

# Shifting Public Outlook: *Rethinking Social Canada*

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*Presentation to the 2016 Queen's International Institute on  
Social Policy*

**August 24, 2016**





- 1) End of Progress?**
- 2) Closing of the Canadian and Western mind?**
- 3) Values**
- 4) Role of Government and Public Institutions**
- 5) Conclusions**

# End of Progress? (i)

- » In 2005, we first noted that progress was not unfolding as it had in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - Since then, this problem has gotten worse, not better



- » Economy has morphed and middle class bargain broken
- » Economic outlook is very bleak, darker for the future

## End of Progress? (ii)

- » Younger generations are much more likely to be falling backward and see an even steeper decline in future
- » Downward intergenerational mobility has trebled from seniors to under 45
- » The dominant priority for the public is to create a longer term blueprint to restore middle class progress

# A Troubling Syllogism?

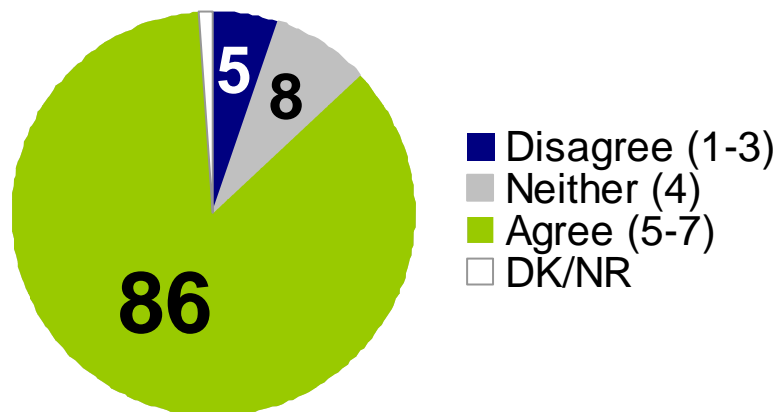
**Proposition 1:** **IF** a healthy society and a strong economy require a growing, optimistic middle class

**Proposition 2:** **AND IF** the middle class is *neither* growing nor optimistic

**Implication:** **THEN** societal health and economic progress will be in peril if these negative conditions persist

Q. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:

**“A growing and optimistic middle class is an essential component of societal progress”**



Q. Overall, which of the following choices do you believe best describes Canada's middle class?



**BASE (left):** December 7-10, 2015 (n=1,811), MOE +/- 2.3%, 19 times out of 20

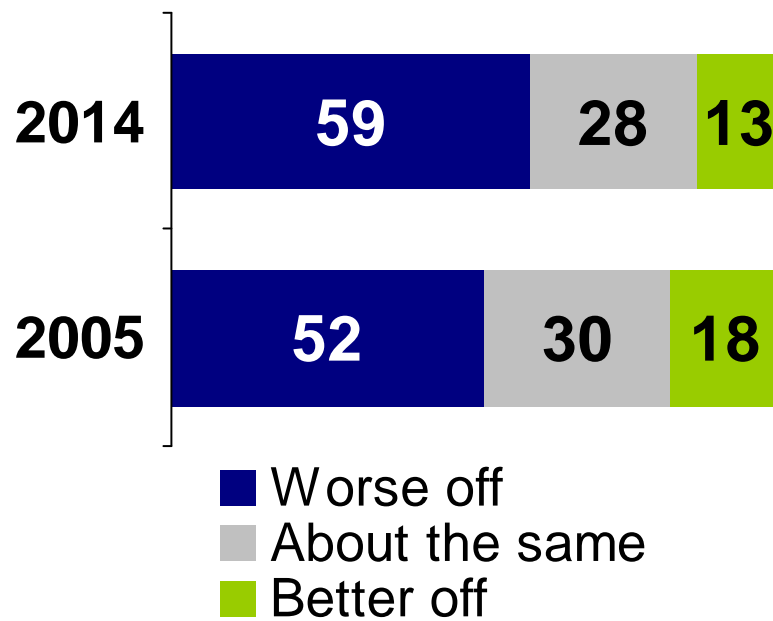
**BASE (right):** Canadians; July 16-23, 2014 (n=2,620), MOE +/- 1.9%, 19 times out of 20

# Generational Outlook & Social Class

- » Fears are highest when turned to the future
- » The grey outlook on the present turns almost black as the public ponder the fate of future generations
- » It appears that we have at least temporarily reached the end of progress, the defining achievement of liberal capitalism

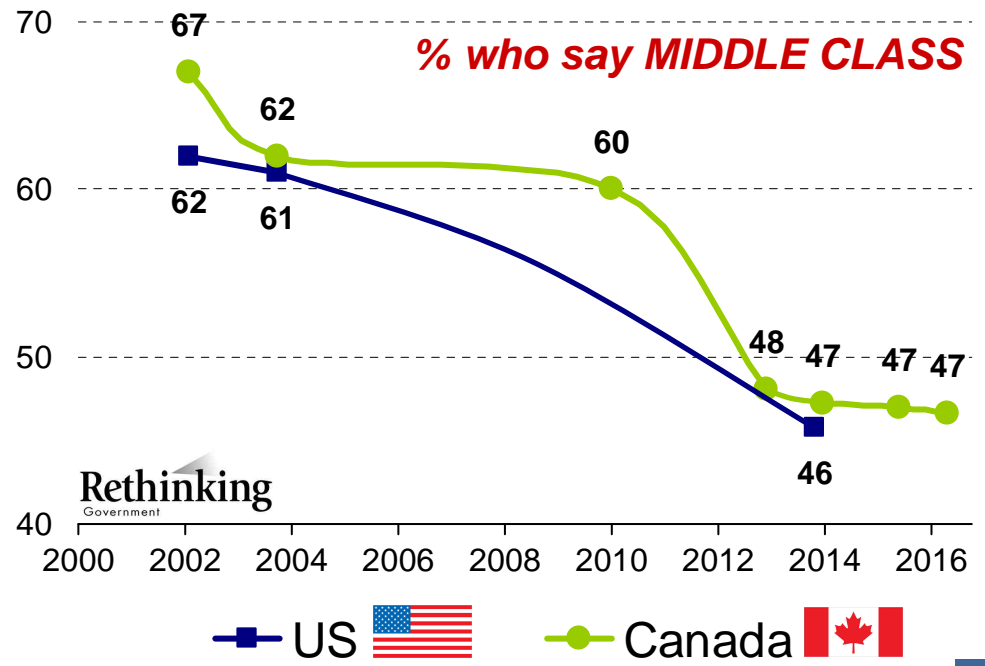
## Generational Outlook

“Thinking about your overall quality of life do you think the next generation will be better off, worse off, or about the same as you are 25 years from now?”



## Self-Rated Social Class

“Would you describe you and your household as poor, working class, middle class, or upper class?”



**BASE (left):** Canadians; September 21-25, 2014 (n=774), MOE +/- 3.5%, 19 times out of 20

**BASE (right):** Canadians; April 14-15, 2016, n=611, MOE +/- 4.0%, 19 times out of 20

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# Why Has Middle Class Progress Stalled?

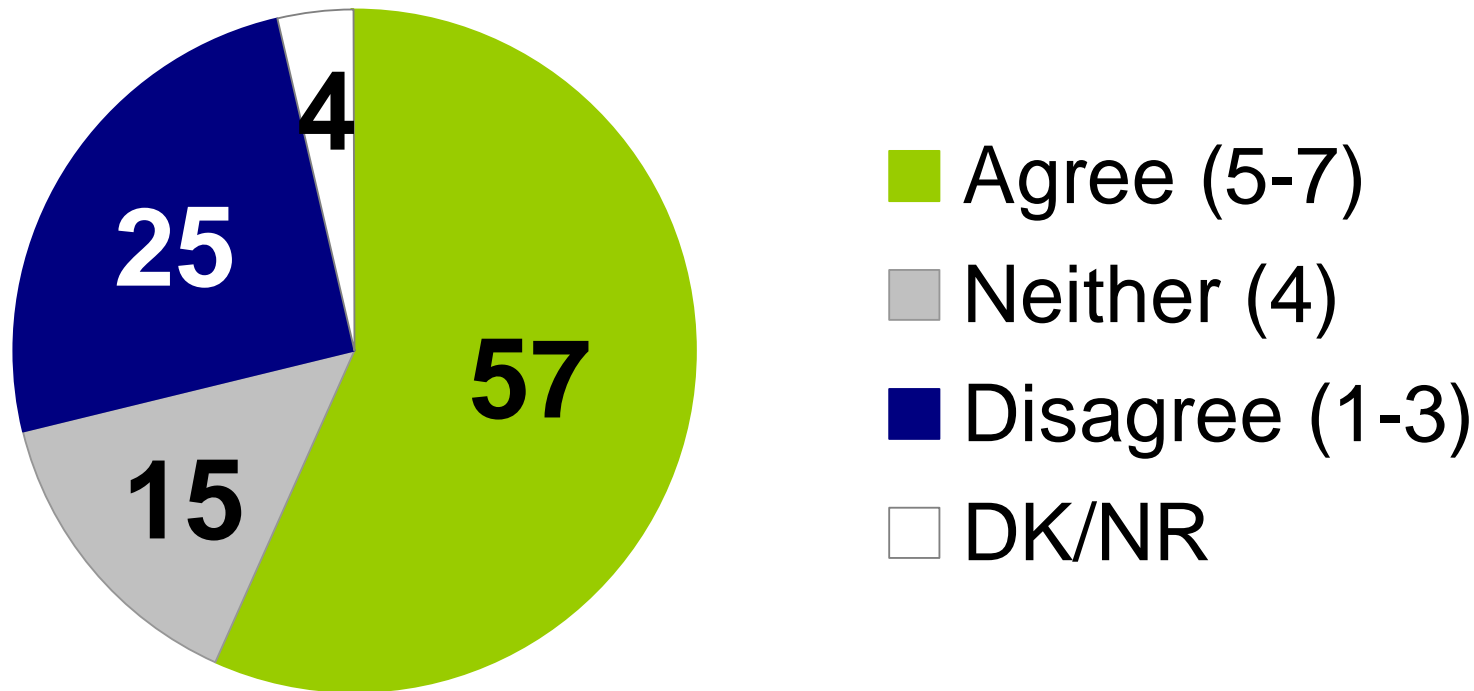
- » Incentive systems are broken; rising inequality
- » Public sphere and taxation in decline
- » The corrosive economic impacts of the post-9/11 security ethic
  - Closing of the Canadian (Western) mind?



