

LOOKING BACKWARD AND LOOKING FORWARD – PART 2

ARE WE APPROACHING A CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY?

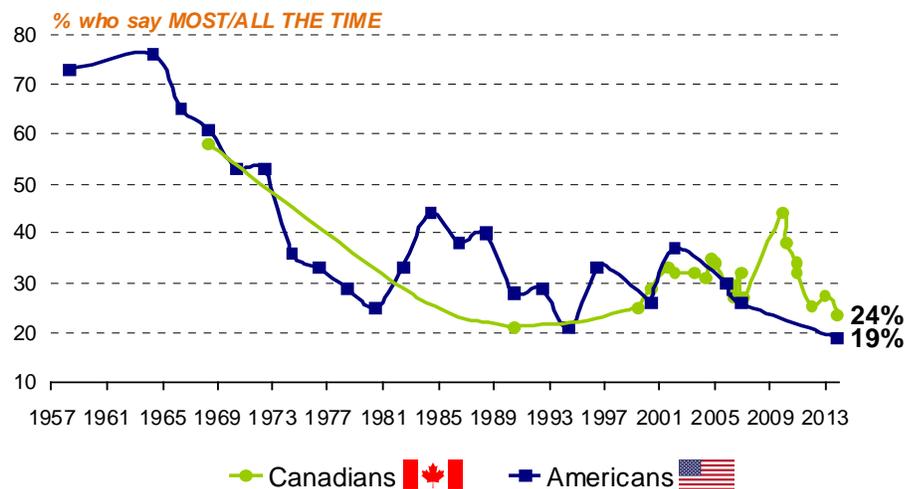
JANUARY 3, 2014

2.0 The Longer Term Patterns of Trust in Government

Let's start with the deep historical context in upper North America. Perhaps the biggest change among a plethora of structural changes in our society has been the shift from a more trusting collectivist society to a more individualistic society – one that is wary of the state and public institutions. The deferential and conformist societies of the post Second World War gave way to the counter culture and protest of the sixties and seventies and the transformation continues to this day. While the elimination of the blind trust and conformism under the forces of rising mass education, a more critical media, and pop culture has produced a more aware and critical public, this shift has also posed huge challenges to governments and democratic institutions. There is little evidence that the advent of Internet 1.0, 2.0, and beyond has done anything to reverse this pattern of very low trust.

Trust in government

Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa/Washington to do what is right?



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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point October 26-29, 2013 (n=1,377)

The most recent changes suggest that the almost unimaginable decline in trust in government which occurred in the last half to the twentieth century continues uninterrupted, and perhaps further eroded in this new century. It is a plus that a more educated and less docile public hold

their public institutions to account. But it is now becoming evident that the trust deficit, combined with the broader unravelling of social cohesion (see Michael Valpy's excellent series in the Toronto Star¹), has reached the levels where it is compromising the very legitimacy of our democracy and public institutions. These fault lines are even more pronounced in younger Canada, which is sitting on the sidelines as a sclerotic gerontocracy shapes the public agenda. Not only are these effects producing an incipient legitimacy crisis in the realm of democracy, but the trust lacuna may well be part of the problem of a stagnant economy which lack the basic reciprocal good faith to ensure a vibrant economy.

Before noting the recent shifts, it is important to note that the current roots of declining trust are deep and that there are no immediate fixes for "restoring" trust in government. The drivers are ultimately cultural, what some have called the rhythms of post-materialism², and there is no evidence that what Nevitte referred to as the Decline of Deference has halted since he noted that trend 15 years ago. If anything, the decline has continued and perhaps even accelerated among the younger half of the population.

