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confederation of
tomorrow 2.0

Portraits 2017

A Fresh Look at Public Opinion
and Federalism

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Mowat Centre
ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY



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Mowat Centre

ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY

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**Ontarians and
Quebecers share
the same priorities
for making the
country work
better. However,
Ontarians and
Quebecers come
at these issues
from different
perspectives**

INTRODUCTION

This sesquicentennial year has provided Canadians with an opportunity to celebrate their country's achievements, to consider how it has changed and to reflect on how it needs to adapt to current and pending challenges. To help inform these reflections, the Mowat Centre, in partnership with Alain-G. Gagnon, holder of the Canada Research Chair in Quebec and Canadian Studies and director of the newly-established *Centre d'analyse politique: Constitution et Fédéralisme*, based at UQAM,¹ undertook a comprehensive study of public opinion in Ontario and Quebec.² The survey, called Portraits 2017, focuses on a wide range of subjects, including federalism, the economy, social programs, international trade, immigration and diversity, and relations with Indigenous peoples. It provides valuable new evidence about whether and how citizens' attitudes towards one another, to the federation and to Canada are evolving at a time of considerable change and uncertainty in the wider global political context.

This report is the first in a series that will present and analyze the results from Portraits 2017. The subjects covered in this report include federalism, attachment and identity, and relations with Indigenous peoples.

1 www.creqc.uqam.ca

2 The Portraits 2017 survey in Ontario was supported by the Mowat Centre; the Portraits 2017 survey in Quebec was supported by Alain-G. Gagnon, CREQC/CAPCF.

METHODOLOGY

Portraits 2017 is a public opinion survey undertaken by Mission Research on behalf of the Mowat Centre. Survey data were collected between November 1 and November 14, 2017 from within randomly-selected, representative samples of residents of Ontario (n=2,000) and Quebec (n=1,000) aged 18 and older. Sample frames were drawn from opt-in market research panels and hence cannot be technically characterized as random probability samples. Still, as a guideline, appropriate margins of error for traditional samples of the sizes of the Ontario and the Quebec samples are +/- 2.2 per cent and +/-3.1 per cent respectively, 19 times out of 20. For the overall sample (n=3,000) the corresponding margin of error is +/- 1.8 per cent, with a 5 per cent error rate. All data are weighted according to the most recent Census figures for age, gender and region;³ in turn, findings from the survey are representative of the adult population aged 18 and older in both Ontario and Quebec.

To address the question of whether attitudes have changed over time, the survey drew extensively from previous studies. In particular, the survey questionnaire drew from the studies conducted between 1998 and 2006 by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC), including the Portraits of Canada annual series and the landmark New Canada study of Canadian identity in the context of growing diversity. A second source for questions was the Focus Canada surveys, which originated as a syndicated research program conducted by Environics Research over the course of three decades (1976 – 2009), and now continues as a project of the not-for-profit Environics Institute for Survey Research. The survey also builds on the Mowat Centre's earlier study, *The New Ontario: The Shifting Attitudes of Ontarians toward the Federation*, which was based upon a national survey conducted in 2010.

³ The sample in Quebec is also representative in terms of language spoken at home.

Both also share a recognition that Canada could go farther in achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. That recognition, however, does not seem to translate into making reconciliation a high priority

SUMMARY

Broadly speaking, Ontarians and Quebecers share the same priorities for making the country work better. However, Ontarians and Quebecers come at these issues from different perspectives. There are important differences between them with respect to the level of attachment they feel for Canada or their respective provinces. Accompanying these differences are differences in perception about the level of respect and influence their provinces are afforded in Canada. These differences underpin their respective views about which order of government should play a leading role in addressing today's most important issues, with Quebecers having more decentralist leanings.

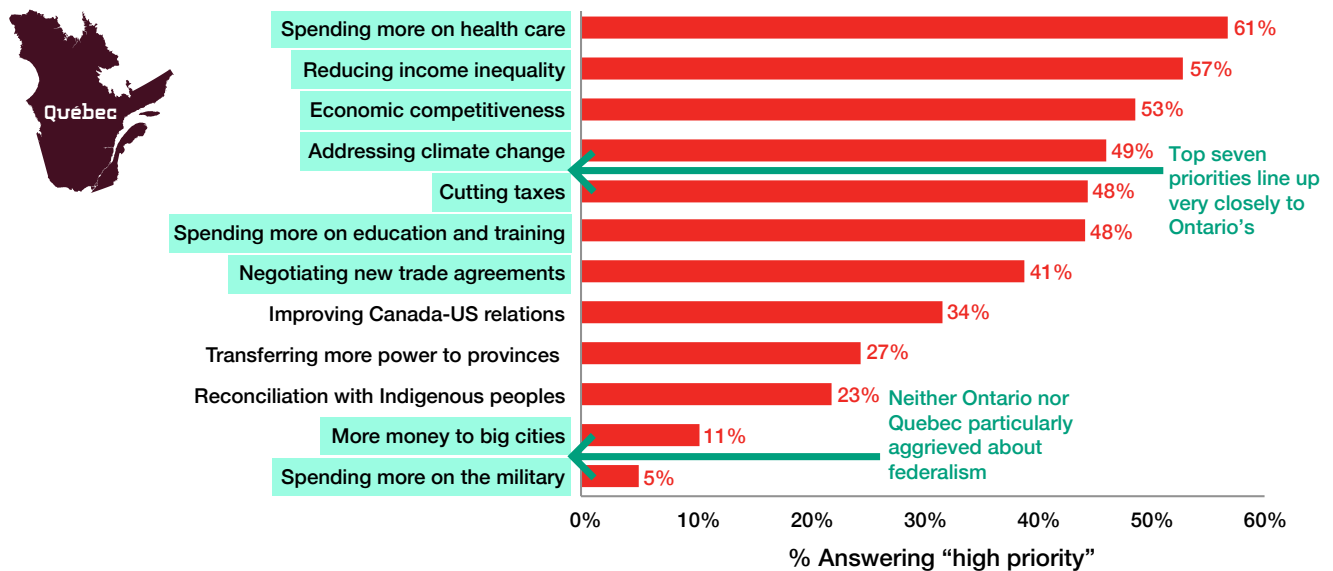
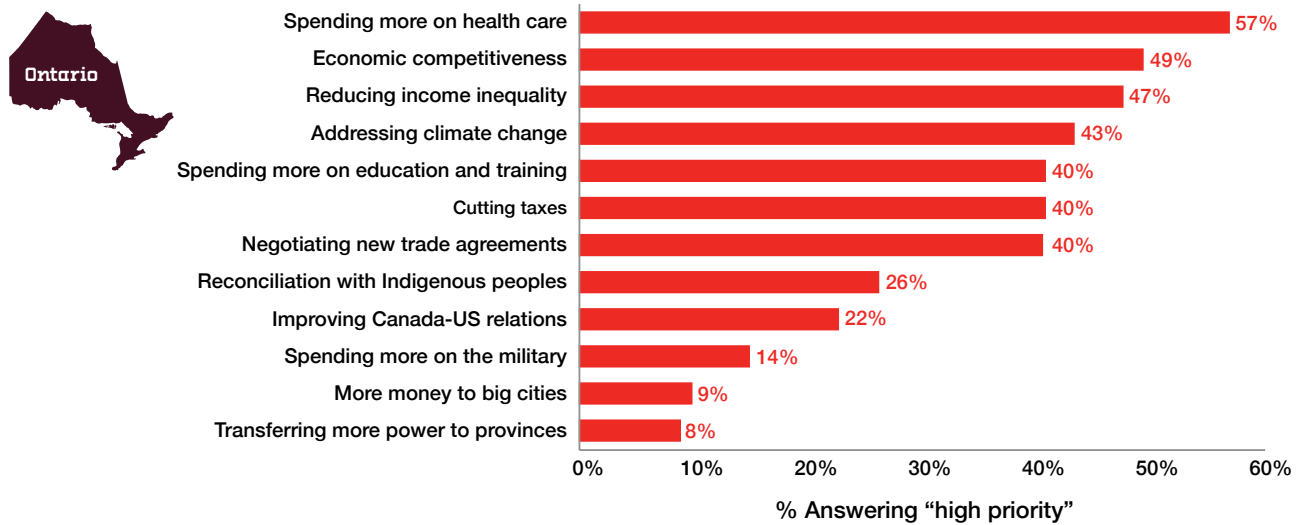
Despite these differences, neither Ontarians nor Quebecers appear to be particularly aggrieved about issues around the current division of powers within the federation. For example, in view of Quebecers' decentralist leanings, transferring more powers from the federal government to provinces is not currently a high priority in that province. Both Ontarians and Quebecers have similar views about whether their provinces receive their fair share of federal funding. Perhaps most encouraging is that Ontarians and Quebecers appear to favour federal-provincial collaboration in many policy areas. Both also share a recognition that Canada could go farther in achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. That recognition, however, does not seem to translate into making reconciliation a high priority. One next step in building public awareness around the issue therefore, may be to focus on the responsibility that all Canadians share and the role that all can play in advancing the reconciliation process.