# Consequences of Inequality

**Q.** Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

*“If the current patterns of stagnation among all except those at the very top continue, I would not be surprised to see the emergence of violent class conflicts”*







- 1) End of Progress?
- 2) Closing of the Canadian and Western mind?
- 3) Values
- 4) Role of Government and Public Institutions
- 5) Conclusions

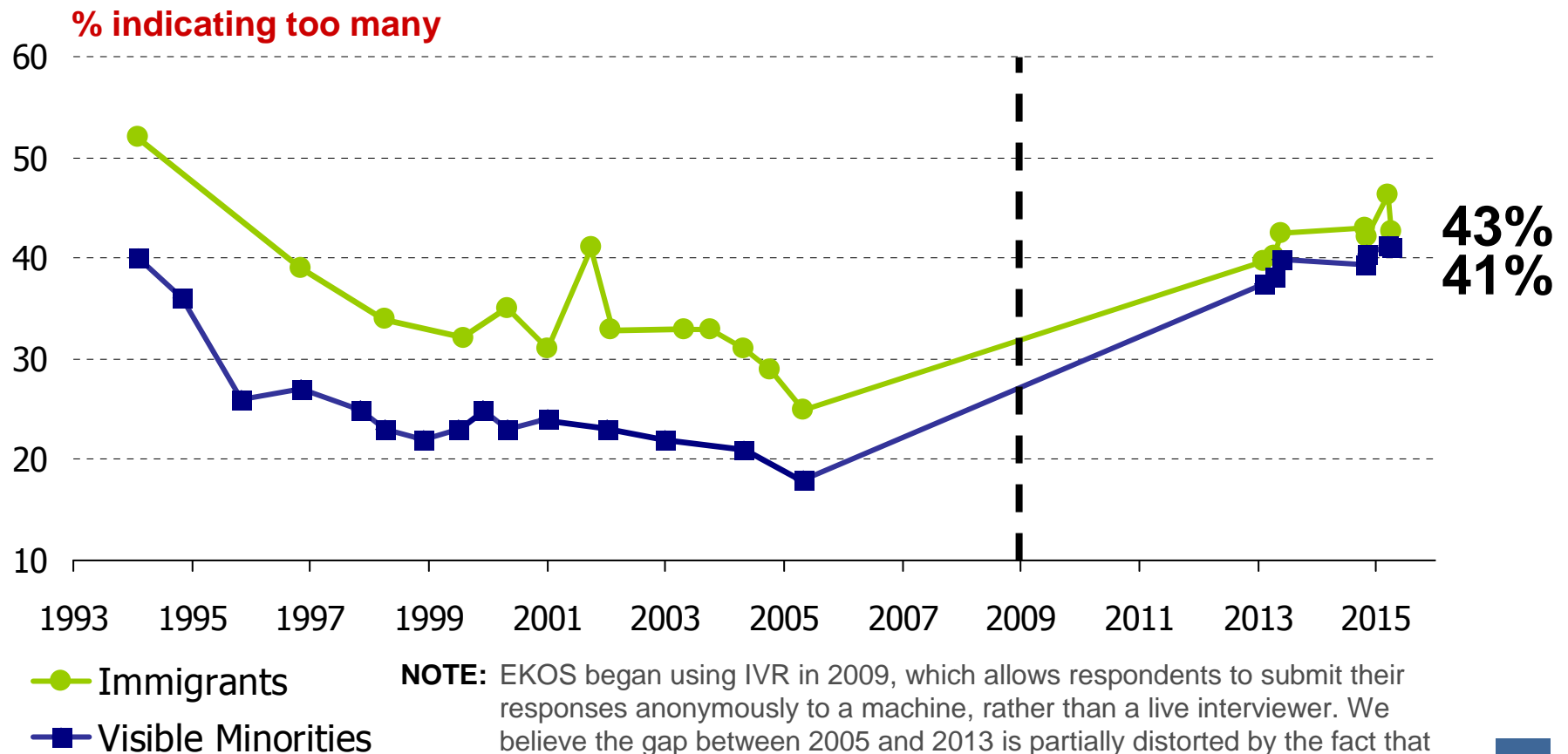
# Closing of the Canadian mind?

- » At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we saw unbridled enthusiasm for trade and globalization
- » Since then, however, a variety of issues has led to more guarded views on globalization and trade:
  - Economic stagnation and anxiety about the future
  - Geopolitical tensions and security concerns
  - Aging
- » Hardening attitudes to immigration and the presence of visible minorities support the thesis that we are closing – not opening – as a society

# Attitudes to Immigration/Minorities

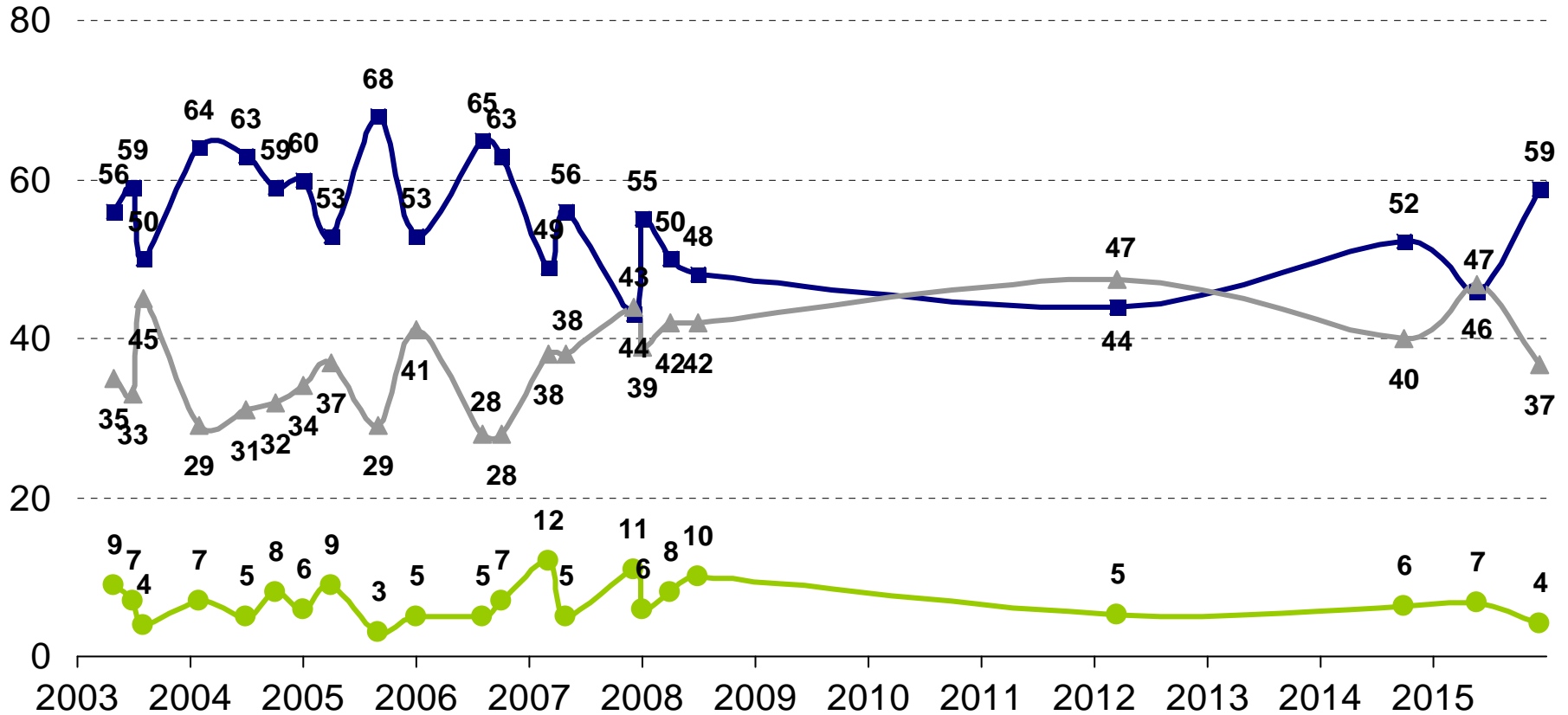
Q. In your opinion do you feel that there are too few, too many or about the right number of immigrants coming to Canada?

Q. Forgetting about the overall number of immigrants coming to Canada, OF THOSE WHO COME would you say there are too few, too many or the right amount who are MEMBERS OF VISIBLE MINORITIES?



# Perceived Danger in the World

Q. From your own point of view, do you feel that, overall, the world is safer, more dangerous, or about the same as it was five years ago?



