New immigrants	Often	-	34
	Sometimes	-	47
	Rarely/Never	-	17
Gays and lesbians	Often	38	31
	Sometimes	38	47
	Rarely/Never	19	19
Black people	Often	27	23
	Sometimes	41	46
	Rarely/Never	29	29

New immigrants. Eight in ten believe that new immigrants to this country experience discrimination often (34%) or sometimes (47%), compared with those who say this is rare (13%) or never happens (4%). Those most likely to believe this happens often include residents of Saskatchewan, as well as younger Canadians and those with at least some post-secondary education. This view is also more prevalent among immigrants from outside Europe/the USA (40%), compared with immigrants from these countries (20%) and native born citizens (35%). *(this group was included for the first time, so no trend data are available)*

Gays and lesbians. Most Canadians believe gays and lesbians experience discrimination often (31%) or sometimes (47%), compared with those who say rarely (15%) or never (4%). Perceptions of frequent discrimination have declined since 2011, with a shift from “often” (down 7 points) to “sometimes” (up 9 points). This downward trend is evident across most of the population, especially in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba, as well as among Canadians under 30 years of age. In contrast, perceptions of ongoing discrimination against gays and lesbians have increased since 2011 among residents of Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan, and immigrants from outside Europe/USA.

Blacks. Seven in ten Canadians believe Blacks are discriminated against often (23%) or sometimes (46%), compared with those who believe this happens rarely (23%) or never (6%). As with gays/lesbians, perceptions of ongoing discrimination have declined since 2011 (shifting from often (down 4 points) to sometimes (up 5 points)). This shift is most evident in Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta, while perceptions of frequent discrimination have increased in Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan. Blacks are most likely to be seen as the target of ongoing discrimination in Toronto (33%) and among immigrants from outside Europe/the USA (30%).

5. *Would you say that difficulties with economic and social equality for immigrants to Canada are mainly due to: the attitudes of the Canadian public, the policies of Canadian governments, or immigrants themselves?*

Who is most responsible the discrimination experienced by new immigrants to Canada? There is no public consensus, with opinions roughly divided among those who apportion blame to the policies of Canadian governments (30%), to the attitudes of the Canadian public (27%) and to new immigrants themselves (26%). About one in ten volunteer that all three share equally in this role.

<i>Would you say that difficulties with economic and social equality for immigrants in Canada are mainly due to . . .</i>	<i>%</i>
The policies of Canadian governments	30
The attitudes of the Canadian public	27
Immigrants themselves	26
All three equally (<i>volunteered</i>)	8
Depends	4

Across the country, those most likely to attribute discrimination against new immigrants to government policy include Atlantic Canadians (38%) and British Columbians (39%), as well as low income Canadians (42%) and allophones (37%). Public attitudes are most widely emphasized by residents of Manitoba (36%) and Saskatchewan (35%), women (30%) and Canadians with a university degree (32%). Placing the blame on new immigrants themselves is most evident in Alberta (36%), among top income Canadians (30%) and those 45 years and older (30%).

6. *Would you say that difficulties with economic and social equality for Aboriginal peoples are mainly due to: the attitudes of the Canadian public, the policies of Canadian governments, or Aboriginal peoples themselves?*

In terms of responsibility for discrimination against the country's Aboriginal peoples, Canadians are most likely to point to government policies (38%), with fewer than half as many identifying the attitudes of the Canadian public (14%). Three in ten (30%) say that Aboriginal peoples are themselves most responsible for the discrimination they experience in Canadian society.

<i>Would you say that difficulties with economic and social equality for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada are mainly due to . . .</i>	<i>%</i>
The policies of Canadian governments	38
Aboriginal peoples themselves	30
The attitudes of the Canadian public	14
All three equally (<i>volunteered</i>)	11
Depends	3

Blaming Aboriginal peoples for their own discrimination is most widespread in Manitoba (47%) and Alberta (51%), as well as among small town (37%) and rural (39%) Canadians and those without a high school diploma (45%). This view is least apparent among urban residents (23%), Canadians under 30 (17%), those with a university degree (25%) and immigrants from outside Europe/USA (18%).

GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE VERSUS PERSONAL PRIVACY

7. *What do you think is more important right now: For the federal government to investigate possible terrorist threats, even if that intrudes on personal privacy, or for the federal government not to intrude on personal privacy, even if that limits its ability to investigate possible terrorist threats?*

In the wake of the Edward Snowden leaks of the US government's NSA intelligence surveillance of citizens and governments around the world, how do Canadians feel about the the practices of its own government with respect to balancing the priorities of fighting terrorism and protecting citizens' privacy?

On balance, Canadians are more likely to place a higher priority on governments investigating terrorist threats (57%) than on avoiding intrusion into citizens' personal privacy (35%). This view is roughly comparable to that expressed recently by Americans, based on a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center.

<i>What do you think is more important right now . . .</i>	Canada %	USA %
For the federal government to investigate possible terrorist threats, even if that intrudes on personal privacy	57	62
For the federal government not to intrude on personal privacy, even if that limits its ability to investigate possible terrorist threats?	35	34
Depends	4	-
Don't know/no opinion	3	4

Those most apt to prioritize government surveillance over personal privacy include residents of Atlantic Canada (64%), Saskatchewan (62%) and Alberta (62%), as well as among women (64%) and Canadians over 45 years of age (65%). This view is least likely to be shared by British Columbians (47%), Canadians with a university degree (51%), and those under 30 years of age (42%).

Survey Methodology

The results are based on a telephone survey conducted for the Environics Institute by Research House with a representative sample of 1,501 Canadians (18 years and older) between September 17 and October 13, 2013. The sample was stratified by province and community size to ensure adequate coverage of jurisdictions for analysis purposes. A sample of this size will produce a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is greater for results for regional and socio-demographic subgroups of the total sample.

The survey questions were designed by the Environics Institute, in conjunction with representatives from the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and McGill University.