Shared Priorities

FIGURE 1

PRIORITIES OF QUEBECERS AND ONTARIANS ALIGN WELL

When it comes to helping the country work better, how much of a priority do you think each of the following should be?



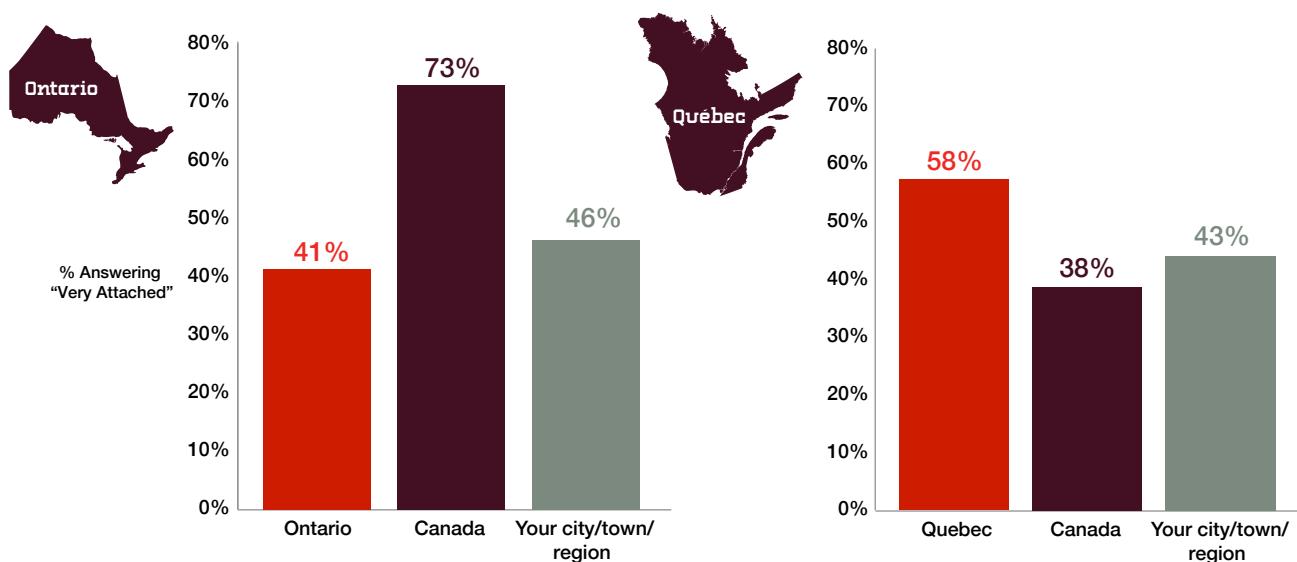
Ontarians and Quebecers share the same priorities for making the country work better. Spending more on health care was the top priority for both provinces, with 57 per cent of Ontarians and 61 per cent of Quebecers ranking it as a high priority. In fact, citizens in each province listed the same seven priorities among their top seven, with reducing income inequality, being economically competitive, addressing climate change, cutting taxes, spending more on education and training, and negotiating new trade agreements ranking as the highest priorities alongside boosting health care spending.

Identity and Attachment

While Ontarians and Quebecers may share the same priorities, they come at these priorities from different standpoints. Not surprisingly, Ontarians feel more strongly attached to Canada than Ontario, or to their city, town or region. Three-quarters (73 per cent) of Ontarians say they are very attached to Canada, compared with 41 per cent who are very attached to Ontario, and 46 per cent who are very attached to their city, town or region.

FIGURE 2
ONTARIANS ARE MORE STRONGLY ATTACHED TO CANADA

How attached do you feel to:



Quebecers, as expected, are much more attached to their province: 58 per cent of Quebecers are very attached to Quebec, compared with 38 per cent who are very attached to Canada and 43 per cent who are very attached to their city, town or region.

What is most noticeable about these results, however, is how stable they have been over time, particularly in Quebec. Similar questions asked in the early 2000s showed the same levels of attachment among Quebecers to both Canada and Quebec (in Ontario, there has been a decrease in the proportion of citizens feeling “very attached” to Canada, to the province and to their city,

town or region. An increasing number of Ontarians now report being only “somewhat attached” to each). This sense of attachment, therefore, appears to be deeply anchored in our political cultures, rather than being driven by short-term political events.

