

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Satisfaction with Government¹

Results from this edition of Rethinking Government suggest that approval of the overall direction of the Government of Canada continues to rise. The proportion of Canadians who feel the Government of Canada is moving in the right direction currently stands at 56 per cent, an increase of four points since August 2007, and of seven points since May 2007. At the same time, those who feel the federal government is moving in the wrong direction is down three points since May (to 37 per cent).

Survey findings also suggest that Canadians are decidedly more positive in their appraisal of overall federal performance than they were a few months ago. The proportion of Canadians who say they approve of the Government of Canada's overall performance is up seven points since August 2007, and up 11 points since May 2007 (to 44 per cent), while the proportion who take a negative view of federal performance has decreased over the past few months (down two points since August 2007, to 30 per cent).

Trust and Ethics¹

In addition to a significant improvement in federal performance ratings, Rethinking Government findings suggest that Canadians have become more trusting of the Government of Canada in recent months. The proportion of Canadians who express a great deal of trust in the federal government is up a full eight points since May 2007 (to 36 per cent), while fewer than one in four (23 per cent – down nine points since May 2007) now say they have little trust in the Government of Canada.

Survey results also reveal a significant decline in political cynicism (although Canadians continue to express fairly high levels of cynicism about government). The majority of Canadians (55 per cent) agree that those elected to Parliament soon lose touch with people, however, this is down five points since May 2007, and down a full ten points since November 2006. Nearly half of Canadians (48 per cent) also agree that they “don't think government cares much about what people like me think”, however, this is down five points since May 2007.

Health Care

This edition of Rethinking Government continued to examine support for individuals paying extra to get quicker access to health care services. Survey results suggest that Canadians have become somewhat less receptive to two-tiered health care than they were earlier this year. One in two Canadians (50 per cent) disagree with the idea of paying extra for quicker access to health care (and this is up four

¹ Please note that fieldwork for this survey was completed before the federal ethics committee investigation into the relationship between former prime minister Brian Mulroney and German-Canadian businessman Karlheinz Schreiber.

points since August 2007), while fewer than four in ten (38 per cent, down three points since August) supports this idea.

Survey results also reveal an improvement in Canadians' views on the health care system. Currently, seven in ten Canadians (69 per cent) feel that if they or a family member became seriously ill, they would be able to access the necessary health care services (and this is up seven points since November 2006), while only about one in five disagrees with this idea (21 per cent, down six points over this same timeframe).

Views on the Public Service

This edition of Rethinking Government included a series of questions examining Canadians' views on the federal public service. Results reveal that Canadians hold fairly positive impressions of the federal public service. Nearly two-thirds of Canadians say they would encourage a member of their family to work in the federal public service (and only 20 per cent disagree with this idea). Nearly half (48 per cent) also believe the federal public service works in the public's best interest, and only 29 per cent disagree with this idea. The plurality of Canadians further agree that the federal public service projects a good image, and is representative of Canadian society (44 per cent each), although a sizeable minority (roughly one-third) disagrees with both these ideas.

As with organizations in the private sector, the federal public service is facing a looming labour shortage as baby boomers begin to retire. Given the importance of recruiting new workers to address this shortage, Rethinking Government asked Canadians a series of questions aimed at better understanding their perceptions of employment in the federal public service. Results reveal that Canadians generally express positive views about employment in the federal public service. Nearly seven in ten agree that the federal public service offers a wide variety of career jobs (68 per cent), and almost two-thirds agree the federal public service offers interesting work (63 per cent). About six in ten believe the federal public service has opportunities for advancement (59 per cent), and that it offers a good work-life balance (58 per cent). Interestingly, views are more mixed regarding the idea that there will be an increase in job opportunities to work for the federal public service in the next five years: fewer than four in ten (38 per cent) agree with this idea, while one in four disagree (25 per cent).

Views on Foreign Aid

Rethinking Government results reveal fairly mixed views regarding Canada's spending on foreign aid. A plurality of Canadians (43 per cent) feel we spend the right amount of money on assisting poor countries around the world, however, one-third (32 per cent) feel we do not spend enough in this area, and one in five (21 per cent) believe Canada spends too much on foreign aid. Tracking this data reveals that the proportion of Canadians who view the amount spent on foreign aid as too high has decreased significantly since the mid-1990s (when almost half of Canadians felt we spent too much on foreign aid), but has increased somewhat over the past two years (up four points since January 2005).