Turning to the current situation – all is decidedly not well

Trust may be down, but as we have noted, this has been going on for a long time and is by no means unique to Canada. What are the more recent trends and just how important are issues of trust and legitimacy in the broader concerns of Canadians? We will show that although Mr. Harper inherited government at a very challenging period, things appear to have only worsened since he took office. This is somewhat ironic as Mr. Harper took office largely on claims to be restoring honesty and transparency and his victory was driven largely by concerns that the previous Liberal government had lost touch in terms of basic accountability and trust issues. So these issues can be important factors shaping political choice. The electorate, however, increasingly seems to think that all choices lead to the same conclusion – governments run by parties who place their own interests and the interests of other powerful agents ahead of the public interest. In fact, if we were to isolate one factor which is paramount in driving declining trust in government, it would be just that – the public interest has become subordinate to other interests in modern politics.

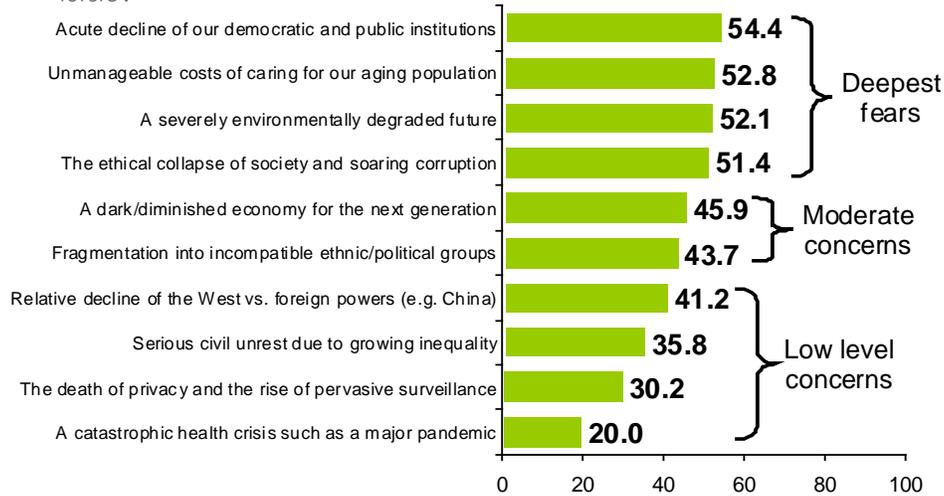
There are, however, many concerns out there in the public mind so does the issue of democratic trust and legitimacy really matter? Are citizens becoming inured to the idea that this is inevitable and not something to be overly concerned about? Consider the results of a tradeoff question we asked Canadians a few months back:

¹ Valpy, Michael. "What binds us together, what pulls us apart". Toronto Star, December 5 2013. Available online at: <http://goo.gl/tKWVup>

² Inglehart, Ronald. "Changing Values among Western Publics from 1970 to 2006". West European Politics 31:1-2 130-46, 2008. Available online at: <http://goo.gl/L32cg>

Deepest concerns about the future

Q. Which of the following choices best reflects your deepest concerns about the future?*



* These items were presented in a series of paired choices. The figures in this chart represent how often each option was selected over the other items that were tested.

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BASE: Canadians; October 10-14, 2013 (n=1,554)

Source: "So What's Really Bothering You Canada?", October 17, 2013.