Historically, Quebecers have also differed from Ontario in terms of their tendency to identify more with their province than with Canada. In a previous Mowat survey conducted in 2010, a majority of Quebecers identified either as “a Quebecer first but also a Canadian” or as a Quebecer only; at that time, only four per cent of Ontarians identified as “an Ontarian first but also Canadian” and almost none identified as an Ontarian only. Three-quarters of Ontarians in 2010 identified as a Canadian only or first, compared with 26 per cent of Quebecers.

The Portraits 2017 posed this question again in Quebec. Again, a plurality of Quebecers identify as “a Quebecer first, but also Canadian,” with 36 per cent of Quebecers identifying in that way. A quarter of Quebecers identify as “both a Canadian and a Quebecer,” while 21 per cent identify as “a Canadian first, but also a Quebecer.” Those who identify as “a Quebecer only” or “a Canadian only” make up only 11 per cent and seven per cent of Quebecers respectively. Again, what is most noticeable about these results is their stability over time, as these results are similar to those from surveys conducted both in 2010 and in the early 2000s.

FIGURE 3 MANY QUEBECERS ARE QUEBECERS FIRST

How do you identify yourself?

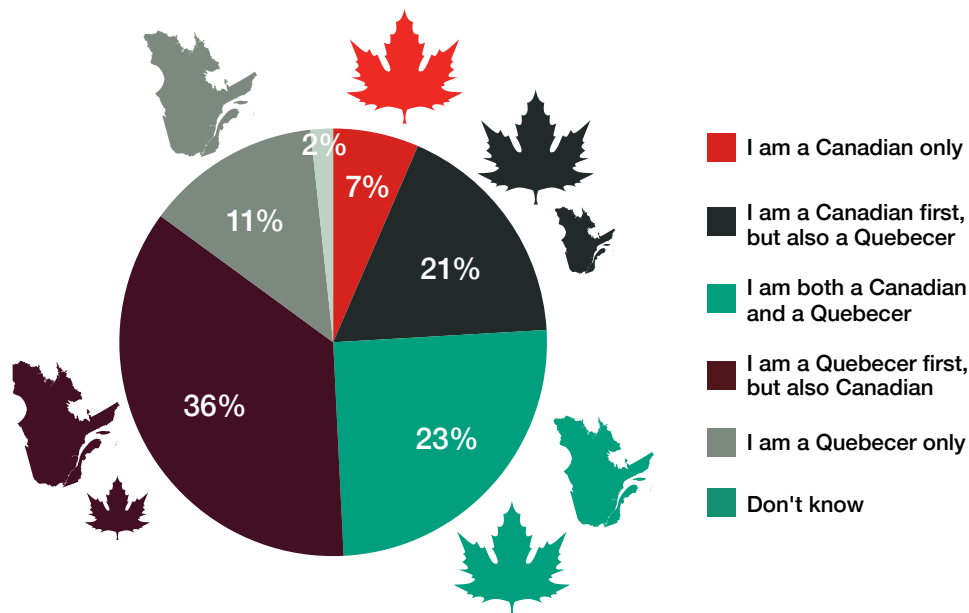
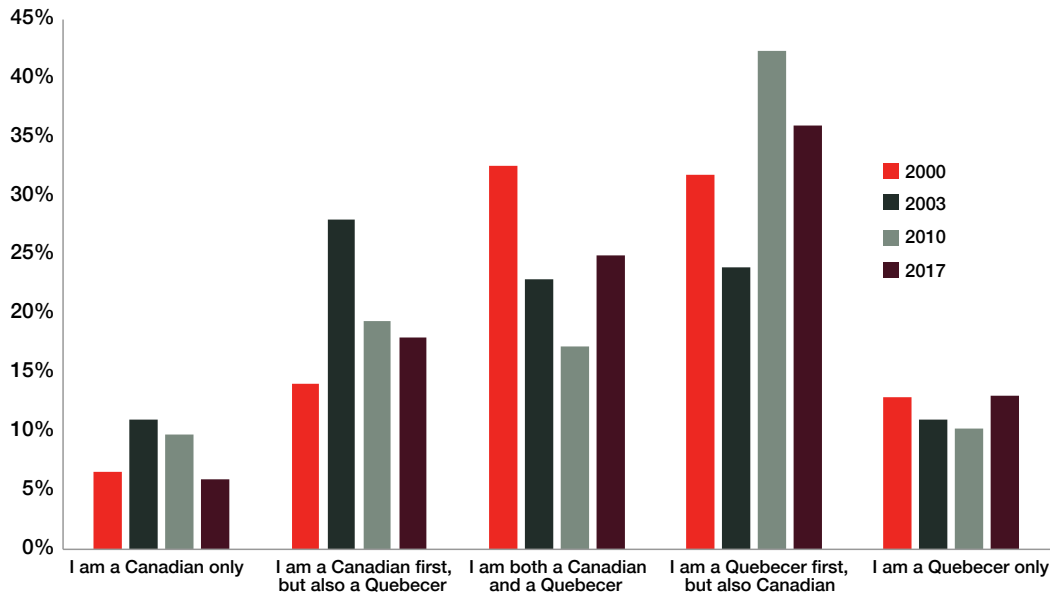


FIGURE 4
MANY QUEBECERS ARE QUEBECERS FIRST

People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself...

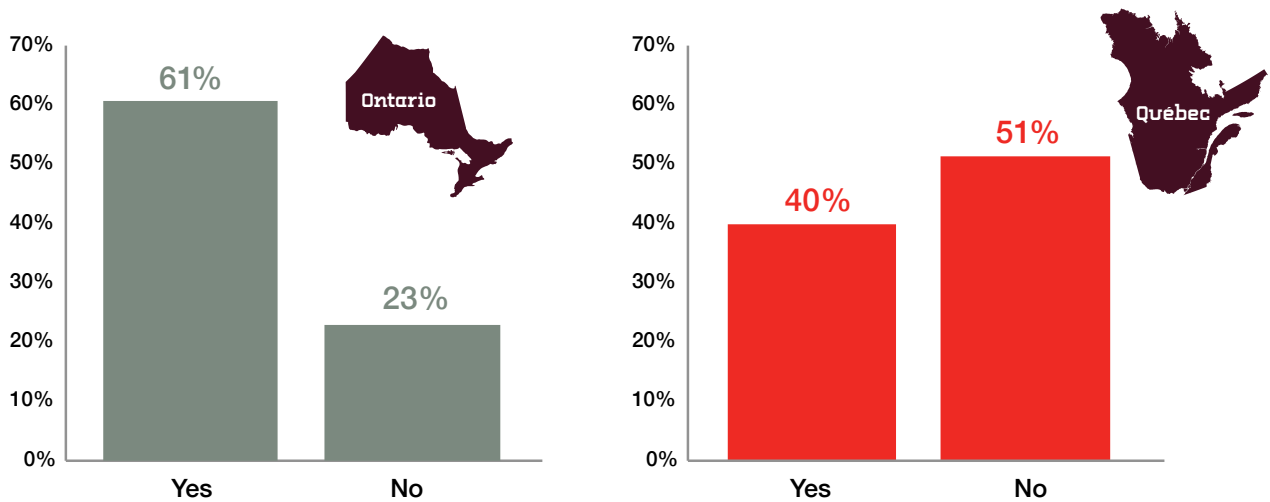


Respect and Influence

Accompanying the differences in identity and attachment are differences in perceptions about the level of respect and influence each province is afforded in Canada.