Results also reveal that Canadians are optimistic that our foreign aid program can have a positive impact on poor countries. A clear majority of Canadians (63 per cent) disagree with the idea that

given the magnitude of world poverty, the Canadian foreign aid program can't make any difference, and only one in five (20 per cent) agree with this idea. Moreover, the proportion of Canadians who feel that global poverty is too overwhelming an issue to overcome has declined six points since 2005, and is down a full 17 points since 1994.

However, despite the fact that most Canadians believe our foreign aid program can make a difference on world poverty, relatively few are willing to increase spending in this area at the expense of domestic programs and services. The plurality (45 per cent) disagree that Canada should increase its humanitarian aid to poor countries even if it means less spending in other areas, compared to one-third (36 per cent) who agree with this idea.

Canada Revenue Agency

This edition of Rethinking Government also examined Canadian views on tax cheating. Results suggest a fairly high level of concern about tax cheating among Canadians. Seven in ten (70 per cent) say they are very or somewhat concerned that some Canadians do not fully report all of their income at tax time, while only about one in four (25 per cent) say they are not concerned about this issue.

Results further suggest that Canadians feel tax cheating is fairly widespread. The plurality of Canadians (30 per cent) feel that between 26 per cent and 50 per cent of Canadians cheat on their taxes. One in five (21 per cent) say between 11 per cent and 25 per cent of taxpayers cheat on their taxes, and only 19 per cent believe tax fraud is perpetrated by 10 per cent or fewer taxpaying Canadians. More than one in ten Canadians (12 per cent) believe that a majority of taxpayers cheat on their income taxes.

Canadians were also asked for their personal experience with tax avoidance. Results reveal that a majority of Canadians (57 per cent) say they know someone who would pay cash for a service to get a cheaper price by avoiding GST or sales tax, however, only about one-third (36 per cent) say they would personally do such a thing themselves.

Turning to awareness of Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) efforts to address tax cheating, results reveal that more than seven in ten Canadians (72 per cent) say they are not very or not at all aware of what the CRA is doing to deal with tax cheating, while only one in four (25 per cent) say they are aware of these efforts. Tracking this data reveals that claimed awareness of CRA efforts to address tax cheating is down 11 points since 2006. Those who indicated awareness of CRA efforts to deal with tax cheating were asked to rate the effectiveness of these efforts. Results reveal that a majority of these respondents (60 per cent) feel CRA's approach for dealing with tax cheating is effective, however, this is down 12 points since 2006.

Results also suggest that Canadians feel more information about the penalties for tax cheating would discourage this activity. Nearly nine in ten (86 per cent) agree that, to discourage cheating, the CRA should better inform taxpayers of the penalties for tax cheating, and only one in ten (11 per cent) disagree with this idea.

Views on Foreign Ownership and Investment

With the recent purchases of high profile Canadian firms such as Stelco, Falconbridge, and Inco by foreign companies, the issue of foreign investment and ownership continues to garner significant media attention. This edition of Rethinking Government examined Canadians' views on this issue.

Results reveal that Canadians feel foreign ownership of Canadian firms is on the rise. Three in four Canadians (75 per cent) believe the rate of foreign ownership is higher than it was 20 years ago, compared to only five per cent who feel it is lower.

Varying the terminology slightly, we find that a similar proportion of Canadians (72 per cent) believe that the rate of U.S. *and* foreign ownership of Canadian companies is higher today than it was 20 years ago, and only six per cent think it is lower. Tracking this question over the past several years reveals that the perceived rate of U.S. and foreign ownership of Canadian companies has remained largely stable since 2004.

Findings also reveal that Canadians are concerned about foreign ownership of Canadian businesses. Three-quarters of Canadians (73 per cent) say they are very (29 per cent) or somewhat (44 per cent) concerned about the rate of foreign ownership of Canadian firms, and only one in four (26 per cent) are not concerned about this issue.

Again varying the terminology slightly, we find that a similar proportion of Canadians (70 per cent) say they are somewhat (41 per cent) or very (29 per cent) concerned about the rate of U.S. *and* foreign ownership of Canadian companies, while three in ten (28 per cent) are not concerned. Tracking this data reveals that Canadians are slightly less likely to be concerned about U.S. and foreign ownership of Canadian firms than they were in 2006 (when 75 per cent expressed concern about this issue) or 2004 (when 72 per cent expressed concern).

