

A HARDER OUTLOOK ON CRIME

BUT PREVENTION STILL MORE IMPORTANT

[Ottawa – April 19, 2010] - This report is part of an ongoing program to test how Canadians are arrayed on a dimension of social conservatism versus progressive attitudes. Our research is aimed at not only trying to understand where Canadians stand today, but how things are evolving. This research is an attempt to provide a more formal assessment of some of the theses recently put forward by Preston Manning that Canadian society was drifting to the right.

This week, we examined the issue of how people view the ultimate goal of the criminal justice system. As with our four previous tests, we are comparing the same indicator to one taken 10 years ago. The four choices provided were punishment, prevention, rehabilitation, and deterrence. These categories were randomized in order to eliminate an order effect.

The argument is that the notion that the system is designed to punish is the more socially conservative response. The other responses are less moralistic and more progressive. As in many of these tests, there is some blurring and ambivalence about which dimension is more desirable. It is important to recognize that many small "l" liberals see punishment as a legitimate goal of the criminal justice system and many small "c" conservatives see prevention as legitimate. Nonetheless, the overall patterns are revealing and shed further light on this important debate.

It is prevention – not punishment – which is seen as the principal goal of the justice by a modest plurality (36%) of Canadians. This is particularly true among women, university educated, and Liberal supporters. Second rank is assigned to punishment, but this is by far the most popular choice amongst Conservative supporters and lower and middle educated. The two trailing choices are rehabilitation (18%), which is more popular among youth and Liberal and NDP supporters, and deterrence (16%), which lines up with a similar constituency as punishment. Overall, we see a slight advantage for progressive views of the justice system, but Canadian society is fairly evenly divided across these choices.

The trajectory is also interesting. Relatively speaking, there has been a slight but significant drift to the more socially conservative position of punishment, which is up 8 points from the beginning of the decade. Rehabilitation also increased slightly over this period. These findings are consistent with other research that suggests that in terms of attitudes to crime and justice, Canadians may indeed be more socially conservative today than in the past. The progressive

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Main goal of criminal justice system:**
 - ▣ **36% prevention**
 - ▣ **30% punishment**
 - ▣ **18% rehabilitation**
 - ▣ **16% deterrence**

Please note that the methodology is provided at the end of this document.

views still lead slightly but in this test, we find some modest support for the thesis of a conservative shift. Notably, the conservative views are not the most dominant and these results clash with clear evidence of rising progressive attitudes in areas such as decriminalisation of marijuana and same-sex marriage. In the case of capital punishment, the evidence also leans in the progressive direction, but less clearly. Finally, in the area of abortion, Canadians lean decisively to a pro-choice orientation, but these attitudes appear to have been stable over the past decade.

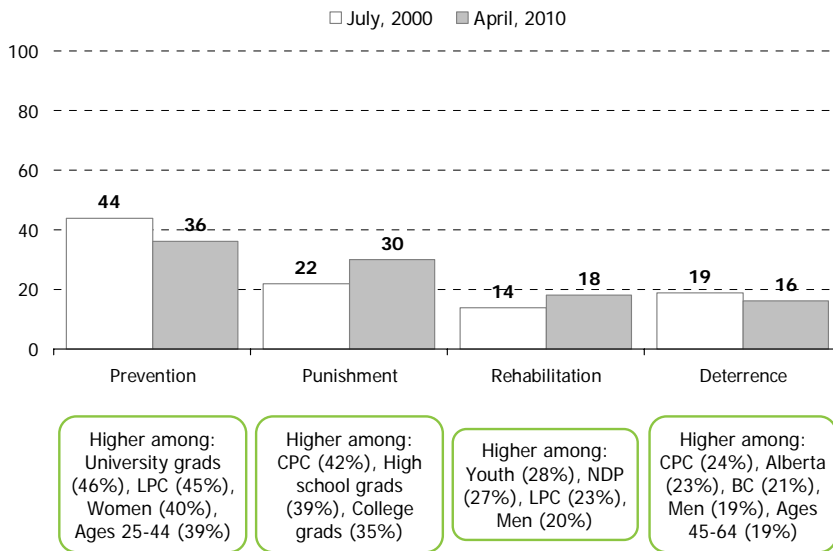
The question of what constitutes the centre of our values is an extremely important one. After five formal tests, we are seeing some mixed evidence, but the overall results so far would lead us to question the thesis of a blueing center as an accurate summary of the trajectory of value change in Canadian society. In fact, it appears that while these values are highly polarized, the clear overall lean is to a more progressive orientation and the trajectory is either flat or towards a more progressive position.