■ More dangerous    
 ▲ About the same    
 ● Safer



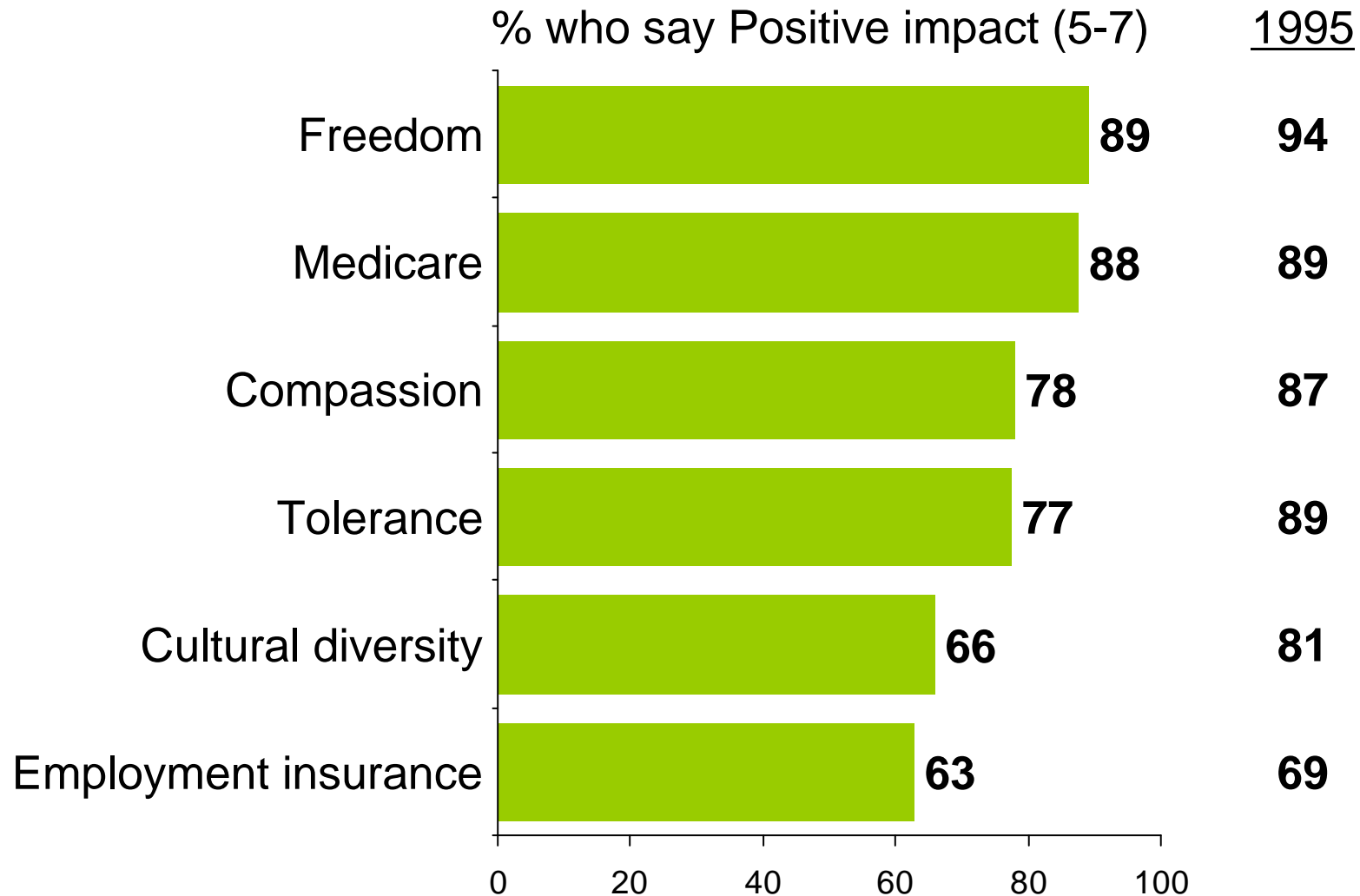
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# Why Values?

- » Ultimate yardsticks of societal preference; normative indicators of right/wrong, good/bad
  - Glacial, not mercurial
- » No monolithic consensus possible in increasingly pluralistic society
- » Long-term trends showing some profound declines in traditional values (traditional family values, respect for authority, minimal government, etc.)
- » Identification with country increasingly salient
  - This notion of identity and belonging is also linked back to an expectation that the country will reflect a sense of moral community

# Symbols and Values

**Q.** How strongly do you think each of the following events, objects and values detract or contribute to your sense of Canadian identity?

