



# Respect, Influence and Fairness in the Canadian Federation

A REPORT FROM  
THE CONFEDERATION  
OF TOMORROW  
2021 SURVEY OF CANADIANS

**Final Report**

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The **Confederation of Tomorrow** surveys are annual studies conducted by an association of the country's leading public policy organizations: the **Environics Institute for Survey Research**, the **Canada West Foundation**, the **Centre D'Analyse Politique – Constitution et Fédéralisme**, the **Institute for Research on Public Policy**, the **Brian Mulroney Institute of Government** and the **Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy**. The surveys give voice to Canadians about the major issues shaping the future of the federation and their political communities.

The 2021 study consists of a survey of 5,814 adults, conducted online in the provinces between January 25 and February 17; and online and by telephone in the territories between January 25 and March 1. Survey results are weighted by region, gender, age, language, education, immigrant background and Indigenous identity, to ensure they are representative of the country as a whole. When results are reported for the territories (individually or combined), these are weighted separately to ensure they are representative of that region.

Results for 2021 are compared to previous Confederation of Tomorrow surveys conducted in 2019 and 2020, as well as to other surveys conducted by the Environics Research Group, the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC), and the Mowat Centre. More information on these surveys is available from the Environics Institute.

# Introduction

Federal-provincial and inter-regional tensions within Canada are nothing new – they have been part of the dynamics of the federation since its inception. One of the main objectives of the Confederation of Tomorrow survey project is to track the ups and downs of these tensions, and to explore the factors that shape them.

Each year resets the context for this exercise. The regular arrival of new federal or provincial political leaders, changing economic conditions, or the introduction of new policies can each strengthen national solidarity or exacerbate regional discontent. But the context for the most recent Confederation of Tomorrow survey, conducted in February 2021, is unique: the COVID-19 pandemic – and its sweeping impact on public health, on the economy and on government finances.

How has the pandemic experience affected attitudes toward the federation? In Spring 2020, as the pandemic took hold in Canada, commentators noted a striking absence of federal-

provincial rancour, as first ministers across the country came together to confront the crisis. Later in the year, however, the political tone became less collegial, as disagreements arose as to which governments were or were not acting quickly or comprehensively enough to contain the spread of the virus, and to support Canadians affected by the lockdowns.

In this unusual context, the Confederation of Tomorrow 2021 survey returned to many of the project's core themes: respect and influence; fairness and the sharing of resources; regional alienation; support for sovereignty in Quebec; and trust in federal and provincial/territorial governments. The report finds little evidence that the pandemic disrupted pre-existing attitudes and trends. In many cases, there has been no significant change, while in other cases the variations are modest and hardly atypical. This lack of dramatic change, however, represents an important finding, as it suggests that how Canadians think about the federation is deeply rooted, and not easily upended – not even by a national emergency.

# Executive summary

One of the main objectives of the Confederation of Tomorrow survey project is to track the regular ups and downs of federal-provincial and inter-regional tensions in Canada. The most recent survey, conducted in February 2021, had an additional goal, however: to assess whether the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped Canadians' attitudes toward federalism. Did the federal, provincial and territorial responses to the crisis alleviate or exacerbate public discontent with how federalism works in Canada?

The 2021 survey finds much more consistency than change in Canadians' attitudes toward federalism. For instance, there has been little change overall to opinions on how the economy should be managed within the federation, on the advantages of federalism for one's province or territory, or on Canadians' ability to resolve their differences. One modest exception to this pattern is that, in many provinces, the proportions saying their province receives less than its fair share of federal spending have declined.

In cases where changes in attitudes are evident, these generally continue longer-term trends that cannot be linked directly to the response to the pandemic. This is the case, for instance, with concerns about the French language in Quebec, or with declining support for some of the positions of the provincial governments in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

## Respect and influence

Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta and Saskatchewan continue to register some of the highest levels of discontent with their province's treatment within the federation, but in each case, the extent of this discontent has abated somewhat since 2019. Assessments of their province's treatment in the federation are also improving in the Maritime provinces; notably, for the first time since the question was first asked in the early 2000s, Nova Scotians are more likely to say their province is treated with the respect it deserves than they are to say it is not. While views in British Columbia on the province's place in the federation have changed very little over the past year, the longer-term trend toward a remarkable improvement continues. The

proportion of British Columbians saying their province is not treated with the respect it deserves is only half as large today as it was 20 years ago.