Our basic social reasoning about the criminal justice system does not seem to follow that pattern with a highly divided population more likely to support the harder, socially conservative view today than they did a decade ago. Whether this is simply a product of an aging population or other factors, it is a pattern which explains the resonance of the "tough on crime" political message despite the declining rates of violent crime over this same period.

Top Line Results:

Main goal of the criminal justice system

Q. Which of the following four possibilities should be the main goal of the criminal justice system?



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BASE: Canadians who provided valid responses: April 7 – April 13 (n=1,382)

Detailed Tables:

Main Goal of the Criminal Justice System						
<i>Q. Which of the following four possibilities should be the main goal of the criminal justice system?</i>						
	Prevention	Punishment	Rehabilitation	Deterrence	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONALLY	36%	30%	18%	16%	1382	2.6
REGION						
British Columbia	32%	29%	18%	21%	265	6.0
Alberta	29%	31%	18%	23%	195	7.0
Saskatchewan/Manitoba	27%	37%	19%	18%	135	8.4
Ontario	37%	31%	18%	14%	396	4.9
Quebec	41%	28%	17%	14%	253	6.2
Atlantic Canada	39%	27%	20%	15%	138	8.3
GENDER						
Male	32%	30%	20%	19%	695	3.7
Female	40%	30%	16%	14%	687	3.7
AGE						
<25	39%	20%	28%	13%	117	9.1
25-44	39%	32%	15%	14%	437	4.7
45-64	31%	32%	17%	19%	553	4.2
65+	36%	28%	19%	18%	275	5.9
EDUCATION						
High school or less	29%	39%	19%	14%	423	4.8
College or CEGEP	30%	35%	16%	19%	423	4.8
University or higher	46%	19%	19%	17%	536	4.2
CURRENT VOTE INTENTION						
Conservative Party of Canada	24%	42%	11%	24%	420	4.8
Liberal Party of Canada	45%	20%	23%	12%	335	5.4
NDP	33%	26%	27%	15%	208	6.8
Green Party	39%	25%	20%	16%	130	8.6
Bloc Quebecois	45%	32%	11%	13%	87	10.5
Other	38%	33%	14%	15%	40	15.5
Undecided	39%	33%	16%	12%	143	8.2

Methodology:

EKOS' weekly tracking polls are conducted using Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) technology, which allows respondents to enter their preferences by punching the keypad on their phone, rather than telling them to an operator.

In an effort to reduce the coverage bias of landline only RDD, we created a dual land-line/cell phone RDD sampling frame for this research. As a result, we are able to reach those with both a landline and cell phone, as well as cell phone only households and landline only households. This dual frame yields a near perfect unweighted distribution on age group and gender, something almost never seen with traditional landline RDD sample or interviewer-administered surveys.

The field dates for this survey are April 7 – April 13, 2010.¹ In total, a random sample of 1,555 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

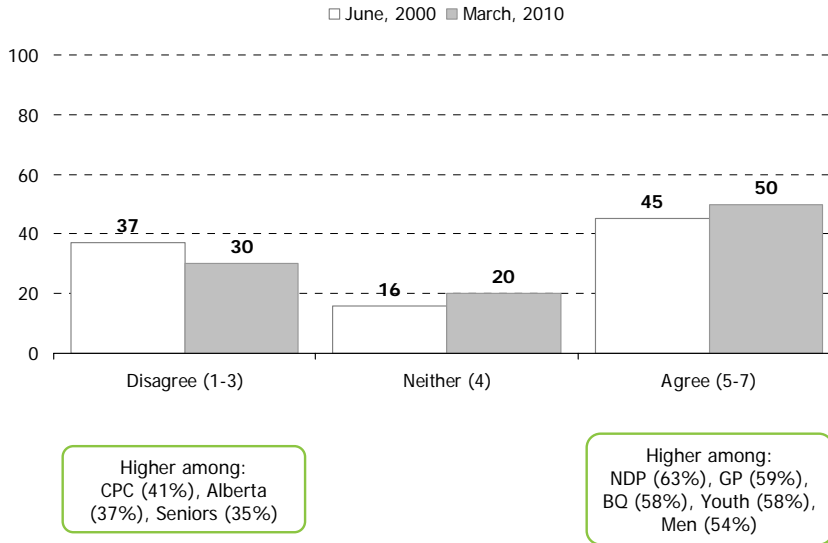
Please note that the margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as region, sex, age, education). All the data have been statistically weighted to ensure the samples composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.

¹ Please note that these dates are not inclusive of the weekends, as we do not survey on Saturday or Sunday.

Appendix:

Support for decriminalization of marijuana

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use should not be a crime.

