

# Rethinking

Government

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

## **Decision-Maker Executive Summary**

January 2007



EKOS  
Research Associates Inc.

Copyright 2007©

EKOS Research Associates Inc.

No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from EKOS Research Associates Inc.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This component of Rethinking Government compares the views of the broader Canadian public with those of Canadian decision-makers across a range of issues (priorities and satisfaction with government, trust and ethics, health care). Similarities and differences between these two groups are summarized below (and in more detail in later sections of this report).

## ***Priorities and Satisfaction with Government***

Both decision-makers and the general public were asked to rate the priority of a number of policy areas for the federal government. Results reveal that while health care is cited as the highest priority area by both decision-makers and the public, decision-makers are more likely than the public to place a high priority on the environment, but are less likely than Canadians as a whole to assign high priority to education. Results are largely similar between the two groups in terms of the priority assigned to managing the economy, skills development, and the level of taxation. The most significant difference between the public and decision-makers is in the area of unemployment, with fewer than half of decision-makers seeing this as a high priority area, compared to seven in ten general public respondents.

Further probing views on government priorities, decision-makers and the general public were asked how they would prefer to use any future federal budgetary surpluses (to reduce debt, lower taxes, or invest in social programs). Survey results reveal that the general public places a higher priority on investment in social programs than do decision-makers, while decision-makers assign much higher priority to using any surplus to reduce debt. Public and elite preferences are identical in terms of using any budgetary surplus to lower taxes.

Results also reveal that a majority of decision-makers (56 per cent) and general public respondents (54 per cent) say they would favour a smaller government with lower taxes and fewer services over a larger government with higher taxes and more services (although the general public is more likely than Canadian decision-makers to express a preference for larger government – 38 per cent versus 27 per cent, respectively).

Both decision-makers and the public at large were also asked about the federal government's taxation trends over the past several years. Survey results reveal that both decision-makers and members of the general public tend to believe the federal government has been leaving taxes about the same in the last couple of years, although decision-makers are notably less likely to feel this way (42 per cent, compared to 56 per cent of the public). Decision-makers are also somewhat less likely to feel the federal government has been increasing taxes in the last couple of years. Conversely, decision-makers are significantly more likely than the general public to feel the federal government has been reducing taxes in recent years (35 per cent versus 13 per cent, respectively).

Turning to satisfaction with federal government performance, results reveal that decision-makers are polarized in their views of federal government performance: four in ten (39 per cent) rate the federal government's overall performance as good, and a virtually identical proportion (40 per cent) say it is poor. The Canadian public is somewhat less polarized, and less positive, in their appraisal of federal government performance, with fewer than three in ten (31 per cent) assigning a positive rating to the federal government's performance, and almost four in ten (38 per cent) offering a negative rating.

## ***Trust and Ethics***

In the aftermath of the sponsorship program and the ensuing Gomery Commission, the new Government of Canada introduced the Federal Accountability Act to help improve Canadians' trust in the federal government. Despite the passing of this legislation into law, findings suggest that both decision-makers and the public continue to hold fairly negative views about trust and ethics in government.

The majority of both decision-makers (60 per cent) and the general public (65 per cent) agree that those elected to Parliament soon lose touch with people, and fewer than one in four from either group disagree with this idea. Both decision-makers and general public respondents also agree the ethical standards of the federal government have slipped badly in the past decade, although decision-makers are somewhat less likely to feel this way (50 per cent, compared to 56 per cent of the general public).

## ***Health Care***

This edition of Rethinking Government also examined both decision-maker and public support for individuals paying extra to get quicker access to health care services. Results reveal that decision-makers are more supportive of allowing individuals to pay extra to expedite access to health care. The plurality of decision-makers (45 per cent) agree that individuals should be allowed to pay extra to get quicker access to health care services, while most general public respondents (50 per cent) *disagree* with this idea.

Over the past several years the federal government has undertaken a variety of initiatives, most recently the proposed Patient Wait Times Guarantee, to improve the health care system. Despite these measures, Rethinking Government results suggest that both decision-makers and the public at large express little confidence in the federal government's ability to improve the health care system (and decision-makers hold particularly negative views). Fully two-thirds of decision-makers (64 per cent) and almost half of general public respondents (48 per cent) disagree that the federal government will be able to make meaningful improvements to the health care system in the next two years. Only one in five decision-makers (20 per cent) and one in three general public respondents (31 per cent) feel the federal government will be able to improve the health care system in the next two years.