Full results available at: <http://goo.gl/5L9fy7>

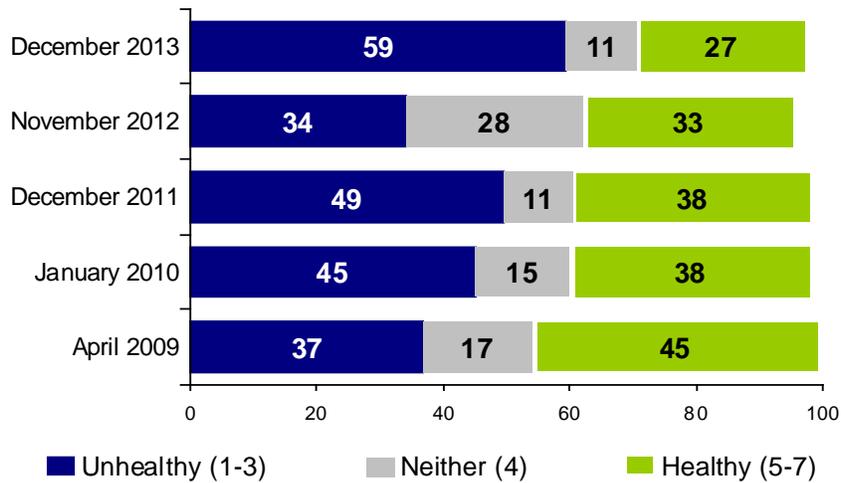
We no longer seem to worry about nuclear annihilation nor violence in the streets. A super SARS pandemic isn't bothering us that much, nor is the idea of a ubiquitous surveillance state (and industry) that monitors our every move. The thing which seems to bother Canadians the most was the "acute decline of our democratic and public institutions". For those who say these aren't really the foundation concerns of the public, we say you are wrong. This is very much a central concern – if not *the* central concern – of an increasingly jaded and suspicious public.

Recent trends in rated health of democracy

We noted that the roots of the decline in trust in government and democracy were deep and that this phenomenon was not unique to Canada. We also note that while the major declines occurred in the seventies and eighties, although there is evidence that the trend lines are going down again. We have been asking people to rate the overall health of democracy as another test of this issue.

Perceived health of democracy

Q. How would you rate the overall health of democracy at the federal level in Canada?

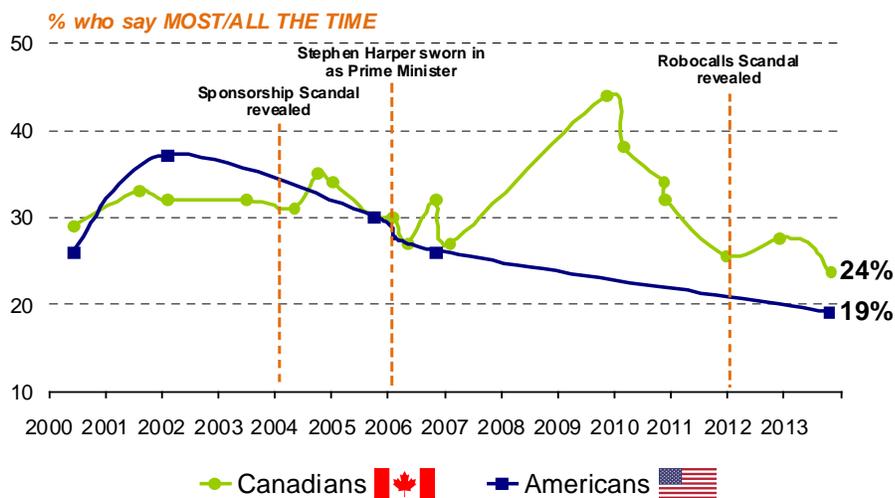


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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point December 12-20, 2013 (n=1,531)

Trust in government

Q. [Canada] How much do you trust the government in Ottawa to do what is right? [United States] How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?



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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point October 26-29, 2013 (n=1,377)

Source: "Stephen Harper Plumbing Record Lows on Trust, Direction, and Approval", October 29, 2013.

Full results available at: <http://goo.gl/BtB3X0>



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The pattern here is both clear and troubling. While we were leaning to see democracy as somewhat healthy in early 2009 (by a margin of 45 per cent to 37 per cent), this has steadily eroded to the rather dismal reading we got at year-end. Today, just over one-quarter of the public see democracy as healthy and, for the first time, a clear majority say our democracy is sick. So while the Harper government is by no means responsible for the poor democratic health of the country, it certainly hasn't helped this. Other polling from earlier this year suggests that the public consider both the Senate spending scandal (the handling and potential cover-up rather than the initial infractions) and the Robocalls Scandal to be more serious than the Sponsorship Scandal which banished the Liberal Party from office for nearly a decade now³. This belief that democracy is in critical shape is shared in all regions and demographic cohorts. The only striking division is across partisan boundaries. Nearly two-thirds of the remaining Conservative base rate democracy as "healthy"; across all other parts of the political spectrum, this figure is around 15 per cent.