FIGURE 5
DIFFERENT VIEWS ON RESPECT

Is your province treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

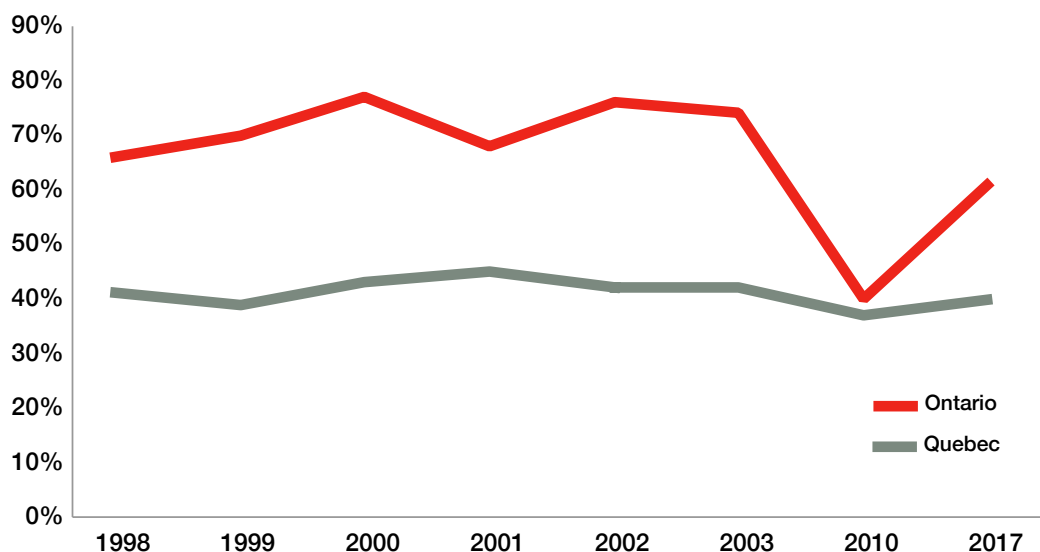


A majority of Ontarians (61 per cent) agree that their province is treated with the respect it deserves in Canada. This is not the case, however, in Quebec, where only 40 per cent agree that their province is treated with the respect it deserves. While this view has not changed much over time in Quebec, there has been significant movement in Ontario. In 2010, Ontarians resembled Quebecers, with only 40 per cent feeling that their province was treated with the respect it deserves in Canada. That sense of grievance in Ontario seems to have subsided for the moment, though the sense of being respected has not returned to the previous historical norm of over 70 per cent.

FIGURE 6

IF ONTARIANS FELT DISRESPECTED, THAT HAS SUBSIDED

Is your province treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not? Per cent answering “Yes”



Related to the feelings of respect, or lack thereof, is the degree to which Ontarians and Quebecers feel they have influence over important national decisions. While 48 per cent of Ontarians feel that their province has “about its fair share” of influence, only 31 per cent of Quebecers feel the same. One in two (50 per cent) Quebecers feel that their province has “less than its fair share” of influence, compared with only 19 per cent of Ontarians. Compared to 2003 and 2010, the share of Quebecers who feel that their province has less than its fair share of influence has increased from 35 per cent and 44 per cent respectively. The perceived decline in influence observed among Ontarians in 2010 (32 per cent saying that their province has less influence) has subsided closer to 2003 levels (17 per cent).

FIGURE 7 FAIR SHARE OF INFLUENCE IN CANADA

How much influence does your province have on important national decisions?

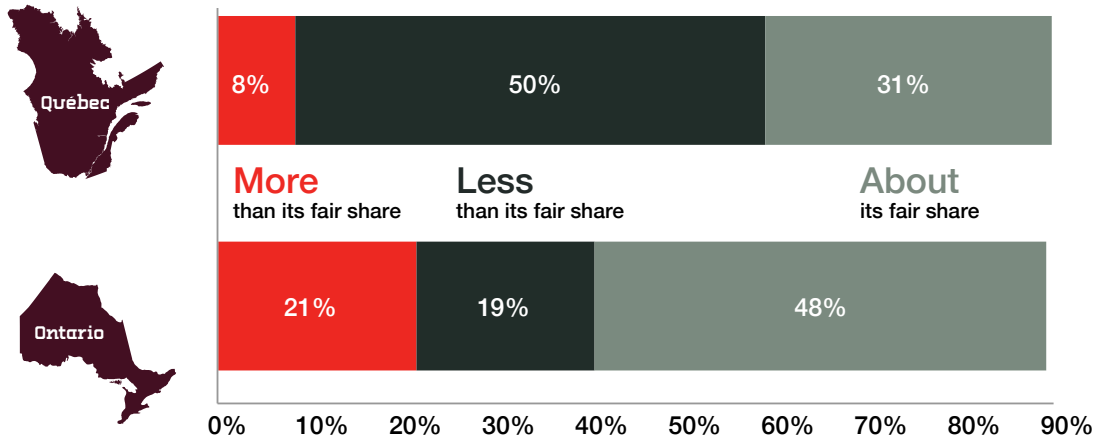
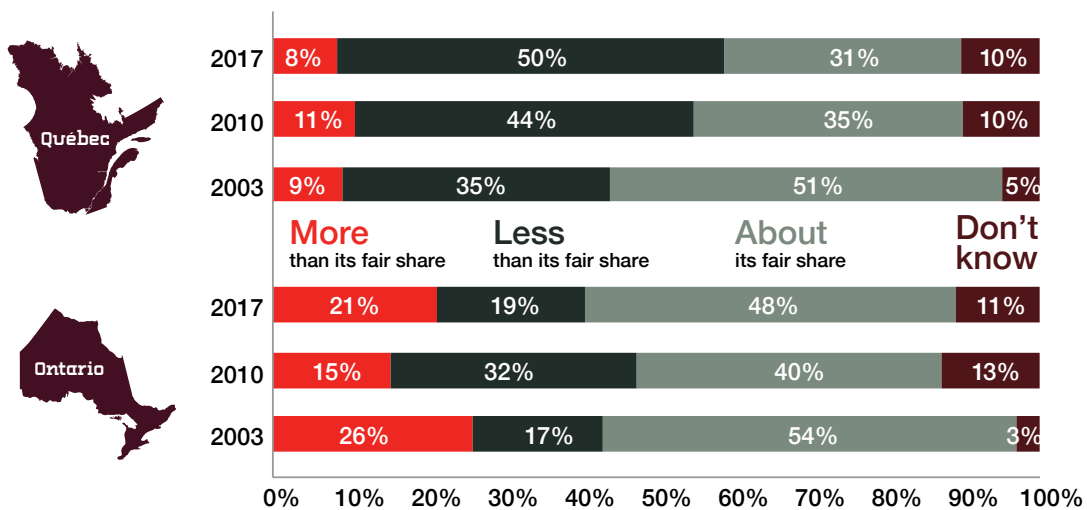