Not surprisingly, given their concern about foreign ownership of Canadian companies, fewer than one in four Canadians (23 per cent) say they support the purchase of Canadian-owned businesses by foreign-owned companies, while two-thirds (66 per cent) oppose foreign ownership of Canadian firms. Even fewer express support for the purchase of Canadian businesses by foreign state-owned companies (20 per cent), while more than seven in ten (72 per cent) oppose this idea.

Results also reveal that a majority of Canadians feel the federal government should consider resource and security threats when making decisions about foreign investment in Canada. Fully eight in ten Canadians say it is important that the federal government consider foreign-owned and foreign-state owned companies owning Canada's natural resources when making decisions about foreign investment in Canada (84 per cent each, up a respective six and nine percentage points since 2005). And three in four (76 per cent) say it is important the government take potential threats to Canada's national security into consideration when making foreign investment decisions (unchanged since 2005).

Supporting Canadian Families

Canadians were asked a series of questions related to balancing the needs of their family with their work needs. Results suggest that Canadians face a number of challenges in this area, and look to governments and businesses to help them cope with these challenges. Nearly eight in ten agree that given the demands facing today's families, governments should do more to assist families who need support (78 per cent), and only one in ten (11 per cent) disagree with this idea. A similar proportion (76 per cent) believe Canadian employers should do more to help workers balance their work responsibilities with their family needs, and only 10 per cent disagree. A further six in ten (58 per cent) say they are worried about how stress and a lack of time affects their health, work and ability to care for their family, while fewer than one in four (24 per cent) disagree with this idea. The plurality of Canadians also feel that they don't have enough time to work and look after their family (47 per cent).

Canadians were also asked to identify the biggest challenge facing their family (i.e., day to day financial pressures, longer term financial pressures, or balancing work and family needs). Longer-term financial pressures (such as saving for retirement/children's post-secondary education) was chosen most often (33 per cent), followed by balancing work and caring for family (27 per cent). Interestingly, day-to-day financial pressures (e.g., housing, food, utilities) was at the bottom of this list (selected by 24 per cent of Canadians). Six per cent of Canadians volunteered the idea that both time and financial pressures were a major challenge for their family.

Respondents were further asked which of a range of areas should be given highest priority by the Government of Canada in providing support to Canadian families. Results suggest that no one area dominates as most important to help Canadian families. Child and family poverty was mentioned most often among the areas examined (chosen by 28 per cent of Canadians), followed closely by financial support (22 per cent), and caregiving support (19 per cent). A further one in seven (15 per cent) felt encouraging employers to make their workplace more family-friendly should be given highest priority, and one in eight (12 per cent) preferred the government focus on child care support.

Food Safety

This edition of Rethinking Government also asked Canadians a series of questions regarding their confidence in the safety of foods – both those produced in Canada and those imported into the country. Findings suggest a fair degree of concern about the safety of food produced in Canada. About half of Canadians (48 per cent) say they are concerned about the safety of foods produced in Canada, while only about one in three (36 per cent) indicate they are not worried about Canadian food products. Moreover, there has been a significant increase in concern about the safety of food produced in Canada over the past few months (up five points since July 2007).

Canadians express even higher levels of concern about the safety of imported foods. Seven in ten Canadians (69 per cent) say they are concerned about the safety of food imported to Canada, while fewer than one in six (15 per cent) are not worried about the safety of imported food. Results also reveal a substantial increase in concern about the safety of imported foods over the past few months: up a full 18 points since July 2007.

Respondents who expressed concern about the safety of imported foods were asked, unprompted, which countries that import food into Canada are of greatest concern to them. Almost half of these respondents (45 per cent) mentioned China (and this is up five points since July 2007). NAFTA partners, Mexico and the United States, follow distantly with 14 per cent of Canadians indicating concern about the food imported from each of these countries. South American countries in general (13 per cent), and other Asian countries (six per cent) are also seen as a source of concern for a number of these respondents.

Survey results also reveal that almost half of Canadians (48 per cent – up 12 points since July 2007) do not believe the Government of Canada applies the same food safety regulations to imported foods as it does to foods produced in Canada. Only about one in three Canadians (38 per cent) believes the Government of Canada applies the same food safety regulations to both imported and domestic foods (and 14 per cent are unsure).

The increase in concern among Canadians about food safety may be attributed to a high and growing awareness of recent media stories about the safety of products imported into Canada. Two in three Canadians (65 per cent) say they have recently seen media reports about the safety of imported products, and only one in three (34 per cent) say that they have not heard anything in the media about this issue. Moreover, tracking this data reveals a sharp increase in claimed awareness of these media reports over the past few months (up 16 points since July 2007).