Looking beyond these longer-term trends, one shorter-term change is evident: in a majority of provinces, the proportions saying they receive less than their fair share of federal spending have declined. This may be a result of the emergency spending measures introduced by Ottawa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Fairness in the federation

Canadians are more than twice as likely to say that the current federal government favours one province over the others than they are to say that it treats all provinces in Canada equally. Nonetheless, the proportion saying that the federal government favours one province over the others has been steadily declining since 2005.

Overwhelmingly, most of those who say the federal government favours one province over others identify one of the two central Canadian provinces as the one that is favoured. While there has been little change in opinions on this question since 2019, changes are more noticeable when the current results are compared to 2014 – prior to the change in federal government that resulted from the 2015 election. In 2014, among those saying the federal government favours one province over others, Alberta was more likely than Quebec to be identified as the province that is favoured. Today, the reverse is true.

Among those outside of Quebec, views as to which province is favoured differ remarkably by age. Younger Canadians (roughly those under the age of 40) are much more likely than older Canadians to say that Ontario is favoured over other provinces by the federal government. Older Canadians (roughly those age 50 and older) are much more likely to say Quebec is favoured. It is possible that this pattern is a lingering effect of the Constitutional debates of the 1980s and 1990s, marked in part by the first and second Quebec referendums on sovereignty in 1980 and 1995, respectively.

The focus on Quebec's constitutional status in these earlier decades may have created a lasting impression in the minds of those old enough to remember.

## Support for equalization

Despite recent criticisms, a majority of Canadians continue to support the equalization program, with little change over the past two years. The program is supported by majorities in every province, including Alberta and Saskatchewan. But, while there has been little change in overall support since 2019, there has been some noticeable change in Alberta, and to a lesser extent in Saskatchewan: in both those provinces, support for equalization has grown. Notably, support for equalization in Alberta has grown among supporters of both the governing and opposition parties in the province.

## Focus on the West

Two in five Westerners agree that their region gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own – a proportion that has edged upwards since last year. Agreement has increased in each of the four western provinces: almost one in two in Alberta and Saskatchewan currently agree. In each of the Prairie provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba), agreement in 2021 that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own” is much higher than in 2010, when the federal government was led by a prime minister from Western Canada.

Only one in five Westerners currently agree that the centre of power is shifting away from Central Canada toward the West. Agreement with this proposition within the region is lower than it was two decades ago, particularly in Alberta.

## Focus on Quebec

Only a minority of Quebecers identify either as mainly federalist or mainly sovereigntist, as many prefer to say that they are in between the two options, or identify with neither. But the proportion “choosing sides” (whether federalist or sovereigntist) has increased since 2020, suggesting that opinions in Quebec on the question of sovereignty have polarized somewhat over the past year. Francophone Quebecers under the age of 40 are more likely to say they are

mainly federalist than mainly sovereigntist, but even among this group, the most favoured option is “in between the two.”

One in two francophone Quebecers agree that Quebec sovereignty is an idea whose time has passed, but more than one in three disagree. The level of agreement has not changed noticeably over the past 20 years. But, among Quebec francophones, the sense that the French language in the province is threatened is much higher than 20 years ago, and is edging upwards. Currently, three in four Quebec francophones agree that the French language is threatened in Quebec – the highest level of concern yet recorded.

## Support for independence

More than one in four Quebecers say their province should separate from Canada and form an independent country, as do one in five Albertans. Support for independence is lowest in the Maritime provinces and in Ontario. Support for independence in Quebec is slightly higher in 2021 than in the early 2000s, while in Alberta there has been little change.

Older residents are more likely than their younger counterparts to favour independence in each of the three Prairie provinces, but not in B.C. In fact, younger residents in B.C. are about twice as likely as their younger counterparts in the Prairies to support this option.

## Trust in federal and provincial governments

Canadians continue to be much more likely to say that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests, rather than the federal government or their municipal government. In fact, this pattern holds in 12 of 13 provinces and territories – the exception being Alberta, where a plurality of residents say that no government best represents their interests. The three jurisdictions where residents are most likely to say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests (Northwest Territories, Quebec and Prince Edward Island) are also among those with the highest proportions saying they trust their provincial or territorial government more to manage the pandemic.

While there have been only minor changes in opinions overall since the onset of pandemic, the average disguises bigger changes within individual jurisdictions. In the Northwest Territories, PEI and New Brunswick,

the proportions saying that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests have increased significantly. In four jurisdictions, the trend goes the other way: residents of Nunavut, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are all slightly less likely than in 2020 to say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests.