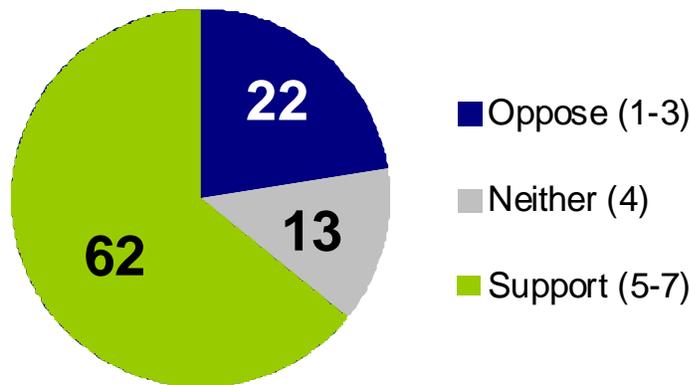
³ See "Stephen Harper Plumbing Record Lows on Trust, Direction, and Approval", October 29, 2013. Available online at: <http://goo.gl/BtB3X0>

The public views on some possible fixes

Unsurprisingly, we have seen public receptivity to a number of fixes to improve this serious problem. These range from sweeping ideas such as replacing political parties to more common suggestions including moving from first-past-the-post to proportional representation. Here we will look at two specific ideas. One of these ideas is the package of reforms developed by Conservative MP Michael Chong and is currently under debate in Parliament. Although it includes other measures, the most notable would be to give sitting MPs the power to replace a leader who has lost their confidence. The results shown below indicate that this proposal enjoys broad public support.

Support for Michael Chong's reform bill

Q. As you may have heard, Michael Chong, a Member of Parliament, has proposed a bill that would give sitting Members of Parliament the ability to vote out their party leader, among other things. To what extent do you support or oppose the notion that party caucuses should have the power to expel their leader?



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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point December 12-20, 2013 (n=1,531)

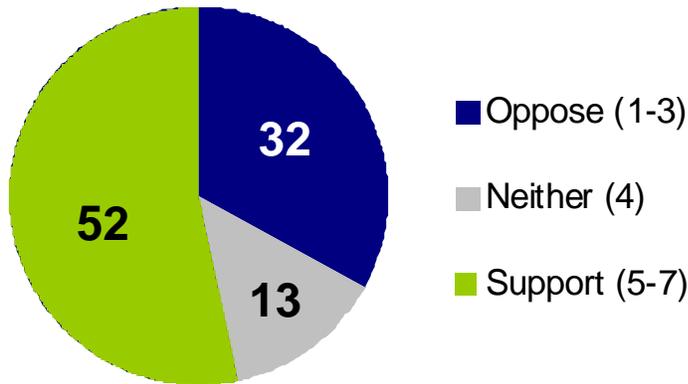
The public, particularly men and the university educated, express strong support for the idea that their elected members should be able to fire an offending leader. The only place where it is not clearly supported is among supporters of Mr. Chong's party, and even there it produces a pretty even split.

The next figure shows fairly broad support for a more radical concept – mandatory voting. Although a little more controversial than the Chong bill, the idea that all citizens must vote is supported by a clear majority, although it is opposed by around one-third. The most attractive feature of this measure, which has been in place in Australia since 1924, is that it solves the problem of low voter turnout. Obviously, one would prefer a situation where the vast majority

turn out voluntarily (as in the case of Denmark for example) but one could argue that the inventory of evils associated with the new permanent campaign of get out (and keep home) the vote has risen to a point where this more drastic measure is necessary. Notably, turnout in Australia is around 90 per cent and no one goes to jail if they offend (it is a fairly minor fine) and the measure enjoys the support of around 80 per cent in polls. This measure doesn't seem to favour any particular party in the long run' parties must consider platforms and campaigns that focus on all voters rather than just narrowcasting to specific segments in the manner noted in Susan Delacourt's recent book⁴.

