

Rethinking

Government

**Exploring Changing Relationships Among
Individuals, Governments and Business**

Wave 4 Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Satisfaction with Government

Results from this edition of Rethinking Government reveal an improvement in views on federal government performance over the past few months. The proportion of Canadians who say they approve of Government of Canada performance is up three points since November 2006 (to 34 per cent), and the proportion who take a negative view of federal performance is down eight points over this same timeframe (to 30 per cent).

Satisfaction with Government of Canada direction is also up significantly over the past few months: the proportion of Canadians who feel the Government of Canada is moving in the right direction is up six points since November 2006 (and currently stands at 52 per cent), while the proportion who feel the Government of Canada is moving in the wrong direction is down nine points since November (to 39 per cent).

Trust and Ethics

Rethinking Government findings also suggest some improvement in public views about trust and ethics in government. While Canadians remain split in terms of their trust in the Government of Canada, the proportion who express little trust in the Government of Canada is down five points since November 2006. Moreover, the proportion of Canadians who feel the ethical standards of the federal government have slipped badly in the past decade is down 10 points since February 2006, and agreement with this idea is at its lowest point since 2002.

Continuing with our examination of perceptions of trust and ethics, respondents were asked to rate the honesty (or corruption) of a variety of organizations. The findings reveal that none of the institutions tested are seen as being particularly honest. Only three in ten characterize the federal government (31 per cent) or their provincial government (31 per cent) as honest (and the plurality think they are corrupt). Fewer than three in ten (28 per cent) feel the media is honest, and only one in four believe federal bureaucrats (25 per cent) or federal politicians (22 per cent) are honest. And, at the bottom of the list, fewer than one in five would characterize multinational corporations as trustworthy (16 per cent), and three times as many feel they are corrupt. Tracking this data reveals that results are largely stable across many of these organizations over the past year, however, mirroring other results, there has been some improvement in honesty ratings for the federal government (up six points since February 2006).

Economic Insecurity

Rethinking Government results reveal that Canadians continue to express low levels of concern about job loss. Fewer than one in five Canadians (18 per cent) believe they could lose their job in the next couple of years (down five points since May 2006), and fully two-thirds disagree with this idea. Tracking this over the longer term reveals that fear of job loss is down dramatically from the late 1990s when almost half of Canadians felt there was a good chance they could lose their jobs in the near future.

Results also reveal that one in four Canadians (25 per cent) feel they have all lost control of their economic future, while 57 per cent disagree with this idea. Interestingly, despite a fairly significant drop in fear of job loss over the past eight months or so (as outlined above), there has been a slight increase in concern about a loss of control over one's economic future (up two points since May 2006).

Health Care

Improving the public health care system has been a key priority for both federal and provincial governments for some time now, however, findings from Rethinking Government suggest that Canadians remain pessimistic about this issue. Half of Canadians (50 per cent) disagree that the federal government will be able to improve the health care system in the next two years (and this is up four points since February 2006), and only three in ten (29 per cent) express confidence that the system can be improved in the near future (down four points over this same time period).

This edition of Rethinking Government also continued to examine support for individuals paying extra to get quicker access to health care services. Survey results suggest that support for two-tiered health care has plateaued: currently 38 per cent of Canadians agree with this idea, while 50 per cent support the continuation of the single-payer public system. These findings are virtually identical to those found throughout the last year.

The Government of Canada is in the process of trying to establish a Patient Wait Times Guarantee to ensure patients receive necessary medical treatment within clinically acceptable timeframes. Consequently, this edition of Rethinking Government continued its examination of Canadians' awareness and support for this initiative.

Survey results reveal that just over half of Canadians (51 per cent) say they have heard something about the Patient Wait Times Guarantee (21 per cent clearly and 30 per cent vaguely), and roughly the same proportion (49 per cent) say they have heard nothing about this initiative. Tracking this data suggests that Canadians are less familiar with the program than they were last year: "clear" recall is down eight per cent since May 2006, and the proportion who indicate they have not heard about this initiative is up six per cent.

Despite declining awareness of this program, results reveal that the concept of a Patient Wait Times Guarantee receives high levels of support from the Canadian public. After being given a description of the Patient Wait Times Guarantee, fully 84 per cent of Canadians say they support this idea, and support is up five points since May 2006.

However, despite strong support for the idea of a Patient Wait Times Guarantee, fewer than half of Canadians (48 per cent) believe it is very or somewhat likely that the Patient Wait Times Guarantee will actually be established (and only eight per cent feel this is very likely).

Canadians were also asked how quickly they thought the Patient Wait Times Guarantee could reasonably be established. Results reveal that only three in ten Canadians (31 per cent) feel this program will be established within the next year (and this is down five points since May 2006). Most Canadians (65 per cent) think it will take more than a year to establish, and almost four in ten (36 per cent) feel it will take more than two years before the program is created.

Results also reveal that Canadians hold mixed views on the federal government's efforts to establish a Patient Wait Times Guarantee. Overall, 40 per cent of Canadians describe the job the federal government is doing in attempting to establish a Patient Wait Times Guarantee as either poor or very poor, and only 14 per cent describe it as good or excellent (37 per cent feel the federal government has done a fair job in trying to establish a Patient Wait Times Guarantee). These results have remained largely stable since May 2006.