Despite the economic shock triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been little change overall to Canadians' views on how the economy should be managed within the federation. Opinions remain fairly divided, with one in three trusting both the federal and their provincial or territorial government equally, and almost as many trusting their provincial or territorial government more.

Saskatchewan and Alberta are exceptions to the relative stability in views at the national level: in those provinces, the proportions trusting the federal government more to promote economic growth and create jobs have increased significantly. These changes have unfolded since 2019, and not only in the past year – indicating that they are related to factors that go beyond the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Attitudes toward federalism

The experience of the pandemic does not seem to have significantly affected Canadians' opinions on the advantages of federalism. The proportion agreeing that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their province or territory is up very slightly – but, overall, responses to this question are similar to those seen in both 2020 and 2019. There has also been considerable stability in opinions on two related questions: that of whether a federal system of government is the best one for Canada, because we are a country made up of different peoples and nations; and that of whether Canadians will be able to resolve their internal differences.

It is striking that federalism is more strongly supported by “new Canadians” – who are less likely than those who have been here for several generations to be of either British or French background (the two peoples the Canadian federation was originally intended to accommodate). The proportion agreeing that “a federal system of government is the best one for Canada, because we are a country made up of different peoples and nations” is noticeably higher among first-generation immigrants, racialized Canadians and allophones. The same pattern holds in the case of questions about the advantages of Canadian federalism, and about our ability to resolve our internal differences.



# Respect and Influence

Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta and Saskatchewan continue to express the greatest discontent with their province's treatment within the federation, but in each case, the extent of this discontent has abated somewhat since 2019. In a majority of provinces, the proportions saying they receive less than their fair share of federal spending have declined, possibly as a result of the emergency spending measures introduced by Ottawa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Studies of regional grievances with federalism in Canada have typically focused on three key measures: feelings of respect for one's province; perceptions of influence on national decision-making; and perceptions of the regional fairness of federal spending.

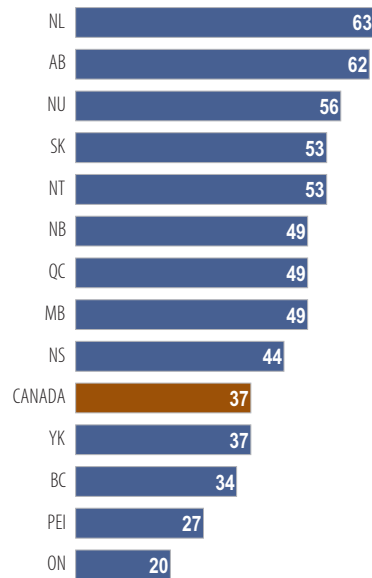
## Atlantic Canada

Atlantic Canadians are generally feeling a bit more positive about their province's place in the federation this year compared to last. In particular, across the region as a whole, the proportion saying their province receives less than its fair share of federal spending has declined (from 58% to 45%), possibly as a result of the emergency spending measures introduced by Ottawa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Residents of **Newfoundland and Labrador** are among the most likely to say their province is not treated with the respect it deserves, has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, and receives less than its fair share of federal spending. But the proportion holding these views has edged downward over the past year. Most notably, there has been a 10-point drop in the proportion saying the province receives less than its fair share of federal spending (from 67% to 57%), and a 13-point drop in the proportion saying it has less than its fair share of influence (from 75% to 62%).
- In stark contrast to their neighbours across the Cabot Straight, **Prince Edward Islanders** are among the least likely to say their province is not treated with the respect it deserves, has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, and receives less than its fair share of

## Province/territory is not treated with respect

2021 By province/territory

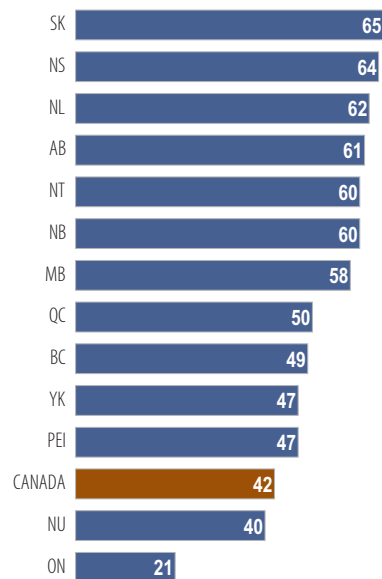


Q.9

In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

## Province/territory has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions

2021 By province/territory



Q.10

In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

federal spending. But their relatively positive views have become even more positive over the past year, with a 14-point drop in the proportion saying the province is not treated with respect (from 41% to 27%) and a 19-point drop in the proportion saying the province receives less than its fair share of federal spending (from 47% to 28%).