Support for compulsory voting

Q. A number of countries such as Australia and Brazil have implemented compulsory voting, where citizens are required to vote in elections. Would you oppose or support introducing compulsory voting in Canada?



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Perhaps the most auspicious benefit would be to reset democracy with young voters, who are in large numbers opting out of democracy. There is some evidence that the younger voter opting out is carrying on into later stages of life. It isn't healthy that just as young voters are representing a relatively scarcer portion of our society, their decision to not participate effectively renders their numeric influence over elections to about one-quarter of what it was twenty years ago. It is therefore not surprising that we see an increasing gap between the values and interests expressed by younger Canada and those of older Canada⁵.

While not holding our breath in anticipation of mandatory voting, we note that proper polling can and should represent the voices of those who are not participating in elections – notably the

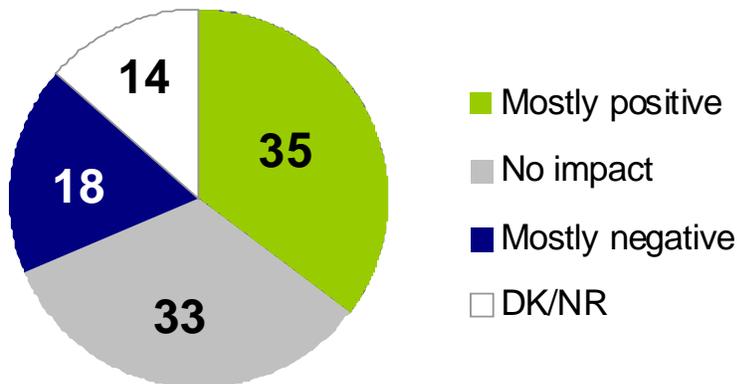
⁴ Delacourt, Susan. *Shopping for Votes: How Politicians Choose Us and We Choose Them*. Madeira Park, British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, 2013. Print.

⁵ Frank Graves. *Canada Evolving: Sources of Stability and Change in Canadian Social Fabric*. Presentation for "Being Canadian Today", State of the Federation 2012, December 1, 2012. Available online at: <http://goo.gl/CTqwP>

young and more vulnerable members of society. This view of polling as a boon to democracy and public debate is by no means universal and, given the rather bruising year that polling has experienced given failure to properly forecast some provincial results (most notably the 2013 British Columbia election⁶), we thought we would ask the public about the value of polling to democracy. Discounting the potential selection bias that those agreeing to be polled may be more favourable to the question we note the results below:

Impact of polling on democracy

Q. Overall, do you believe that polling and survey research have a mostly positive impact, a mostly negative impact, or no impact on the quality of democracy in Canada?



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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point December 12-20, 2013 (n=1,531)

We are comforted to note that only 18 per cent see the impacts of polling as mostly negative whereas 35 per cent see it as mostly positive. While short of a stirring endorsement, this does provide us with confidence that there are more Canadians supportive of our efforts to listen to Canadians than opposed. Not surprisingly, negative attitudes towards polling are most apparent in British Columbia where pollsters collectively miscalculated the election. It is also interesting to note that a clear plurality of young people endorse the impacts of polling on democracy, even though this group is by far the least likely to participate in the democratic process itself.

In conclusion, our democratic health check-up suggests that democracy suffers egregious problems that have been further aggravated over the past year. There are some areas of support for renewal and recovery but it would be foolish to assume that all is well – it clearly isn't.