Views on Illegal Substances

In November 2007, the federal government introduced legislation designed to toughen existing penalties under the Controlled Drug and Substances Act. This edition of Rethinking Government examined Canadian views on fighting illegal drugs in Canada.

Results suggest that Canadians clearly see the federal government as bearing primary responsibility for fighting illegal drugs. When asked which level of government they think is primarily responsible for fighting illegal drugs in Canada, a majority of Canadians (56 per cent) selected the federal government. Only one in eight believe their provincial government (12 per cent) or their municipal government (12 per cent) is primarily responsible for the fight against illegal drugs, while one in six (16 per cent) volunteered that all levels of government are responsible.

Results also reveal that more than six in ten Canadians (61 per cent) feel the federal government should be doing more to combat illegal drugs, while three in ten (30 per cent) say current government efforts are about right. Only five per cent of Canadians feel the federal government should be doing less to combat illegal drugs in Canada.

Though a paired choice exercise, Canadians were also asked which substances they think are most damaging to communities in Canada. Results reveal that cocaine/crack and methamphetamines are perceived to be most damaging to communities (chosen a respective 67 per cent and 62 per cent of the time over the other options tested), followed by alcohol (chosen 53 per cent of the time). Prescription drugs (44 per cent), tobacco (44 per cent), ecstasy (43 per cent), hallucinogens (41 per cent) and the date rape drug GHB (39 per cent) are also seen as having a significant negative impact on communities in Canada. Marijuana is seen as least damaging to communities among the substances examined (chosen 15 per cent of the time over the other options tested).

A similar question was asked regarding which of these substances is perceived to be the most damaging to *individuals* in Canada. Results are largely the same as those found when examining which of these substances are seen as most damaging to communities. Cocaine/crack and methamphetamines are once again mentioned most often (chosen a respective 66 per cent and 63 per cent of the time over the other options tested). About half (51 per cent) view tobacco as the most harmful substance to individuals. Ecstasy (45 per cent), alcohol (44 per cent), prescription drugs (42 per cent), hallucinogens (42 per cent) and the date rape drug GHB (40 per cent) were also seen as having a negative impact on individual Canadians. Marijuana is once again viewed as the least harmful among the substances tested, selected 15 per cent of the time.

Views on Confederation and Quebec Separation

This edition of Rethinking Government also continued to ask Canadians for their preference in terms of the balance of power between federal and provincial governments. Results reveal that the plurality of Canadians feel the federal government should devolve more powers to the provinces (44 per cent), while slightly fewer (39 per cent) prefer that the current arrangement between the federal and provincial governments be maintained. Few Canadians feel the federal government should assume more power than it currently does (13 per cent). Tracking this data reveals a decrease in preference for federal devolution of powers since 2006 (down three points), and a corresponding three-point increase in preference for the status quo.

Rethinking Government also continued to ask Canadians (both inside and outside of Quebec) about their views on the likelihood of Quebec separation. Results suggest that Quebecers' desire for separation is on the decline. Currently, only five per cent of Quebec residents believe that separation is likely to occur within the next two years (down two points since May 2007), while those who feel Quebec separation is *unlikely* to occur in the next two years is up one point over this timeframe (and now stands at 81 per cent). Belief that Quebec separation is likely to occur in the next five years is down one point since May 2007 to 10 per cent, while the proportion who say this is unlikely to occur is up seven points (to 74 per cent). Moreover, fewer than one in six Quebecers now feel it is likely that their province will separate from Canada in the next 10 years (16 per cent, unchanged since May 2007), and a growing majority (57 per cent, up three points since May 2007) feel it is unlikely. Residents from the rest of Canada are even less likely than Quebecers to think Quebec separation will occur within the next 10 years. And, similar to Quebec residents, belief that Quebec separation is likely to occur is down since May 2007 across all three timeframes tested.

Quebec residents were also asked about their support for sovereignty using the same type of question as was asked in the 1995 referendum. Similar to views on the likelihood of Quebec separation, results reveal a diminishment in support for Quebec separation. The plurality of Quebec residents (46 per cent) now say they would vote No in a referendum on Quebec sovereignty (and this is up three points since August 2007), while four in ten say they would vote Yes under this scenario (40 per cent – down seven points since August).