- A majority of **Nova Scotians** are concerned about their province’s level of influence in the federation, and there has been little change over the past two years. The proportion saying the province is not treated within the respect it deserves in Canada, however, has fallen; for the first time since this question was first asked in the early 2000s, Nova Scotians are more likely to say their province is treated with the respect it deserves than they are to say it is not. And the proportion of Nova Scotians saying their province receives less than its fair share of federal spending has fallen by 14 points since last year (from 58% to 44%).
- Changes in opinion in **New Brunswick** have been more modest. However, the proportion of New Brunswickers saying their province receives less than its fair share of federal spending has fallen by nine points since last year (from 53% to 44%).

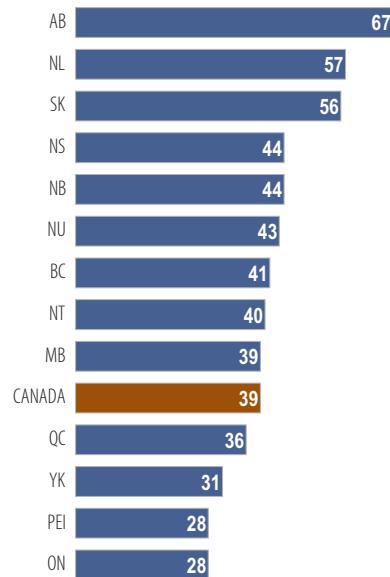
## Central Canada

The situation in Central Canada is generally one of stability, with little change in views in either Quebec or Ontario.

- In **Quebec**, the proportion saying their province is not treated with the respect it deserves, has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, and receives less than its fair share of federal spending has remained largely unchanged in recent years. That said, it is worth noting that the proportion saying the province has less influence than it should is now much higher than it was in the late 1990s or early 2000s.
- **Ontario** continues to stand out for the absence of any sense of grievance about the federation: Ontarians are the least likely to say their province is not treated with the respect it deserves, has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, and receives less than its fair share of federal spending. And while there have only been minor changes in the past two years, these changes are in a positive direction: Ontarians are even less likely than they were two years ago to be concerned about their province’s influence or share of federal spending.

## Province/territory receives less than its fair share of federal spending

2021 By province/territory



Q.13

Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives ... ?

## The West

Saskatchewan and Alberta continue to be the focal point for “Western alienation” – though discontent has abated somewhat since 2019 – while attitudes in British Columbia continue to improve.

- Views in **Manitoba** on the questions related to both respect and influence have changed very little, not only over the past few years, but over the past two decades. The same proportion in 2021 (49%) as in 2001 (50%) say the province is not treated respect; and the proportion saying the province has less than its fair share of influence is also essentially unchanged (58% in 2021, compared to 56% in 2001). But, over the past year, the proportion saying the province receives less than its fair share of federal spending has dropped, from 52 percent to 39 percent.
- Along with residents of Newfoundland and Labrador and neighbouring Alberta, **Saskatchewanians** continue to register some of the highest levels of discontent with their province’s treatment within the federation. That said, the proportion saying their province is not treated with the respect it deserves (53%) is the lower than at any point in the past 20 years. There has been no change on the question of the province’s influence (with two in three continuing to say the province has less than its fair share), but over the past year, the proportion saying the province receives less than its fair share of federal spending has declined by 11 points (from 67% to 56%).
- Along with residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, **Albertans** are the most likely to say that their province is not treated with the respect it deserves in Canada (with 62% holding this view). However, this figure is somewhat lower than its peak two years ago (it reached 71% in 2019). In Alberta, there has been little change in the proportions saying their province has less than its fair share of influence or receives less than its fair share of federal spending (with the proportion holding these views remaining comparatively high).
- Views in **British Columbia** on the province’s place in the federation have changed very little over the past year, but the longer-term trend toward a remarkable improvement continues. The proportion of British Columbians saying the province is not treated with the respect it deserves is only half as large today as it was 20 years ago. Over

the same period, there has been a 20-point drop in the proportion saying the province has less than its fair share of influence. The proportion saying the province receives less than its fair share of federal spending has also been edging downwards.

## The North

Patterns are less clear in the North – with stability in some cases, but contrasting trends in others.