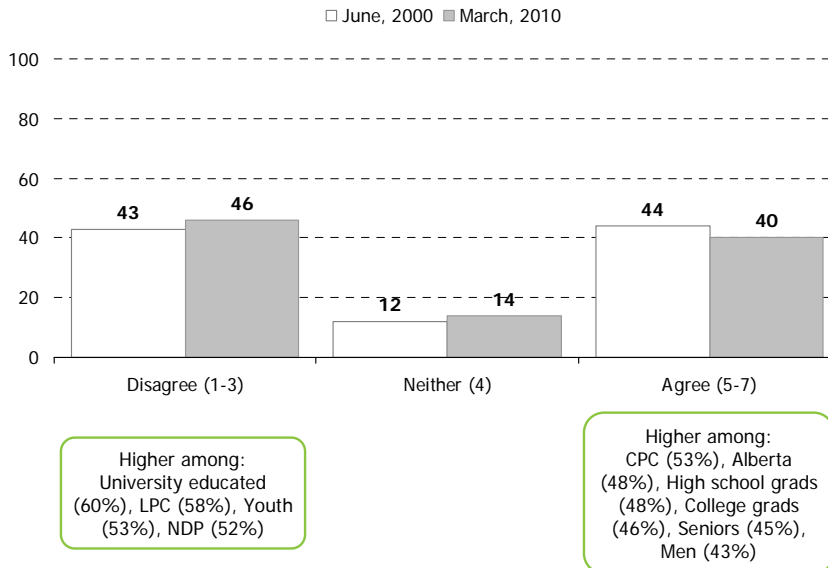


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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point March 10-16 (n=2302)

Support for reintroduction of capital punishment

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I would support the reintroduction of capital punishment.

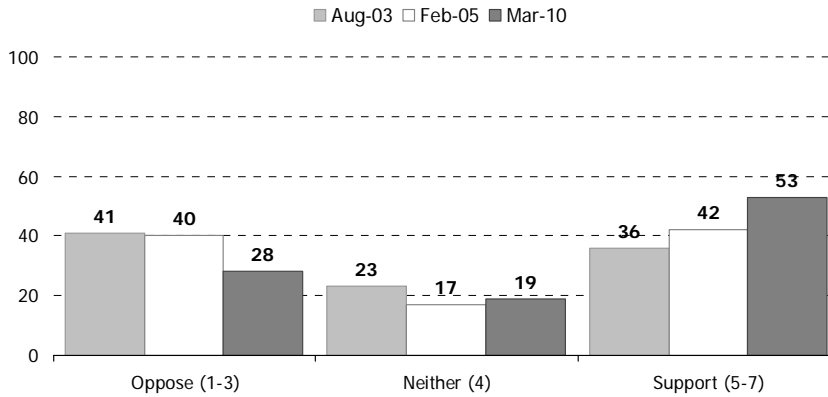


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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point March 10-16 (n=2302)

Support for same-sex marriage

Q. Do you support or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry?



Higher among:
CPC (40%), High school educated (34%), Alberta (33%), Men (32%), Seniors (32%)

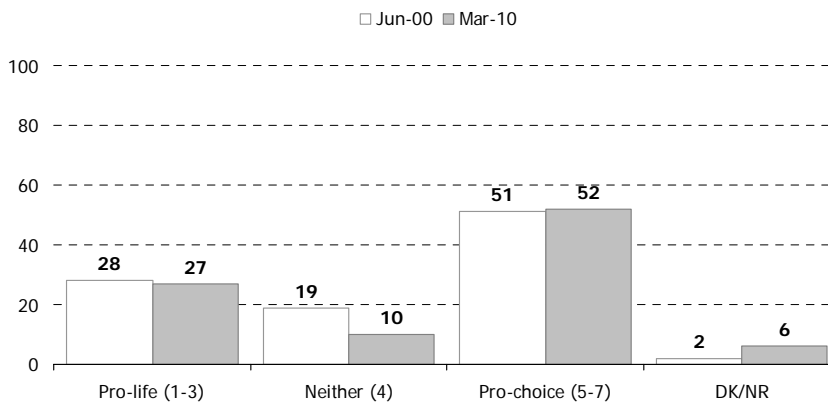
Higher among:
BQ (66%), GP (66%), University educated (62%), NDP (63%), Ages 25-44 (61%), LPC (60%), BC (60%)

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BASE: Canadians; March 17-23 (n=2880)

Public views on abortion rights

Q. Thinking about your general views on abortion, would you say you are more pro-life or pro-choice?



Higher among:
CPC (37%), Prairies (37%), College educated (31%)

Higher among:
University educated (63%), NDP (62%), BQ (61%), GP (59%), BC (59%), Ages 25-44 (57%)

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BASE: Canadians; Most recent data point March 24-30 (n=2162)