FIGURE 8 QUEBECERS ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT INFLUENCE THAN IN THE PAST

How much influence does your province have on important national decisions?

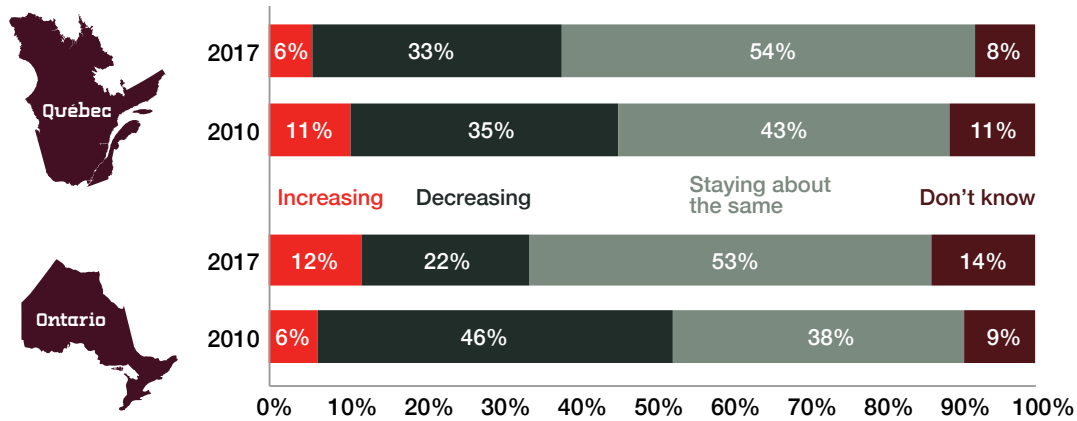


With respect to perceptions about whether their province's influence over important national decisions is increasing or decreasing, only 22 per cent of Ontarians feel that their level of influence is decreasing, while one-third of Quebecers feel that way. Compared to 2010, the largest increase in both provinces is among those who think that their province's influence is staying about the same, increasing from 43 per cent to 54 per cent in Quebec, and from 38 per cent to 53 per cent in Ontario.

FIGURE 9

MOST THINK LEVEL OF INFLUENCE STAYING ABOUT THE SAME

Do you think your province's influence on important national decisions is:

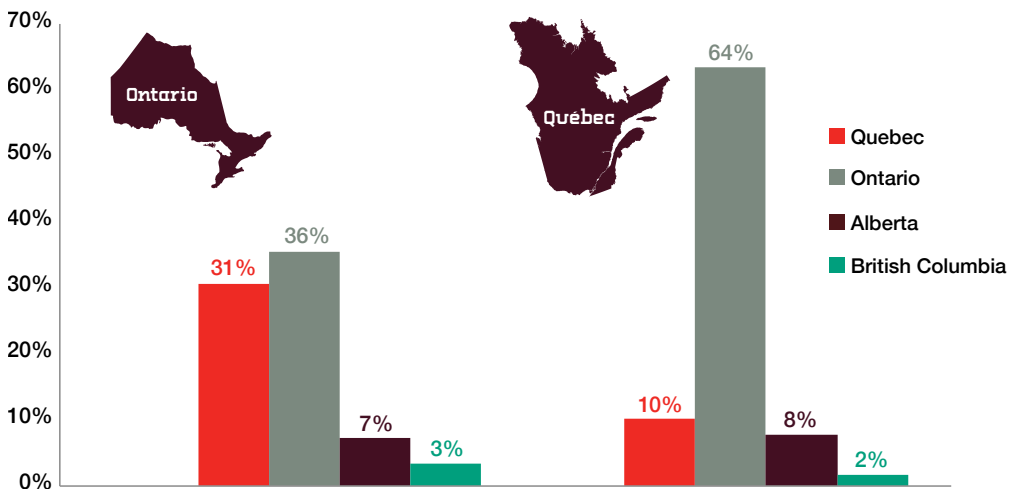


In terms of who does have the greatest influence over important national decisions in Canada, Ontarians (36 per cent) and Quebecers (64 per cent) both agree that it is Ontario. However, about one in three (31 per cent) Ontarians think that Quebec has the most influence – a view shared by only 10 per cent of Quebecers themselves. Interestingly, only 10 per cent of both Ontarians and Quebecers name a province outside of central Canada as having the greatest influence on important national decisions (though about one in five say they don't know).