- The proportion of **Nunavut** residents who feel their territory has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions has declined by 20 points since 2019 (from 60% to 40%). The proportion saying the territory does not get its fair share of federal spending had increased in 2020 (compared to 2019), but has since dropped back down.
- Some ups and downs on individual questions notwithstanding, there have been no substantive changes in attitudes in the **Northwest Territories** over the past two years.
- Change in **Yukon** is not consistent. The proportion saying the territory receives less than its fair share of federal spending has doubled, from 15 percent to 31 percent; but the proportion saying it has less than its fair share of influence has been gradually declining, and the proportion saying that it is treated with respect has been growing.

## Variations within regional populations

Generally, speaking, the sense that one’s province or territory is not treated with respect, has less than its fair share of influence, or receives less than its fair share of federal spending increases as age increases, but decreases as educational attainment rises. These feelings are also much more pronounced among those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents, and much less pronounced among immigrants. On average, men are also somewhat more likely to express these grievances than are women.

These patterns are more complicated than they first appear, however, because they are not always consistent across regions, or – within each region – across the three different questions (respect, influence and federal spending).

- The relationship with **age** is the most consistent: in almost every province (the exceptions being New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island), younger residents are much less likely than their older counterparts to feel their province is treated unfairly. In the North, however, views on whether one's territory is treated fairly do not vary with age.
- In most parts of the country, first-generation **immigrants** are, not surprisingly, less likely to feel their province or territory is treated unfairly. Ontario and B.C. offer partial exceptions: in those two provinces, where the sense of grievance is generally less pronounced, differences in outlook between those born in or outside of Canada are less visible.
- The overall relationship between **educational attainment** and feelings of unfair treatment is heavily influenced by Central Canada, where this relationship is strongest

across all three questions. The relationship is weaker and less consistent in Atlantic Canada, the Prairies and B.C.

- The relationship with **gender** is the most variable. Overall, men are more likely to express a sense of regional grievance than are women, but when looked at more closely, this pattern only really holds in the three largest provinces (Ontario, Quebec and B.C.). There is no strong relationship between these sentiments and gender in the Prairies or the Maritimes; in Newfoundland and Labrador, women are slightly more likely than men to feel their province is not treated fairly. The comparison between Alberta and B.C. is especially interesting. While Albertans are 28 points more likely than their neighbours across the Rockies to say their province is not treated with the respect it deserves, this gap in opinions is much smaller among men (18 points) than among women (36 points).

# Fairness in the federation

Canadians are more than twice as likely to say that the current federal government favours one province over the others than they are to say that it treats all provinces in Canada equally. Overwhelmingly, most of those who say the federal government favours one province over others identify one of the two central Canadian provinces as the one that is favoured.

## Does the federal government treat all provinces in Canada equally?

Currently, a little more than one in two Canadians (56%) say that the current federal government favours one province over the others. This is more than twice the proportion that says that the current federal government treats all provinces in Canada equally (24%). One in five (20%) offer no opinion either way.

In no jurisdiction do more than three in ten say the current federal government treats all provinces in Canada equally.

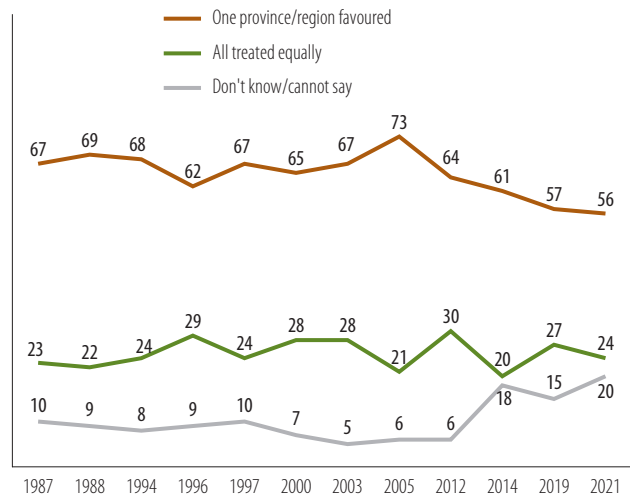
There has been little change since 2019, the last time this question was asked in a Confederation of Tomorrow survey. However, a comparison with earlier surveys shows a steady decline since 2005 in the proportion saying that the federal government favours one province over the others. In 2005, almost three in four (73%) held this view; since then, this proportion has declined by 17 points. The proportion saying that the provinces are treated equally, however, has not risen; instead, there has been a rise in the proportion offering no opinion. This is likely an effect of the change of the survey method, from telephone to online.<sup>1</sup>

The decline in the proportion saying that the federal government favours one province varies across the country. It has dropped by about 20 points in each the three largest provinces, compared to drop of about 10 points in Atlantic Canada and the Prairies.