Views on Caregiving

This edition of Rethinking Government also posed a number of questions aimed at better understanding Canadians' views on caregiving.

Respondents were first asked if they thought the federal government should use taxpayer dollars to provide financial assistance to help support Canadians who provide care to a family member or friend who is disabled, has a long-term health condition, or is frail and elderly. Results reveal strong support for this idea: fully nine in ten Canadians (91 per cent) agree with this idea, and only six per cent disagree.

Those who support using taxpayer dollars to provide financial assistance to caregivers were asked what should determine who receives this financial support. Results reveal no one criteria dominates: just over one in three of these respondents (36 per cent) believe the type of care provided should determine who receives this financial support, one in four (23 per cent) think that the caregiver's income should be given highest priority, and one in five (19 per cent) believe the hours of care provided should be the primary determining factor. At the bottom of the list, although still endorsed by a relatively large proportion of these respondents (16 per cent), is the length of time spent providing care.

Looking at this issue from a slightly different perspective, we asked Canadians *who* should be given highest priority for this type of financial assistance. Again, no one response dominated, although the plurality (37 per cent) think that priority should be given to those who have quit their job in order to provide care. One in five (22 per cent) believes that caregivers who are poor should be helped first, and roughly one in six feel priority should be give to those who live with the person being cared for (17 per cent) or to seniors who are caring for other seniors (15 per cent).

Respondents were asked if they or anyone in their household looked after a friend or family member who is disabled, has a long-term health condition, or is frail and elderly. Results reveal that most Canadians (80 per cent) say they do not provide this type of care, however, a relatively large number (20 per cent) say that they or another member of their household do provide care to a friend or family member.

The survey also asked Canadians if they *expect* to be providing care to a close friend or family member who is disabled, has a long-term health condition, or is frail and elderly. Results reveal that a substantial proportion of Canadians (43 per cent) say they do expect to provide this type of care for a family member or friend in the future.

Those who said they expect to be providing care to a close friend or family member in the future were asked what type of care they would be willing to provide. Results reveal that a majority of these respondents say they would be willing to provide all the types of care tested, however, they are most likely to say they would be prepared to organize health related appointments or drive the family member/friend to medical appointments (96 per cent), followed closely by assisting with meal preparation and light housework (93 per cent). A further nine in ten (86 per cent) say they are willing to provide financial assistance, such as banking and preparing taxes, and three-quarters (76 per cent) are prepared to provide personal care, such as dressing, bathing, toileting and feeding. At the bottom of the list was helping with household maintenance such as roof repairs and yard work (although a substantial proportion – 70 per cent – said they would be willing to provide this type of care).

Transportation Safety

This edition of Rethinking Government also continued to ask Canadians how confident they are in the safety and security of various modes of Canada's transport system (i.e., rail, air, marine and road travel). Results reveal that Canadians continue to assign the highest level of confidence to air travel (53 per cent) and rail travel (49 per cent). Canadians are more mixed in their views on the safety of other modes of travel (although few Canadians assign low safety ratings to any of the modes of transportation tested). Just over four in ten Canadians (43 per cent) assign high safety and security ratings to marine travel, and one in three Canadians (33 per cent) assign high safety ratings to road travel.

Tracking this data reveals some shifts in attitudes across the modes of travel over the past year. Perhaps as a result of last summer's attempted terrorist attack on airplanes flying out of Britain (and the ensuing tightening of security regulations on airline passengers), we see a drop in confidence in air travel (from 59 per cent in February 2006 to 53 per cent currently). We also see a drop of confidence in rail travel (from 56 per cent to 49 per cent), possibly due to the relatively large number of train derailments that have occurred over the past year or so. Results also reveal a slight drop in confidence in marine travel (from 47 per cent in February 2006 to 43 per cent currently). Interestingly, safety and security ratings continue to climb for road travel (up two points since February 2006, and up eight points since March 2005), although it is still at the bottom of the list of tested transportation modes.

Views on Confederation and Quebec Separation

As the provinces and the federal government continue to discuss how to best resolve the “fiscal imbalance”, survey results reveal that Canadians hold divergent opinions on how their province’s contributions match those of other provinces. Overall, fewer than half of Canadians (43 per cent) agree that their province puts more money into the Confederation than it gets out. However, these findings vary by province/region. Respondents in the stronger economic provinces of Alberta and Ontario are more inclined to believe that they contribute more than they receive (53 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively), while those in Atlantic Canada are least likely to feel their province puts more into Confederation than it gets out (34 per cent). Tracking this data reveals that overall agreement with this idea continues to decline, and is down ten points since May 2005, when 53 per cent of Canadians felt their province contributed more money to Confederation than it received.

Turning to questions related to Quebec sovereignty, results reveal somewhat inconsistent views expressed by Quebecers. When asked to choose which of four options they would prefer for Quebec (complete independence, sovereignty association, decentralized federalism or the status quo), one in five Quebec residents (21 per cent) say they would opt for complete independence (up two points since August 2006), and an identical proportion (21 per cent) selected the status quo (down five points over this same timeframe).

However, when forced to choose between complete independence from Canada or maintenance of the status quo, just over one in three (36 per cent) choose complete independence (and this down three per cent since August 2006). The majority of Quebecers (54 per cent) say they would choose the status quo in this forced choice scenario (identical to results found in August 2006).