FIGURE 10

QUEBECERS THINK ONTARIANS HAVE THE MOST INFLUENCE

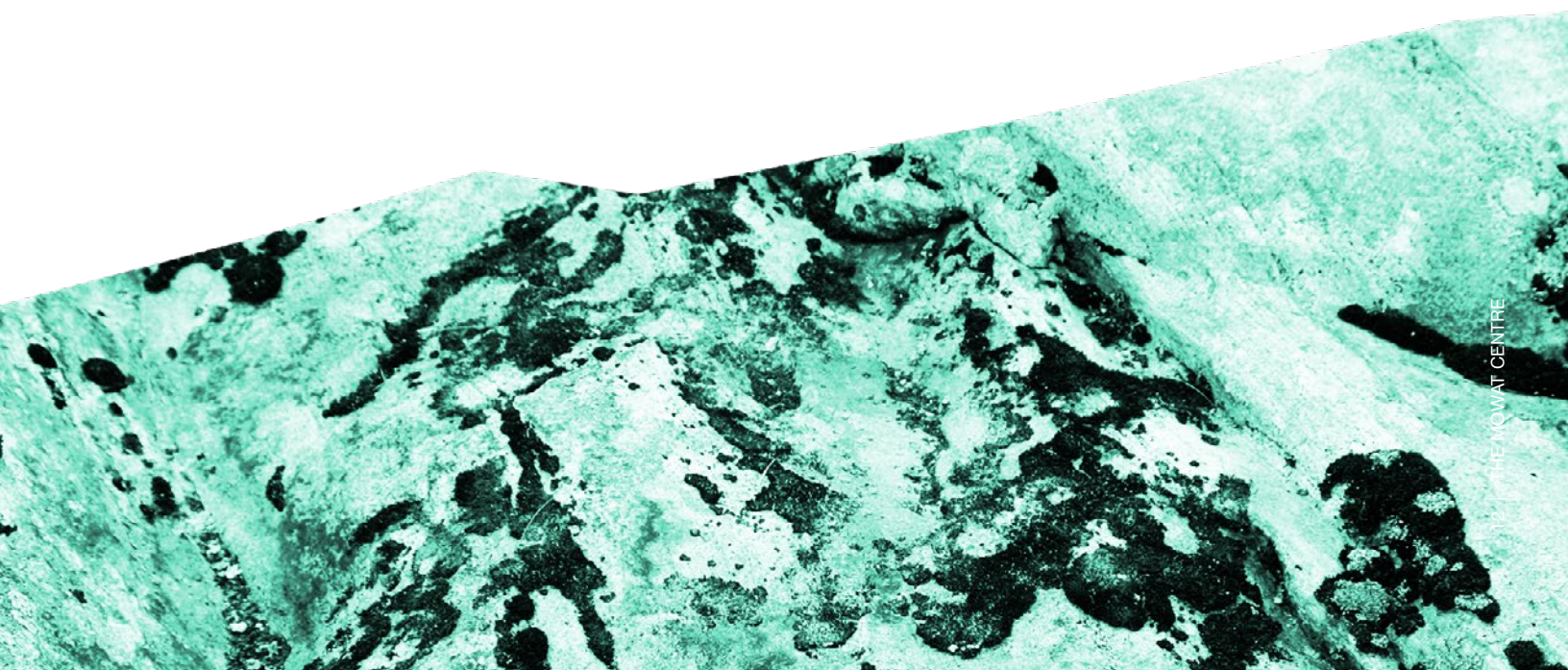
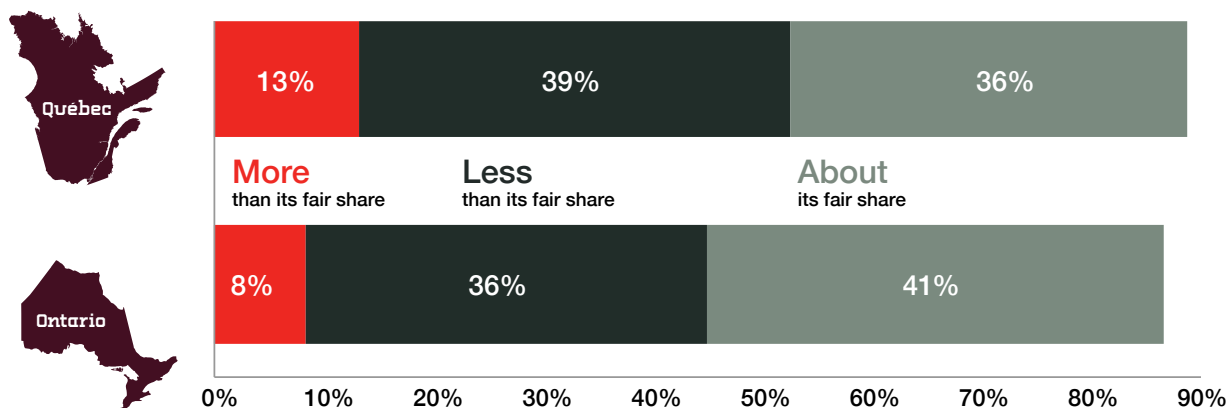
Which province has the most influence on important national decisions?



Perceptions about the fairness of federal funding for Ontario and Quebec are also similar in both provinces. The percentage of Ontarians and Quebecers who think they are getting either less than their fair share of federal funding or about their fair share are roughly consistent across the two provinces (75 per cent in Quebec and 77 per cent in Ontario). Ontarians and Quebecers are not unique in thinking that they are not getting their fair share of federal funding. Past studies have shown that this viewpoint is consistent right across Canada. When the Mowat Centre asked this question in 2010, over half of respondents in every region of Canada thought they received less than their fair share of federal funding, with the exception of Quebec. At the time, 40 per cent of Quebecers thought they received less than their fair share of federal funding, while roughly the same amount thought their province received about its fair share of federal funding.

FIGURE 11
FAIR SHARE OF SPENDING

Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the province, do you think your province receives:

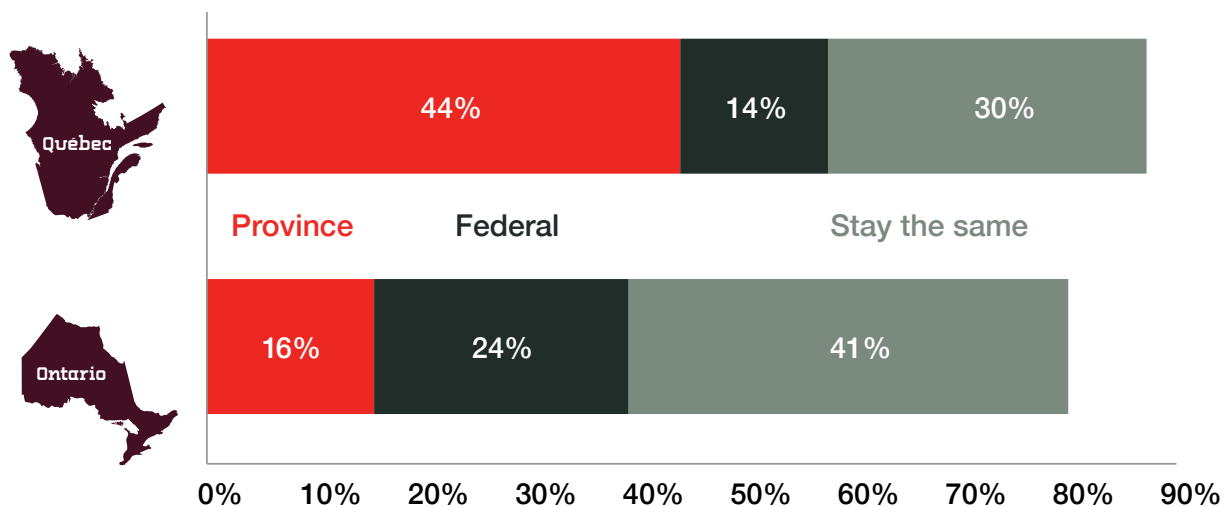


The Division of Responsibilities within the Federation

Quebecers' differences in terms of attachment, identity and perceptions of respect appear to contribute to a more decentralist perspective on the federation. Quebecers are almost three times more likely than Ontarians to think that their province should take charge of many of the things the federal government does right now.