In almost every survey in which this question has been asked since 1987, Albertans have been much more likely than Quebecers to say that the federal government of the

## Are provinces treated equally?

1987 - 2021

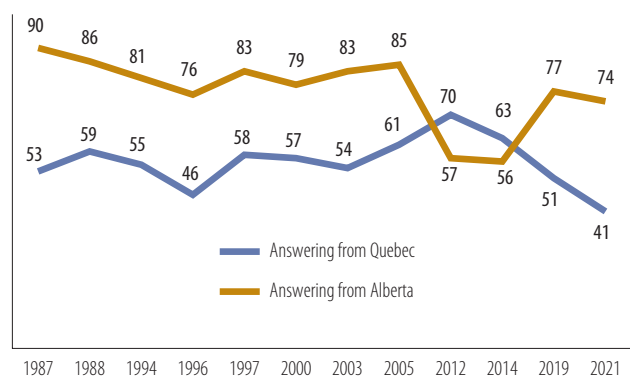


Q.11

Does the current federal government treat all provinces in Canada equally, or does it favour one province over the others?

## Federal government favours one province over others

1987 - 2021 Views in Quebec and Alberta



Q.11.

Does the current federal government treat all provinces in Canada equally, or does it favour one province over the others?

day favoured one province over the others. The exceptions are the surveys of 2012 and 2014, during which the federal government was headed by an Albertan (Stephen Harper).

<sup>1</sup> "Don't know" responses tend to be less common on telephone surveys, because this option is not prompted by the interviewer.

## Which province is favoured?

Those who say that the federal government favours one province over another were asked to indicate which province or territory is favoured (only one answer from the list of 13 jurisdictions was permitted).

- Overwhelmingly, most Canadians feel that one of the two central Canadian provinces is favoured, with 42 percent selecting Ontario and 41 percent selecting Quebec. Much less frequently mentioned are Alberta (8%) and B.C. (3%). No other province or territory is mentioned by more than one percent of Canadians who feel that the federal government favours one jurisdiction over the others.
- In 11 of 13 jurisdictions, residents are most likely to name either Ontario or Quebec as the favoured jurisdiction. The exceptions are Quebec, where the two jurisdictions most likely to be seen as favoured are Ontario (55%) and Alberta (20%); and Nunavut, where the two jurisdictions

most likely to be seen as favoured are Ontario (36%) and Nunavut itself (33%).

- Ontario joins Nunavut as the only other jurisdiction in which a significant proportion of residents cite their own province or territory as the most likely to be favoured by the federal government; in Ontario, 33 percent of those who say one jurisdiction is favoured name their own province.

There has been little change in opinion on this question since 2019. The proportion mentioning either of the two central Canadian provinces as most favoured has increased slightly, from 75 percent to 83 percent, while the proportion mentioning Alberta has dipped slightly, from 12 percent to eight percent. The drop in mentions of Alberta as being the most favoured is most notable in Quebec (from 32% in 2019, to 20% in 2021).

**Table 1: Which province is favoured over others? (2019 - 2021)**

(Question asked only to those who say that the current federal government favours one province over the others)