⁶ See "An Unapologetic Analysis of the BC Polling Debacle". May 29, 2013. Available online at: <http://goo.gl/8kHfCr>


Detailed Tables:

Perceived Health of Democracy						
<i>Q. How would you rate the overall health of democracy at the federal level in Canada?</i>						
	Unhealthy (1-3)	Neither (4)	Healthy (5-7)	DK/NR	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONALLY	59.4%	11.3%	26.5%	2.9%	1531	2.5
REGION						
British Columbia	60.7%	9.8%	26.1%	3.3%	208	6.8
Alberta	53.8%	10.0%	34.0%	2.1%	156	7.9
Saskatchewan	62.9%	3.3%	33.8%	0.0%	27	18.9
Manitoba	63.8%	6.8%	26.2%	3.2%	51	13.7
Ontario	55.5%	13.7%	27.4%	3.3%	624	3.9
Quebec	62.2%	12.1%	23.6%	2.0%	333	5.4
Atlantic Canada	70.8%	6.7%	18.0%	4.5%	124	8.8
GENDER						
Male	60.0%	8.8%	28.8%	2.5%	753	3.6
Female	58.8%	13.7%	24.3%	3.2%	778	3.5
AGE						
<25	49.9%	22.5%	21.3%	6.3%	36	16.3
25-44	61.7%	10.7%	26.3%	1.3%	512	4.3
45-64	59.3%	9.2%	27.7%	3.8%	581	4.1
65+	60.1%	9.7%	28.8%	1.4%	323	5.5
EDUCATION						
High school or less	47.4%	18.8%	28.5%	5.3%	333	5.4
College or CEGEP	59.5%	9.8%	26.6%	4.1%	522	4.3
University or higher	66.5%	7.6%	25.5%	0.4%	658	3.8
Country of Birth						
Canada	60.4%	9.8%	26.7%	3.2%	1323	2.7
Other	52.4%	22.8%	24.8%	0.0%	193	7.1
CURRENT VOTE INTENTION						
Liberal Party	67.6%	14.0%	17.3%	1.1%	516	4.3
Conservative Party	21.8%	11.2%	62.2%	4.8%	378	5.0
NDP	78.6%	8.0%	11.9%	1.5%	316	5.5
Green Party	79.8%	8.4%	11.8%	0.0%	79	11.0
Bloc Quebecois	78.4%	6.6%	13.7%	1.4%	63	12.4



Support for Michael Chong's Support Bill

Q. As you may have heard, Michael Chong, a Member of Parliament, has proposed a bill that would give sitting Members of Parliament the ability to vote out their party leader, among other things. To what extent do you support or oppose the notion that party caucuses should have the power to expel their leader?

	Oppose (1-3)	Neither (4)	Support (5-7)	DK/NR	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONALLY	21.5%	12.9%	61.5%	4.0%	1531	2.5
REGION						
British Columbia	21.7%	12.6%	61.1%	4.6%	208	6.8
Alberta	29.5%	11.8%	55.9%	2.7%	156	7.9
Saskatchewan	19.6%	12.1%	65.5%	2.9%	27	18.9
Manitoba	19.4%	13.3%	62.2%	5.1%	51	13.7
Ontario	23.3%	13.1%	60.5%	3.1%	624	3.9
Quebec	16.3%	12.5%	66.1%	5.1%	333	5.4
Atlantic Canada	18.9%	16.7%	57.9%	6.5%	124	8.8
GENDER						
Male	21.5%	9.8%	66.1%	2.6%	753	3.6
Female	21.6%	15.8%	57.2%	5.4%	778	3.5
AGE						
<25	26.7%	21.5%	51.9%	0.0%	36	16.3
25-44	19.5%	10.1%	65.0%	5.4%	512	4.3
45-64	21.6%	13.7%	60.3%	4.5%	581	4.1
65+	21.6%	9.5%	65.6%	3.3%	323	5.5
EDUCATION						
High school or less	20.9%	19.3%	53.8%	6.0%	333	5.4
College or CEGEP	25.0%	10.3%	59.9%	4.8%	522	4.3
University or higher	18.7%	11.4%	67.6%	2.3%	658	3.8
Country of Birth						
Canada	22.1%	11.6%	62.0%	4.3%	1323	2.7
Other	17.4%	21.2%	59.7%	1.7%	193	7.1
CURRENT VOTE INTENTION						
Liberal Party	20.0%	13.0%	64.6%	2.4%	516	4.3
Conservative Party	41.1%	11.9%	44.1%	3.0%	378	5.0
NDP	14.6%	9.5%	73.8%	2.1%	316	5.5
Green Party	3.8%	10.1%	82.0%	4.2%	79	11.0
Bloc Quebecois	8.9%	17.5%	66.5%	7.2%	63	12.4