FIGURE 12
QUEBECERS ARE MORE DECENTRALIST

Should provincial/federal government take charge of things the other does right now?

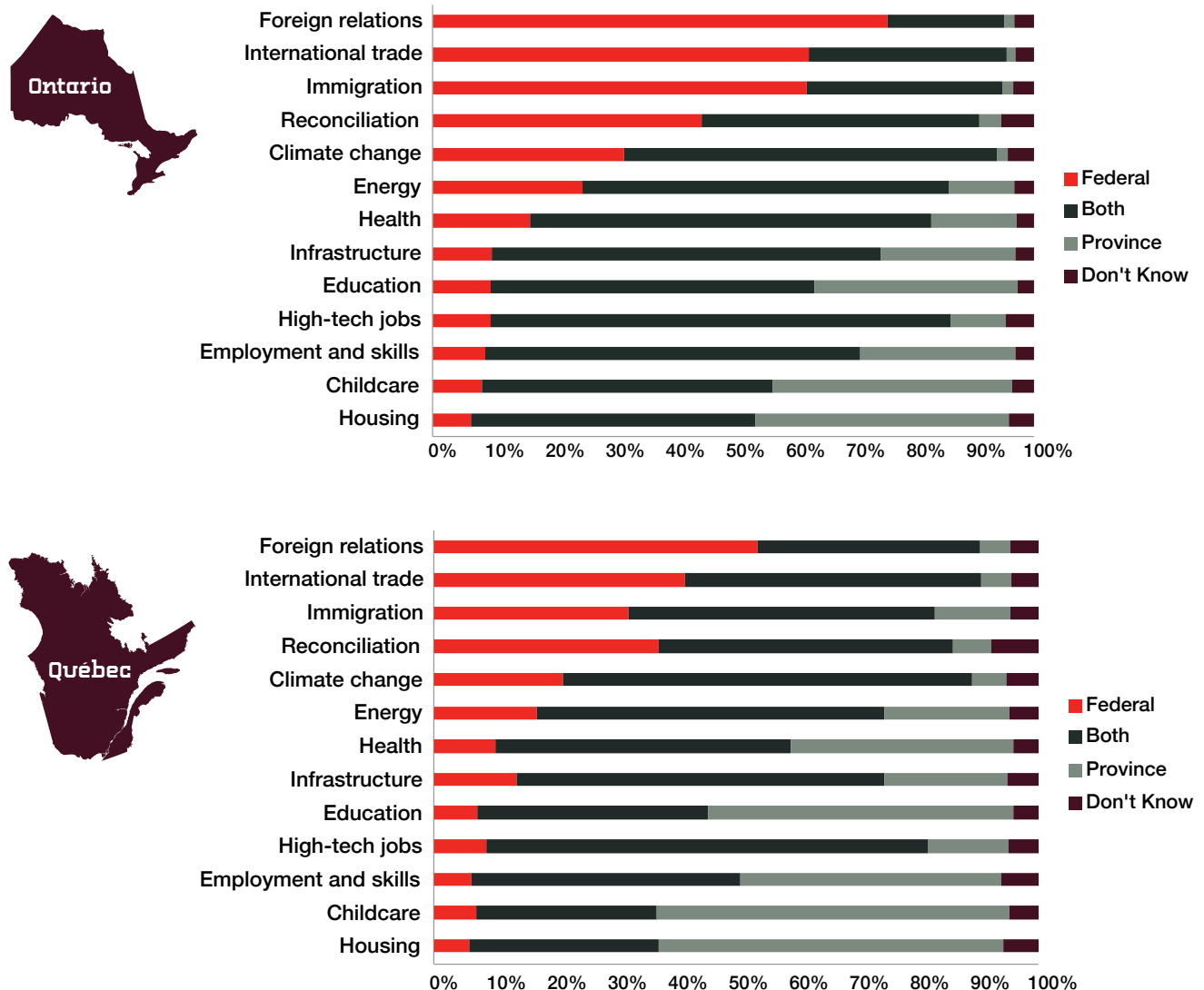


Whereas 44 per cent of Quebecers favour such a change, only 16 per cent of Ontarians think the same. Two in five (41 per cent) Ontarians think that things should stay about the same in this regard, making this response the most popular one in that province. Unlike Quebecers (14 per cent), Ontarians are slightly more likely to favour a shift of responsibilities towards the federal government (24 per cent) than towards their provincial government (16 per cent).

The survey also asked about the division of responsibilities in the federation in specific policy fields. There are very few fields for which Quebecers think the federal government should be “only” or “primarily” responsible. In fact, only in the case of foreign relations do more than 50 per cent of Quebecers say that the federal government should be only or primarily responsible. A majority of Ontarians, however, see a predominantly federal role not only in foreign relations, but in international trade and immigration as well. Conversely, a majority of Quebecers say their provincial government should be only or primarily responsible for three areas (education, child care and housing) while in no area do a majority of Ontarians look for provincial predominance.

FIGURE 13 DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Which order of government should be responsible for:



Beyond these differences between Quebec and Ontario, however, the most striking thing about responses to this question is the tendency of most citizens to prefer to have both levels of government work together. There appears to be a genuine preference for federal-provincial collaboration to address many of the most pressing issues of the day.

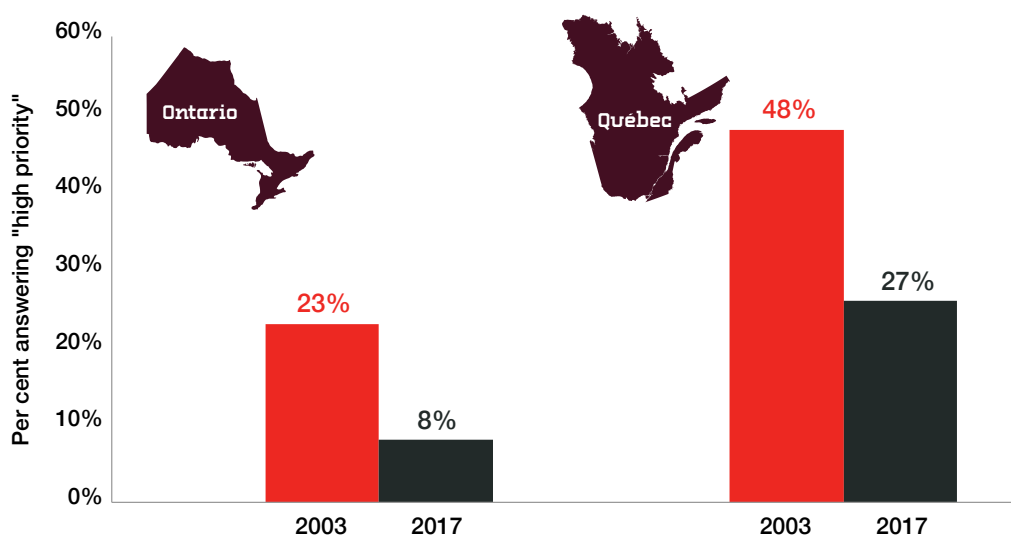
In Ontario, this was the favoured arrangement for ten of the 13 policy fields mentioned in the survey (the exception being foreign relations, international trade and immigration – as mentioned above). But even in Quebec, having both levels of government work together was favoured more often than either federal or provincial predominance. Thus, even though Quebecers are much more likely to look to their province to take leadership in certain fields (notably education, child care and housing), citizens in both provinces in general are looking for a collaborative form of federalism in which both levels of government work together in most areas.