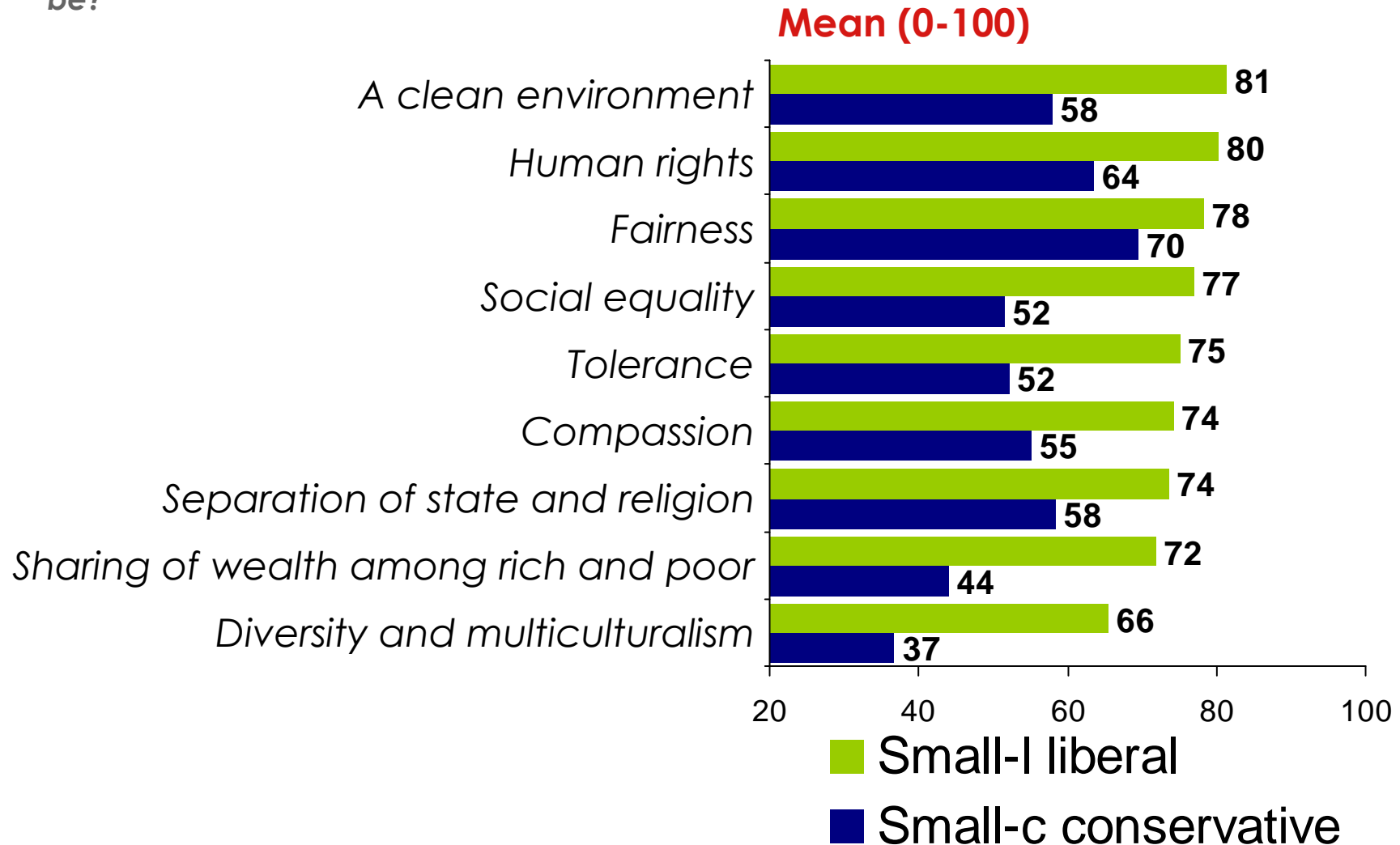


**BASE:** Canadians; January 11-18, 2016 (n=2,312), MOE +/- 2.0%, 19 times out of 20

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# 'Progressive' Values

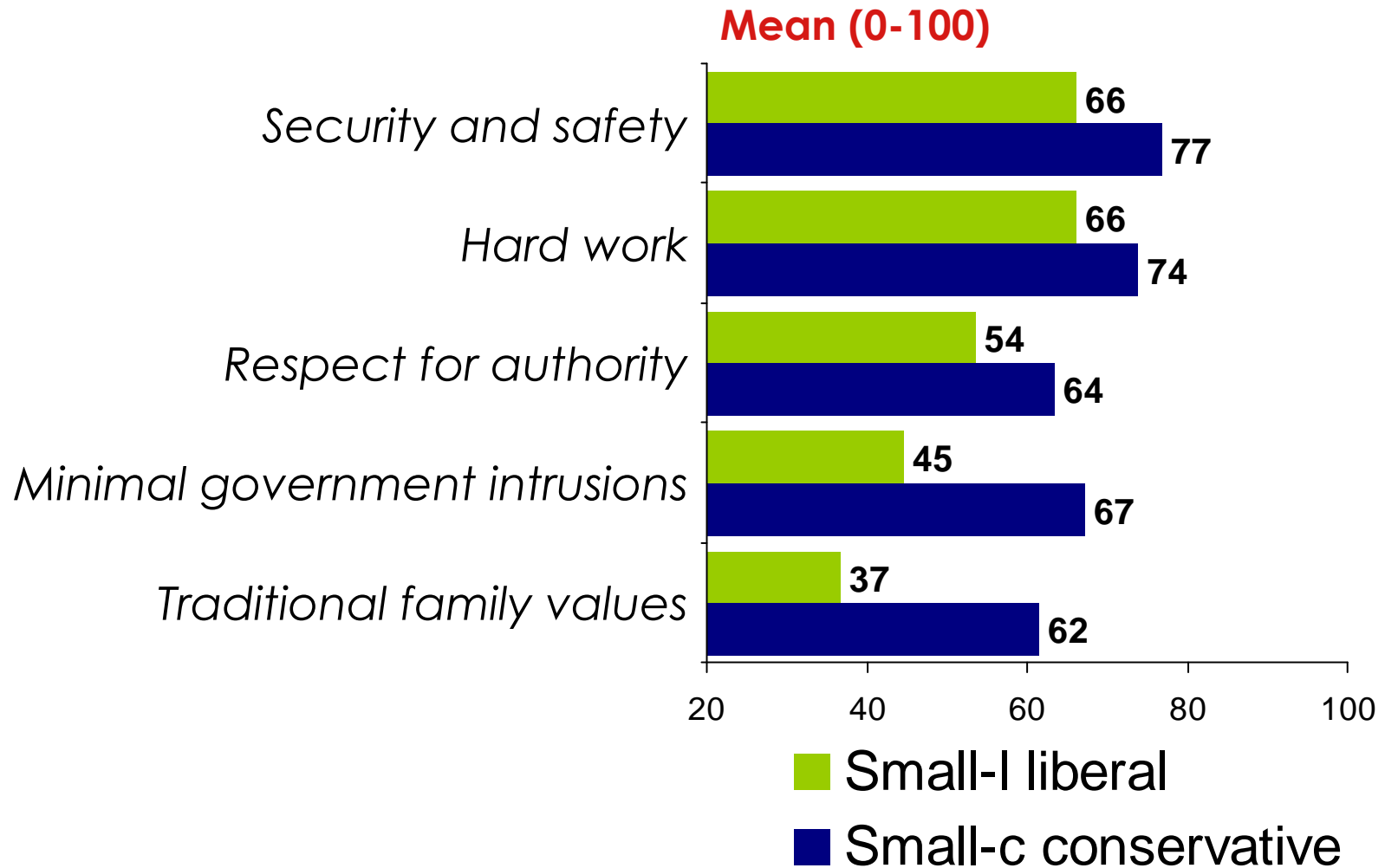
**Q.** *If you were to direct the federal government as to which goals or values should be most important in shaping its direction, how important would you say each of the following goals or values should be?*





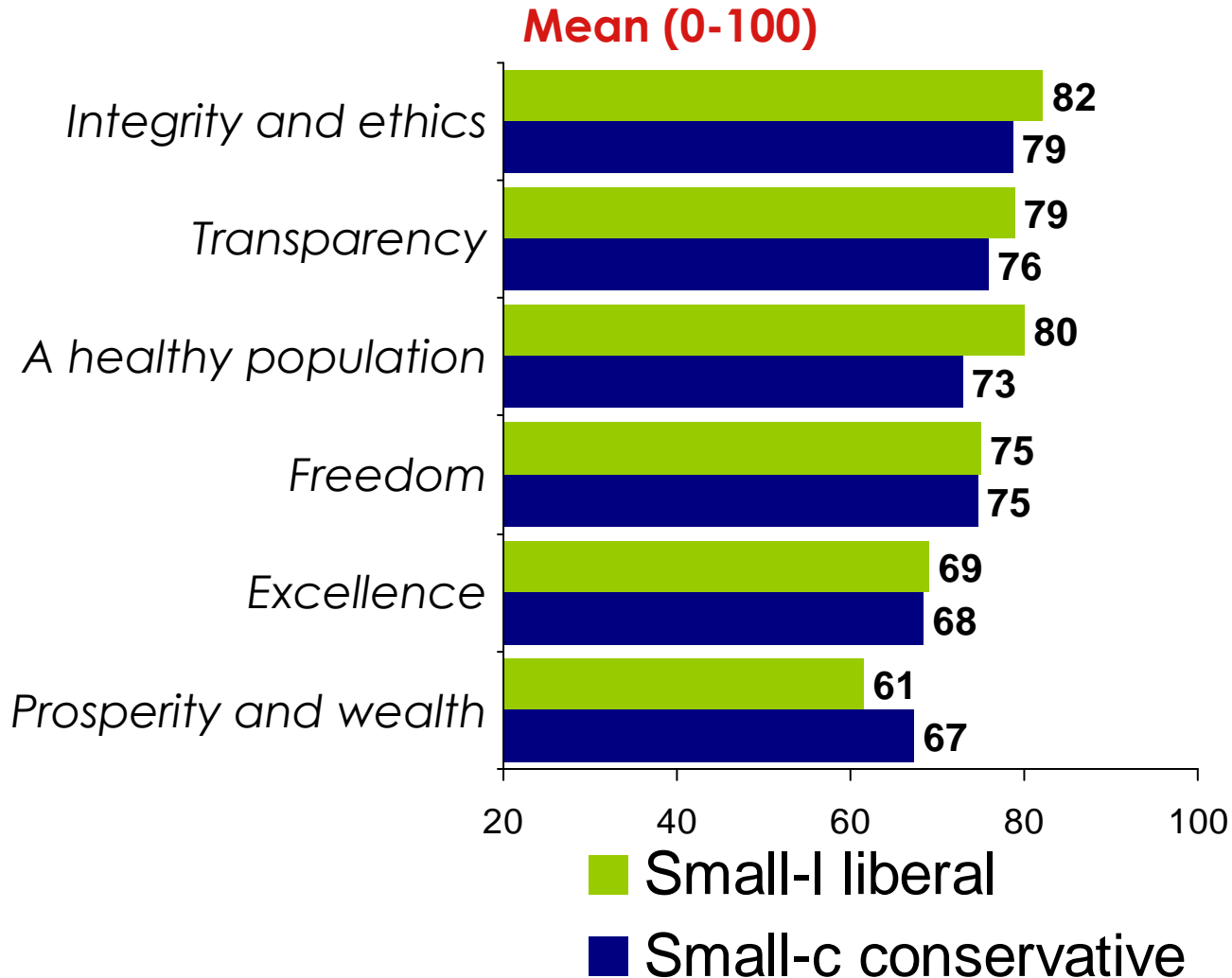
# 'Traditional' Values

**Q.** *If you were to direct the federal government as to which goals or values should be most important in shaping its direction, how important would you say each of the following goals or values should be?*



# 'Universal Values'

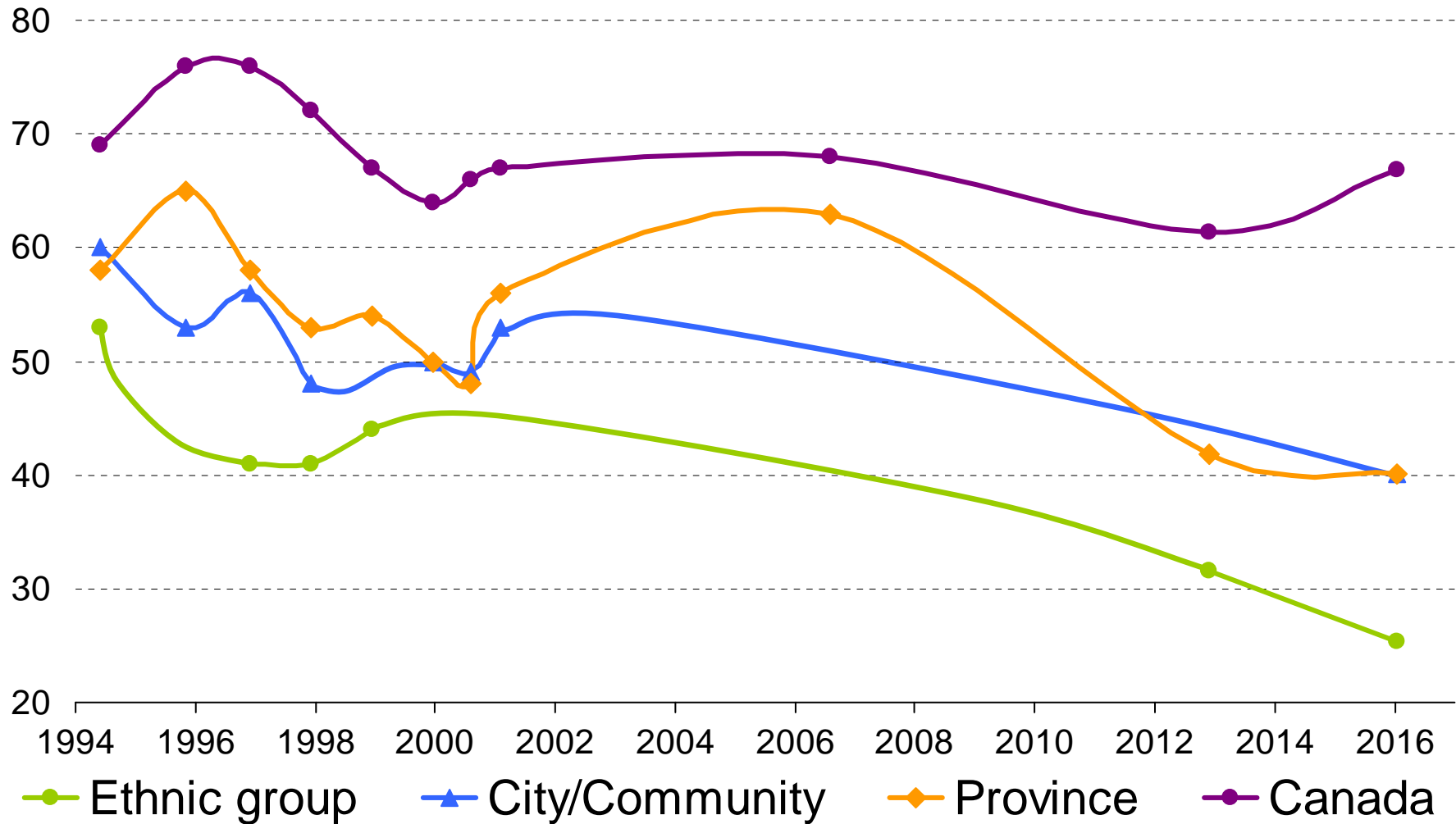
**Q.** *If you were to direct the federal government as to which goals or values should be most important in shaping its direction, how important would you say each of the following goals or values should be?*