<b>Province responding</b>	<b>Survey year</b>	<b>Most frequent mention</b>	<b>2nd most frequent mention</b>	<b>3rd most frequent mention</b>
NL	2019	Quebec (54%)	Ontario (24%)	Alberta (11%)
	2021	Quebec (42%)	Ontario (39%)	Alberta (11%)
PE	2019	Ontario (52%)	Quebec (23%)	Alberta (13%)
	2021	Ontario (54%)	Quebec (29%)	Alberta (15%)
NS	2019	Ontario (51%)	Quebec (25%)	Alberta (12%)
	2021	Ontario (53%)	Quebec (28%)	Alberta (12%)
NB	2019	Ontario (38%)	Quebec (29%)	Alberta (17%)
	2021	Quebec (38%)	Ontario (35%)	Alberta (14%)
QC	2019	Ontario (50%)	Alberta (32%)	Quebec (5%)
	2021	Ontario (55%)	Alberta (20%)	Quebec (12%)
ON	2019	Quebec (49%)	Ontario (25%)	B.C. (8%)
	2021	Quebec (51%)	Ontario (33%)	Alberta (6%)
MB	2019	Ontario (51%)	Quebec (32%)	B.C. (6%)
	2021	Ontario (50%)	Quebec (37%)	B.C. (5%)
SK	2019	Quebec (53%)	Ontario (39%)	B.C. (3%)
	2021	Ontario (50%)	Quebec (45%)	Saskatchewan (2%)
AB	2019	Quebec (56%)	Ontario (35%)	Alberta (5%)
	2021	Quebec (55%)	Ontario (37%)	Alberta (4%)
BC	2019	Quebec (43%)	Ontario (42%)	B.C. (6%)
	2021	Ontario (47%)	Quebec (39%)	Alberta (6%)
YK	2019	Quebec (42%)	Ontario (41%)	B.C. (5%)
	2021	Quebec (36%)	Ontario (26%)	Alberta (12%)
NT	2019	Ontario (39%)	Quebec (24%)	Alberta (12%)
	2021	Ontario (52%)	Quebec (16%)	NWT (12%)
NU	2019	Ontario (47%)	Quebec (10%)	Nunavut (11%)
	2021	Ontario (36%)	Nunavut (33%)	Quebec (13%)

Q.12

*Which one province or territory do you feel is favoured the most over the others?*

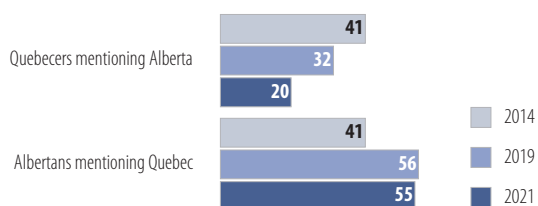
Changes are more noticeable when the current results are compared to those from 2014 – prior to the change in federal government that resulted from the 2015 election.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, among those saying the federal government favours one province over the others, Alberta was more likely than Quebec to be identified as the favoured province. Today, the reverse is true.

- Since 2014, the proportion naming Quebec as the favoured province has increased from 24 percent to 41 percent (excluding responses from Quebec, the proportion increased from 27% to 47%).
- By contrast, since 2014, the proportion mentioning Alberta declined from 27 percent to eight percent (among Quebecers, the proportion mentioning Alberta declined from 41% to 20%). Note that, in both 2014 and 2021, Ontario remained the province most likely to be seen as favoured.

The switch in federal government from one led by a Conservative Albertan (Stephen Harper) to one led by a Liberal Quebecer (Justin Trudeau) thus appears to have affected both the proportion of Canadians in each province who feel that one province is favoured by Ottawa (as shown previously), and the sense of which specific province is favoured.

## Which province is favoured?

2014 - 2021 Among those who say one province is favoured over others



Q.12

Which one province or territory is favoured the most over the others?

<sup>2</sup> Changes in opinion over a longer period of time are more difficult to gauge because of the change in survey format from telephone to online. Prior to 2014, the question was open-ended, meaning that survey participants could answer in their own words. While some mentioned specific provinces, others named regions, such as Central Canada or the West. From 2014 onwards, survey participants were presented with a list of provinces, and asked to choose one. This means that the answers from these earlier surveys are not directly comparable to the most recent ones.



## Generational change and other differences

As was the case in 2019, there is a remarkable difference in opinion among age groups in the 2021 survey. Among those outside of Quebec, younger Canadians (roughly those under the age of 40) are much more likely than older Canadians to say that Ontario is favoured over other provinces by the federal government. Older Canadians (roughly those age 50 and older) are much more likely to say that Quebec is favoured.