This preference for collaborative federalism is interesting in light of the fact that transferring more power to the provinces does not appear to be a particularly high priority among Ontarians or Quebecers – especially compared to its level of priority in the past. Whereas in 2003, 23 per cent of Ontarians and 48 per cent of Quebecers ranked transferring more powers from the federal government to provinces as a high priority, those levels have dropped to eight per cent in Ontario and 27 per cent in Quebec.

FIGURE 14

TRANSFERRING POWERS TO PROVINCES IS LESS OF A PRIORITY

Transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial/territorial governments



Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

The Portraits 2017 survey suggests that both Ontarians and Quebecers are supportive of the objectives of strengthening the distinctive cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and of working towards reconciliation. Those surveyed overwhelmingly agree that “it is beneficial to all Canadians that the distinctive cultures of Indigenous peoples remain strong.” A plurality also says that governments in Canada have not gone far enough to promote reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (44 per cent in Ontario and 39 per cent in Quebec), while one in four (26 per cent) in Ontario and one in three (35 per cent) in Quebec say that governments are doing about as much as they should. Fewer than one in four say that governments have gone too far to promote reconciliation.

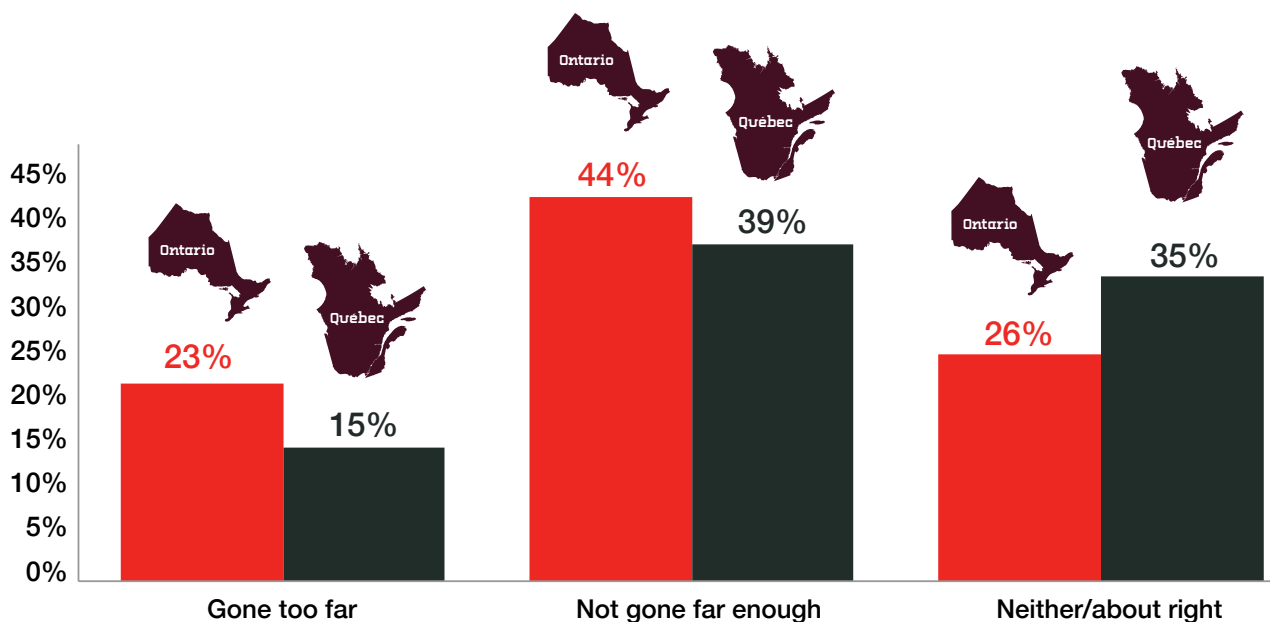
Additional questions asked in Ontario also suggest a growing awareness of the challenges facing Indigenous peoples in Canada. Two-thirds of Ontarians say that, in general, the situation of Indigenous peoples in Canada is worse compared to that of other Canadians – compared with 50 per cent who held this view when the question was last asked in 2003. And almost 70 per cent of Ontarians say they are either very or somewhat familiar with the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

This awareness of both historical events and current circumstances, and support for government action towards reconciliation, does not necessarily mean that working towards reconciliation is a high priority for Ontarians or Quebecers. Only 26 per cent of Ontarians and 23 per cent of Quebecers think that promoting reconciliation is a high priority when it comes to helping the country work better, far fewer than the proportion that prioritize more spending on health or education, addressing climate change or reducing taxes. It is also notable that a plurality of Ontarians and Quebecers think that while both the federal and provincial governments should work together on achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, a significant proportion in each province say that this is either only or primarily a responsibility of the federal government.

What this suggests is that while most Ontarians and Quebecers are supportive of the objective of reconciliation, they feel somewhat removed from the steps that need to be taken – reconciliation is not among their top priorities, and a significant number of Ontarians and Quebecers feel it is mostly a federal responsibility, despite the fact that provinces remain responsible for much of the health, education and social services whose delivery needs to change if the goal of reconciliation is to be advanced.⁴ Perhaps the next step in building public awareness around the issue is not only to talk about the historical and current obstacles and injustices facing Indigenous peoples but to consider the responsibility that all Canadians share and the role that all can play in advancing the reconciliation process.

FIGURE 15
RECONCILIATION HASN'T GONE FAR ENOUGH

In your opinion, have governments in Canada gone too far or have they not gone far enough in trying to promote reconciliation with Indigenous peoples?



4 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Available at www.trc.ca