# Tracking Sense of Belonging

Q. How strong is your own personal sense of belonging to...

**% saying strong (6-7)**

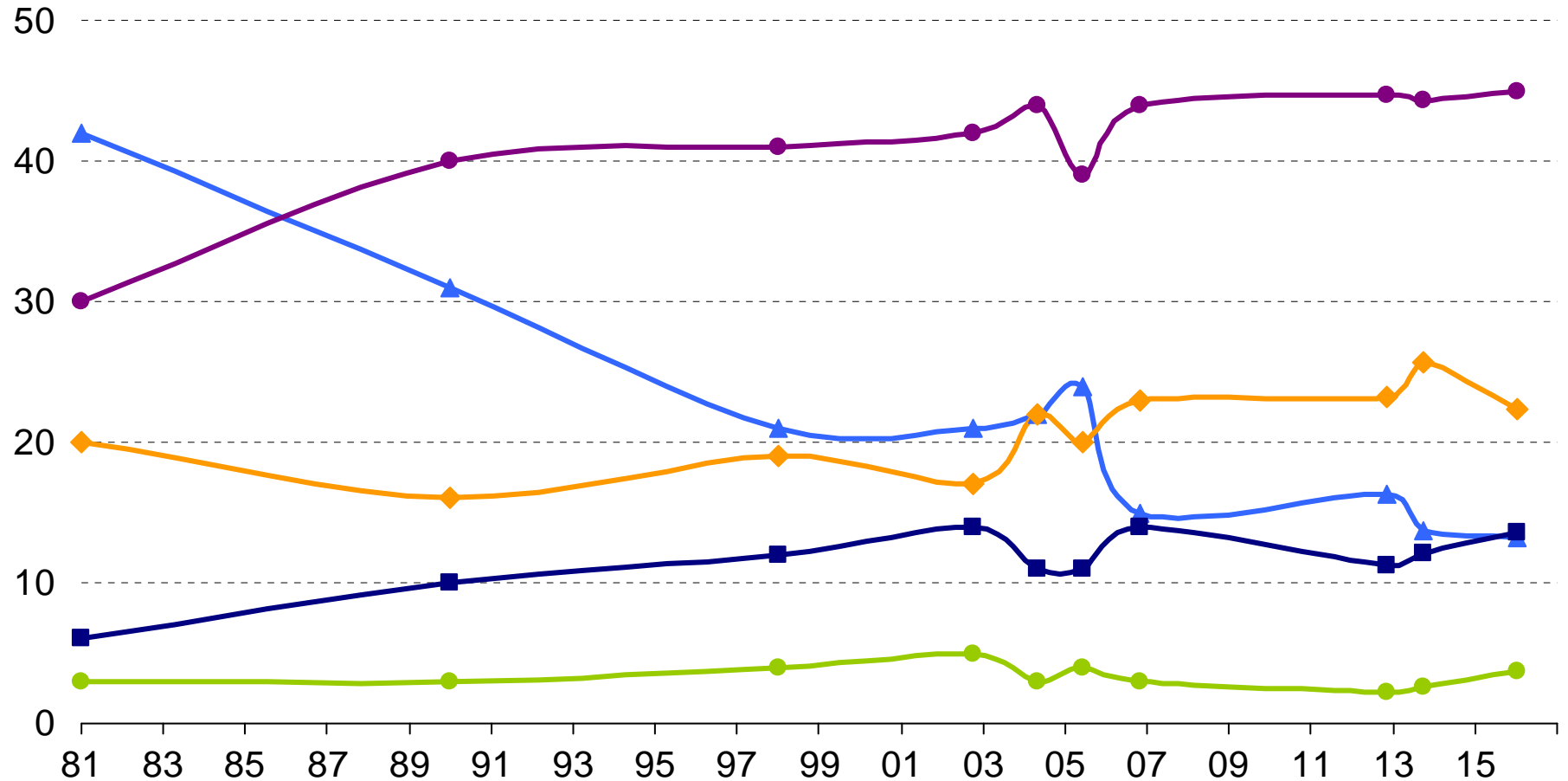


BASE: Canadians; January 11-18, 2016 (n=2,312), MOE +/- 2.0%, 19 times out of 20

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# Tracking Sense of Personal Belonging

Q. To which of these groups would you say you belong to first and foremost?



● North America 
 ▲ Town 
 ■ The world 
 ◆ Province 
 ● Country 
 20

BASE: Canadians; January 11-18, 2016, n=2,598, MOE +/- 1.9%, 19 times out of 20

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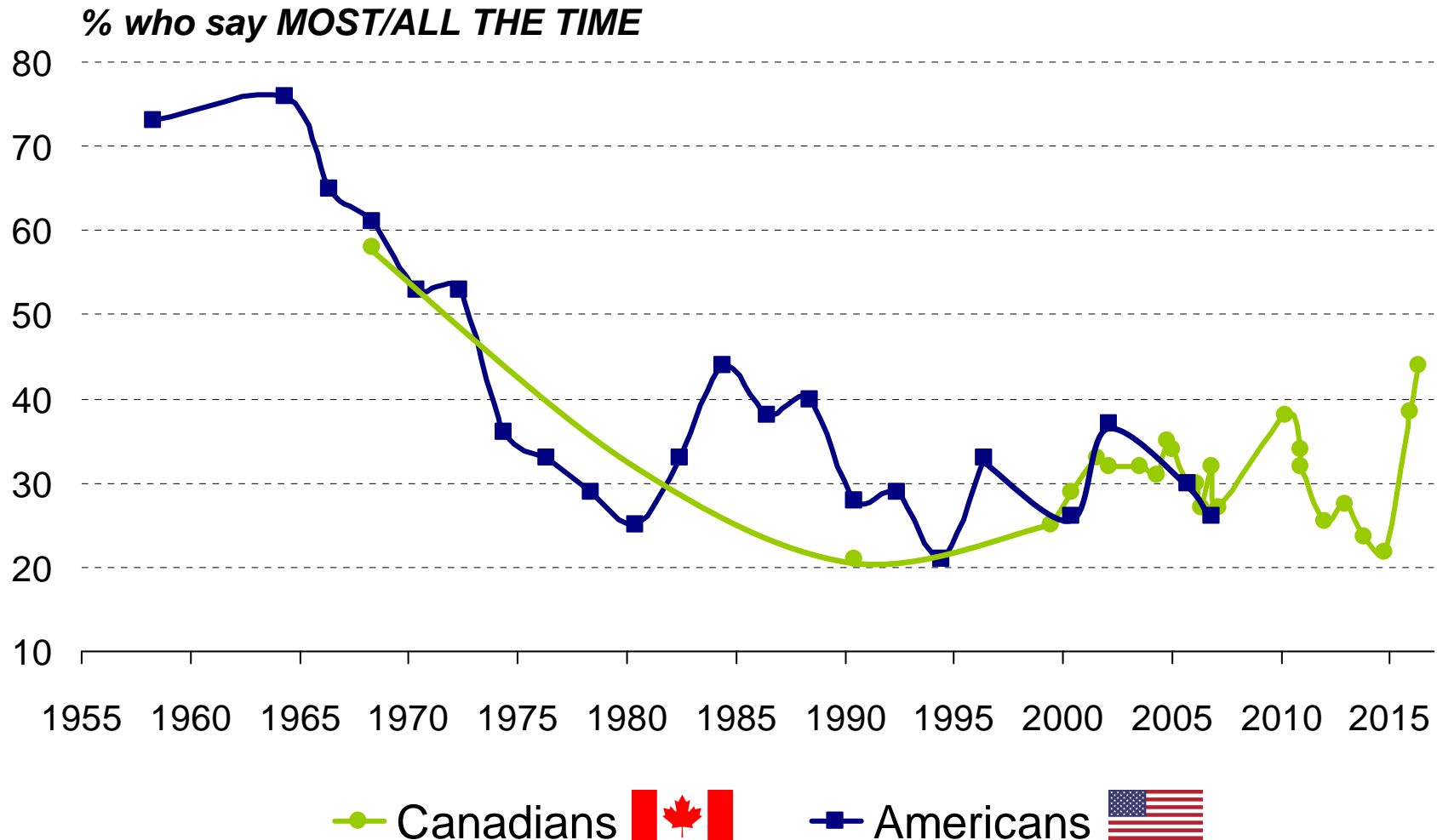
- 1) End of Progress?
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# Role of Government & Public Institutions