Support for Compulsory Voting

Q. A number of countries such as Australia and Brazil have implemented compulsory voting, where citizens are required to vote in elections. Would you oppose or support introducing compulsory voting in Canada?

	Oppose (1-3)	Neither (4)	Support (5-7)	DK/NR	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONALLY	32.0%	13.4%	51.8%	2.9%	1531	2.5
REGION						
British Columbia	35.6%	11.9%	50.5%	2.0%	208	6.8
Alberta	33.5%	13.2%	52.3%	1.1%	156	7.9
Saskatchewan	20.2%	16.2%	55.3%	8.2%	27	18.9
Manitoba	36.7%	11.1%	50.4%	1.8%	51	13.7
Ontario	31.0%	13.6%	52.4%	3.0%	624	3.9
Quebec	30.9%	11.5%	54.6%	3.0%	333	5.4
Atlantic Canada	33.0%	21.3%	41.0%	4.7%	124	8.8
GENDER						
Male	32.4%	11.9%	53.6%	2.1%	753	3.6
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AGE						
<25	19.2%	19.9%	60.9%	0.0%	36	16.3
25-44	34.1%	12.6%	50.9%	2.4%	512	4.3
45-64	35.4%	11.5%	48.8%	4.3%	581	4.1
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EDUCATION						
High school or less	25.9%	16.7%	53.6%	3.9%	333	5.4
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NDP	29.8%	8.6%	59.6%	2.0%	316	5.5
Green Party	30.8%	12.5%	53.9%	2.9%	79	11.0
Bloc Quebecois	28.0%	21.5%	46.5%	4.0%	63	12.4



Impact of Polling on Democracy

Q. Overall, do you believe that polling and survey research have a mostly positive impact, a mostly negative impact, or no impact on the quality of democracy in Canada?

	Mostly negative	No impact	Mostly positive	DK/NR	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONALLY	17.9%	33.4%	35.2%	13.5%	1531	2.5
REGION						
British Columbia	23.2%	37.4%	26.4%	13.0%	208	6.8
Alberta	15.6%	35.1%	30.6%	18.7%	156	7.9
Saskatchewan	20.0%	27.3%	33.9%	18.7%	27	18.9
Manitoba	16.3%	33.6%	35.7%	14.5%	51	13.7
Ontario	18.1%	33.8%	36.0%	12.1%	624	3.9
Quebec	17.2%	31.7%	38.5%	12.6%	333	5.4
Atlantic Canada	11.1%	30.0%	44.3%	14.7%	124	8.8
GENDER						
Male	21.0%	32.6%	36.4%	10.0%	753	3.6
Female	15.0%	34.1%	34.1%	16.8%	778	3.5
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Bloc Quebecois	17.7%	36.1%	34.2%	12.0%	63	12.4



Methodology

This study was conducted using EKOS' unique, hybrid online/telephone research panel, *Prob/t*. Our panel offers exhaustive coverage of the Canadian population (i.e., Internet, phone, cell phone), random recruitment (in other words, participants are recruited randomly, they do not opt themselves into our panel), and equal probability sampling. All respondents to our panel are recruited by telephone using random digit dialling and are confirmed by live interviewers. Unlike opt-in online panels, *Prob/t* supports margin of error estimates. We believe this to be the only probability-based online panel in Canada.

The field dates for this survey are December 12-20, 2013. In total, 1,531 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. Of these cases, 1,427 were collected online, while 104 were collected by computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI). 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 sample's composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.