- » Governments and taxation in decline as economy stagnates and inequality accelerates
- » Legitimacy crisis/Trust deficit?
- » Declining support for trickle-down economics and neo-liberal paradigm
- » Public onside with activist government that will renew public sphere and create shared economic progress
- » Bold is back?
  - New government scoring the highest marks on trust in government that we've seen in 20 years
  - Consonance between preferences and delivery

# Tracking Trust in Government

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



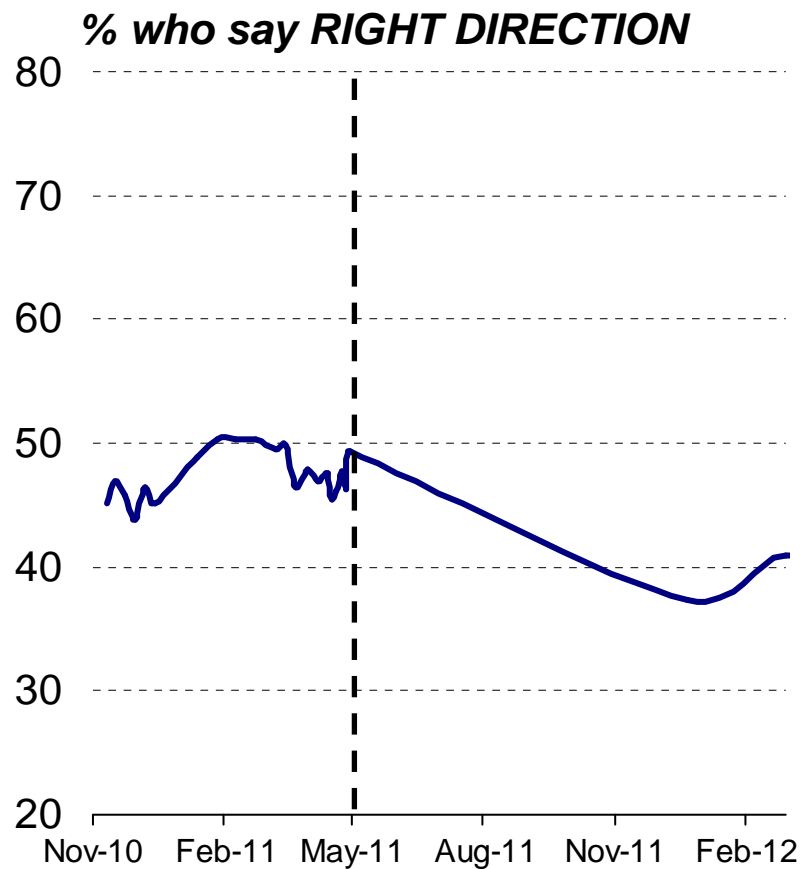
BASE: Canadians; April 14-15, 2016, n=1,176, MOE +/- 2.9%, 19 times out of 20

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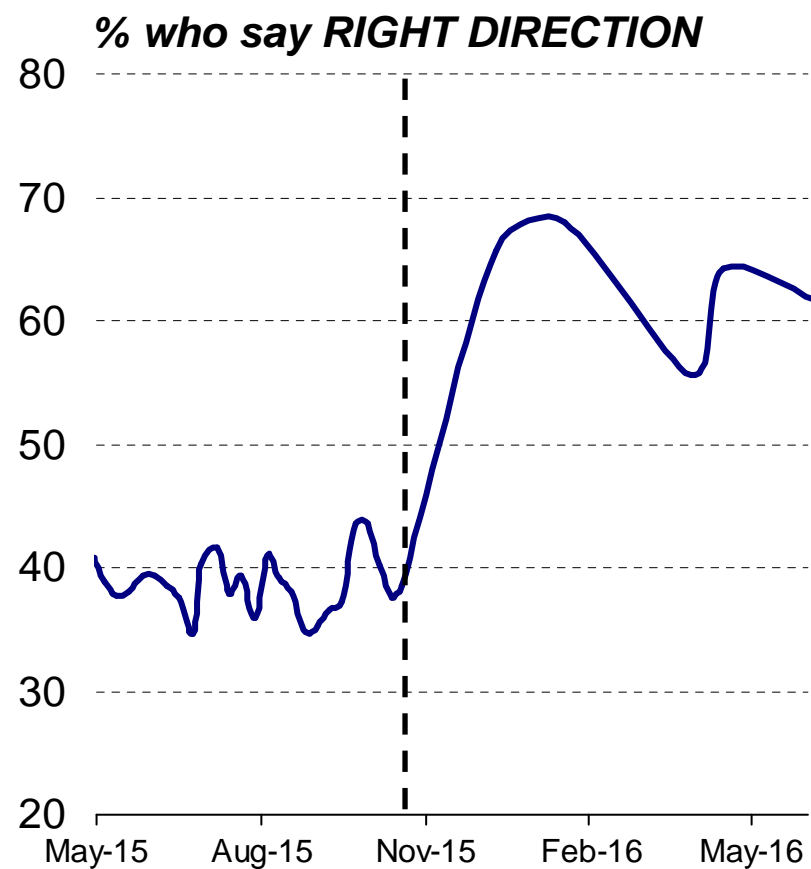
# Post-Election Responses: 2011 versus 2015

**Q.** All things considered, would you say the Government of Canada is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?

## 2011 Election



## 2015 Election

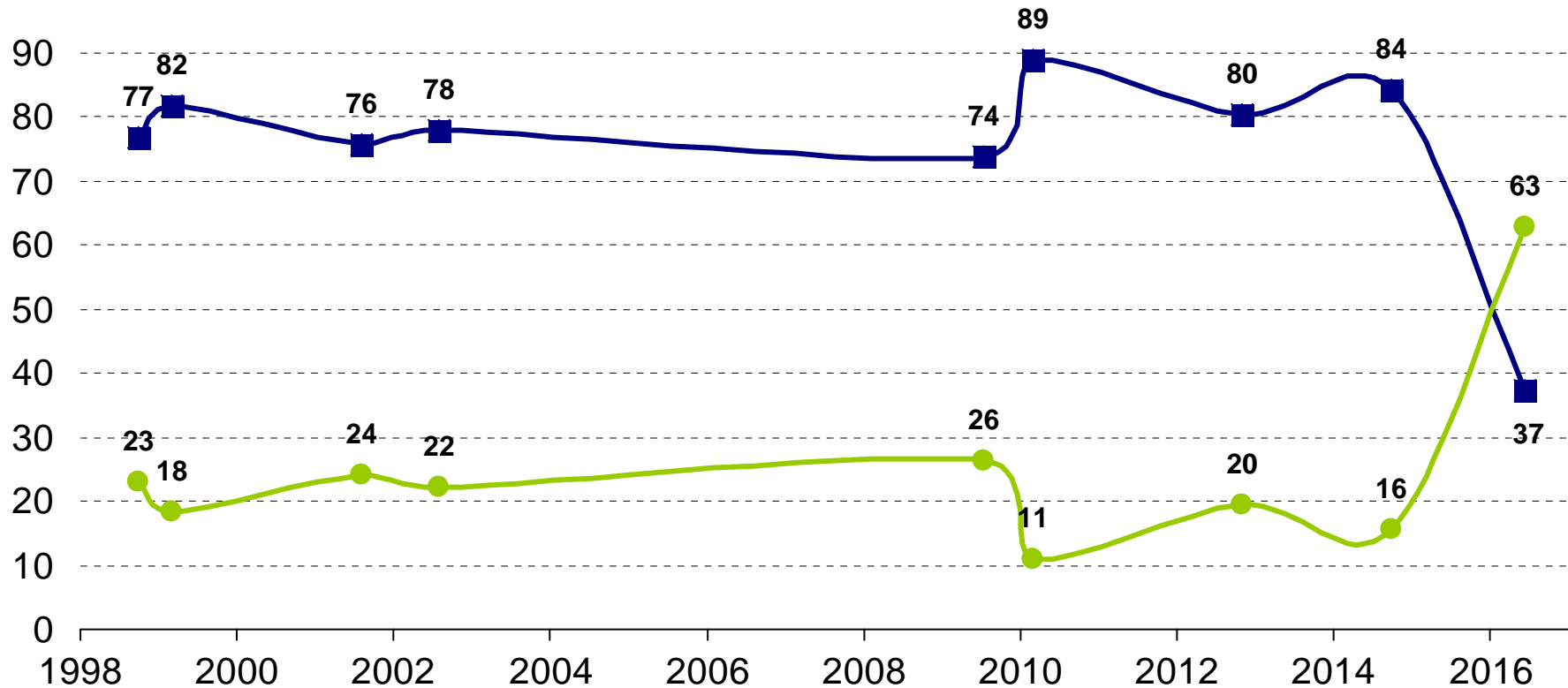


*\*Figures adjusted to exclude those who skipped the question.*



# Perceived Government Vision

Q. Which of the following BEST describes the way the Government of Canada is currently operating?



37

63

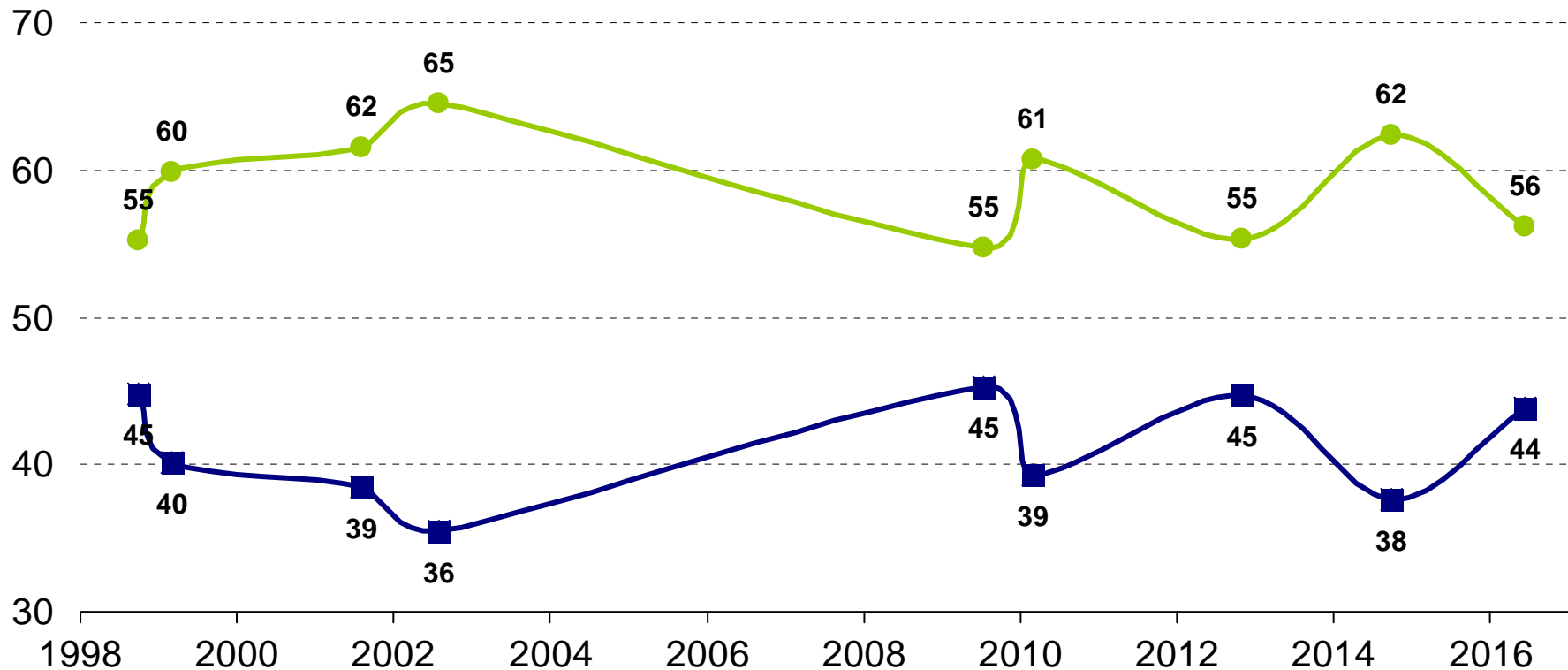
■ Careful, steady-as-she-goes approach

● Bold new vision

Note: Figures adjusted to exclude those who skipped the question.

# Preferred Government Vision

Q. And which way would you PREFER the Government of Canada to operate?



■ Careful, steady-as-she-goes approach

● Bold new vision

Note: Figures adjusted to exclude those who skipped the question.

# Perceived need for new blueprint

**Q.** Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
*Canada needs a clearer plan or blueprint to restore a growing and optimistic middle class*

## December 2015



**BASE:** Canadians; December 7-10, 2015 (n=1,811), MOE +/- 2.3%, 19 times out of 20

## January 2014

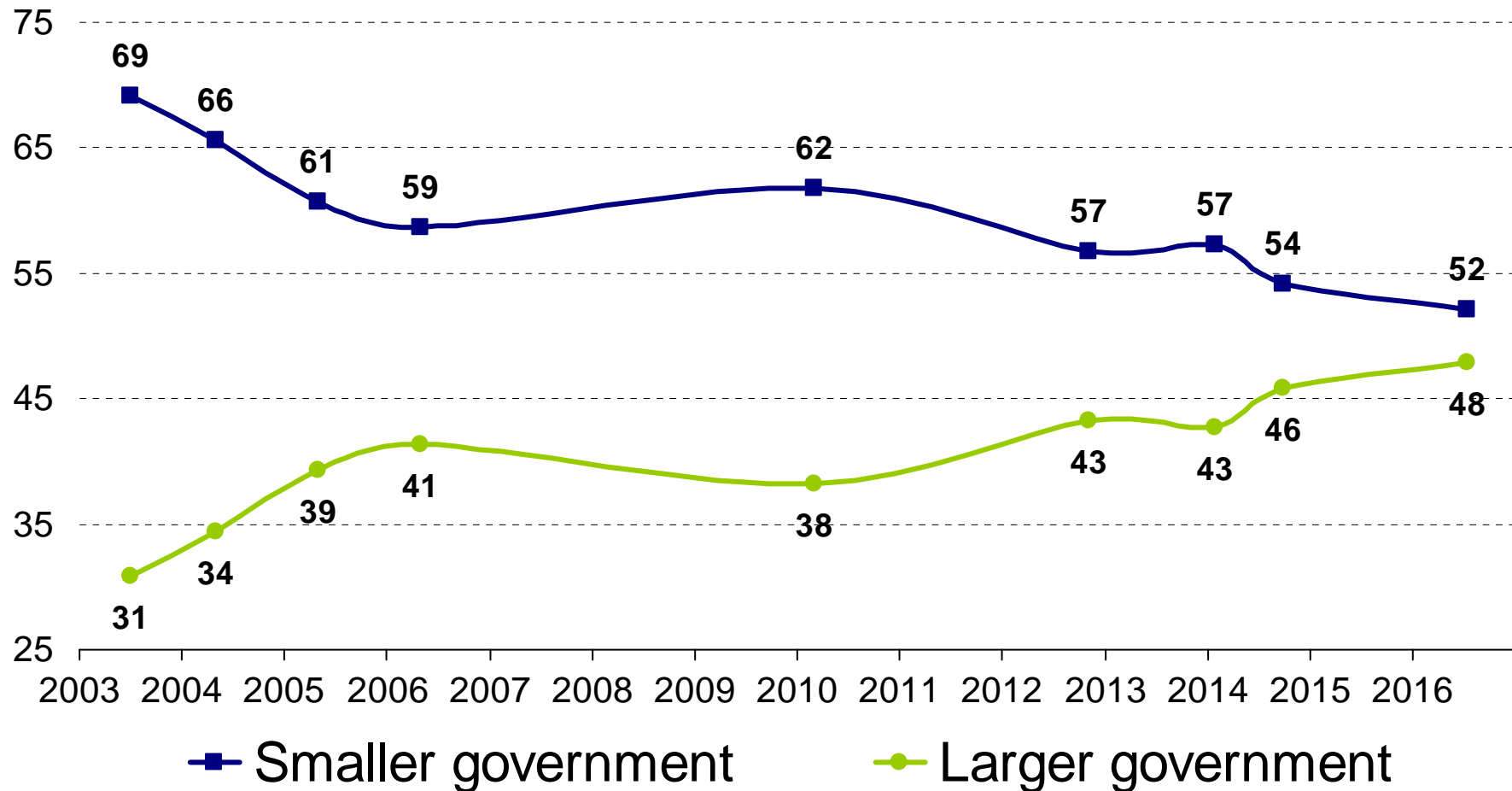


**BASE:** Canadians; January 22-27, 2014 (n=1,501), MOE +/- 2.5%, 19 times out of 20

DK/NR     Disagree (1-3)     Neither (4)     Agree (5-7)

# Preferred Size of Government

**Q.** Generally speaking, which of the following would you say that you favour: 1) a larger government with higher taxes and more services; or 2) a smaller government with lower taxes and fewer services?



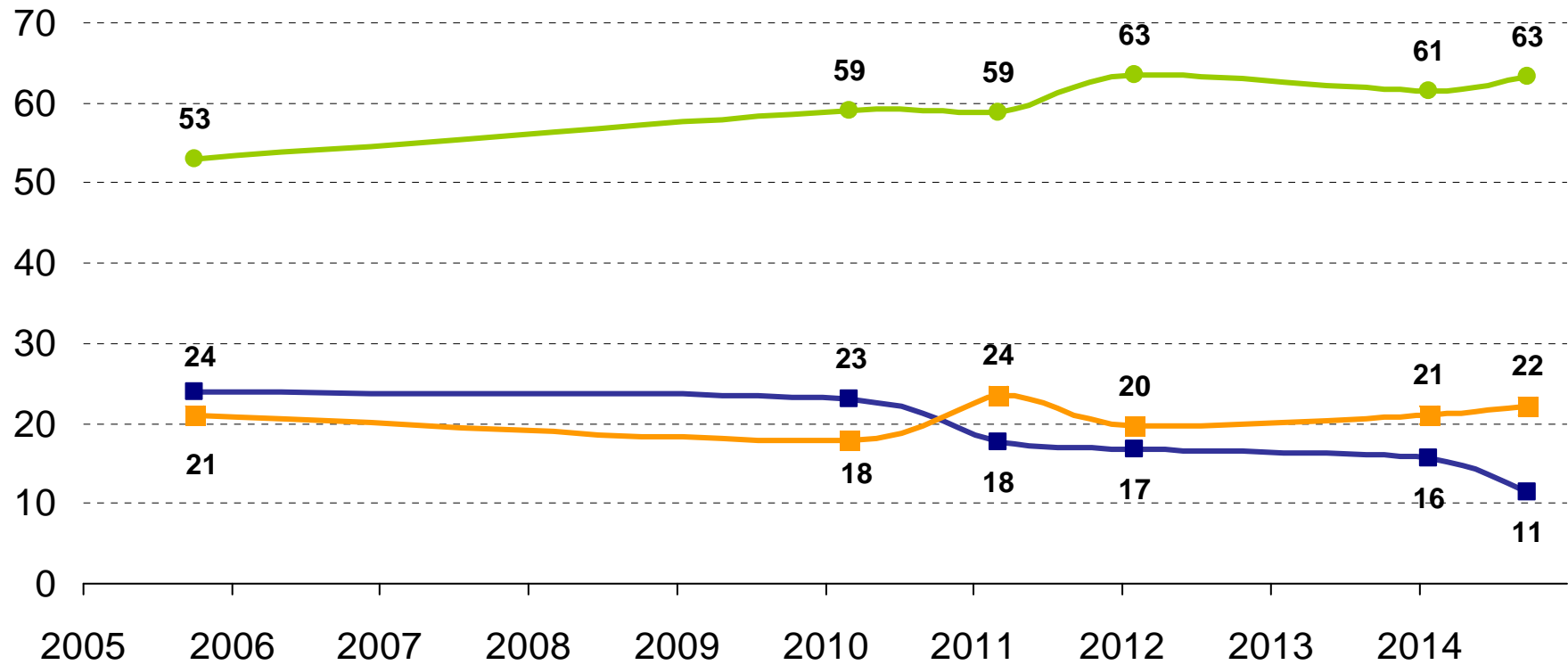
Note: Figures adjusted to exclude those who skipped the question.

**BASE:** Canadians; July 8-14, 2016, n=1,003, MOE +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20

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# Fiscal vs. Investment Priorities

**Q.** The federal government faces major challenges in dealing with its finances. The country also has major ongoing investment needs. Which of the following 3 priorities should be the most important principle for dealing with these challenges?

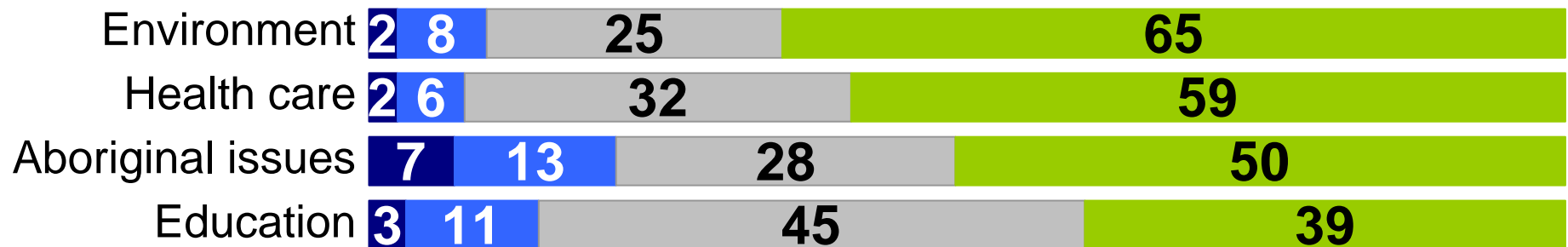


- Keeping taxes as low as possible
- Keeping the deficit as low as possible
- Investing in social areas such as health, education, and jobs

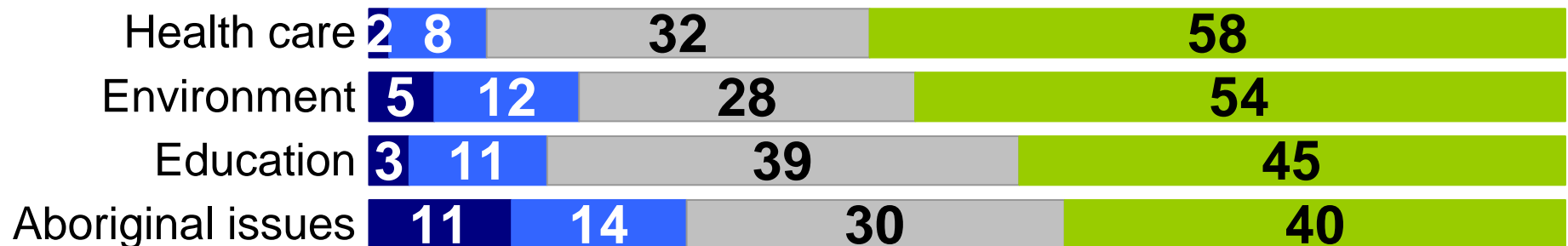
# Preferred Level of Government Involvement

**Q.** Overall, in each of the following areas, what would you like to see the federal/provincial government do in the future? Would you like to see it increase its involvement, maintain its involvement, reduce its involvement, or eliminate its involvement altogether?

## Federal government



## Provincial government

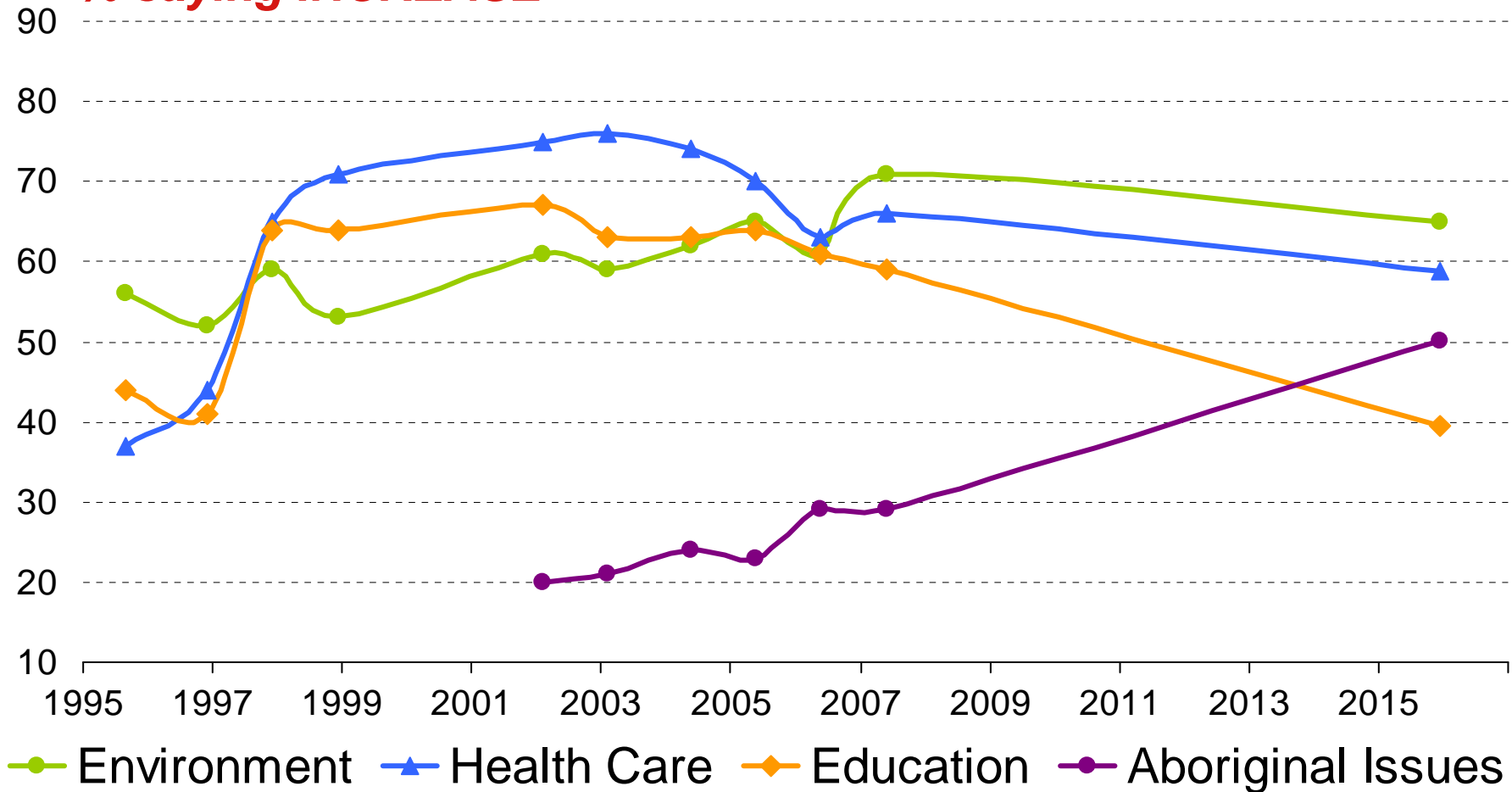


■ Eliminate its involvement altogether      ■ Reduce its involvement  
■ Maintain its current involvement      ■ Increase its involvement

# Tracking Federal Government Involvement

**Q.** Overall, in each of the following areas, what would you like to see the FEDERAL government do in the future? Would you like to see it increase its involvement, maintain its involvement, reduce its involvement, or eliminate its involvement altogether?

## % saying INCREASE





- 1) End of Progress?
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# Conclusions

- » Collapse of middle class bargain defining problem of our age
  - Trickle-down economics has been laid bare as a cruel hoax
  - The public have given the government a strong mandate to pursue a bolder, more ambitious, more progressive federal government
  - Public have largely abandoned the minimal government model
- » The public are looking for a new blueprint to restore shared prosperity
- » Closing of the Canadian mind and growing search for 'order' may preclude some of the essential solutions
- » Paradox of soaring trust and confidence and record economic pessimism (unsustainable as time goes on)
- » If social Canada embodied Canadian values, then this is emphatically more so than in the past



## For more information:

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