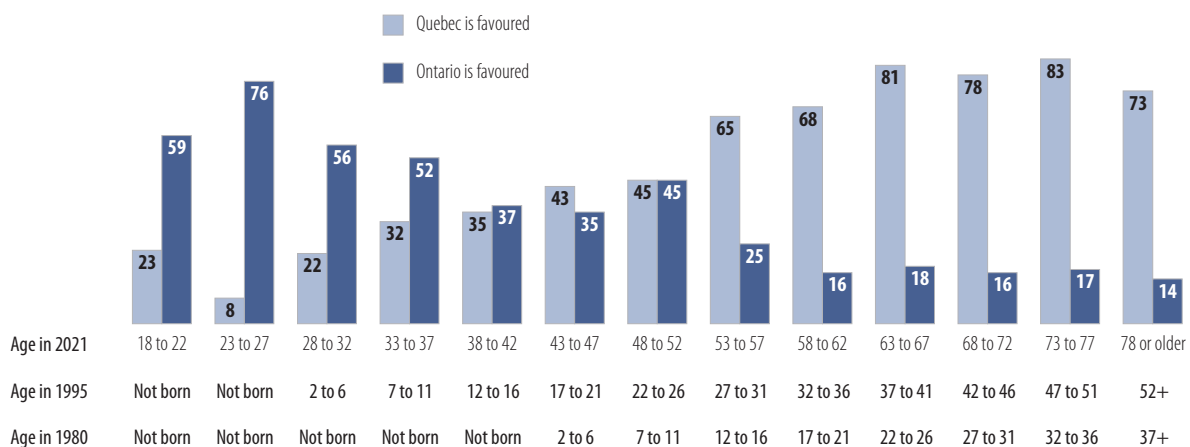
It is possible that this pattern is a lingering effect of the Constitutional debates of the 1980s and 1990s, marked in part by the first and second Quebec referendums on sovereignty in 1980 and 1995, respectively. Canadians who were either not born, or who were children at the time of the 1995 referendum, are more likely to say that Ontario is favoured. Canadians who were adults at the time of the 1995 referendum, and at least teenagers at the time of the 1980 referendum, are more likely to say that Quebec is favoured. The focus on Quebec’s constitutional status in these earlier decades may have created a lasting impression in the minds of those old enough to remember.

Views on the question of which province is favoured by Ottawa also vary according to several other factors. Looking only at those living outside of Quebec:

- **Political ideology.** Those who place themselves on the right of the political spectrum are more likely to say that Quebec is favoured (59%) than to say that it is Ontario (30%). Conversely, those who place themselves on the left are more likely to say that Ontario is favoured (53%) than to say that it is Quebec (30%).
- **Regional grievance.** Those who say their own province is not treated with the respect it deserves are more likely to say that Quebec is favoured (54%) than to say that it is Ontario (33%). Conversely, those who say their own province is respected are more likely to say that Ontario is favoured (45%) than to say that it is Quebec (39%).
- **Gender.** Men are more likely to say that Quebec is favoured (59%) than to say that it is Ontario (29%). Conversely, women are more likely to say that Ontario is favoured (49%) than to say that it is Quebec (34%).

### Which province is favoured?

2021 Excluding Quebec, by age, among those who say one province is favoured over others



Q.12

Which one province or territory is favoured the most over the others?

# Support for equalization

Despite recent criticisms, a majority of Canadians continue to support the equalization program, with little change over the past two years. The program is supported by majorities in every province. But, while there has been little change in overall support since 2019, support for equalization has grown in Alberta, and to a lesser extent in neighbouring Saskatchewan.

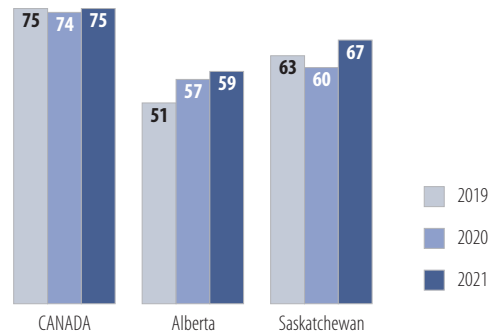
In recent years, the country's equalization program has been singled out for criticism. Through the program, the federal government makes transfer payments to less well off provinces, to enable them to provide more or better public services than they could otherwise afford to do given their own revenue base. All Canadian individuals and businesses contribute to the program by paying taxes to the federal government, but only those living in recipient provinces (currently: the Maritime provinces, Quebec and Manitoba) benefit directly from equalization payments. The Government of Alberta, in particular, has argued that the program is unfair because it has paid no benefits to Alberta, despite the fact that the province's economy has stagnated since 2014 due to the slump in the oil and gas industry. The province will hold a plebiscite on October 18, 2021 to ask Albertans whether they agree that the commitment to the principle of equalization should be removed from the Canadian Constitution.

Despite this criticism, a majority of Canadians continue to support the equalization program, with little change over the past two years. In 2021, 75 percent of Canadians say they strongly (34%) or somewhat (41%) support equalization, compared to only 13 percent who somewhat (9%) or strongly (5%) oppose it (an additional 12% do not offer an opinion either way). The program is supported by majorities in every province.

While there has been little change overall since 2019, there has been some noticeable change in Alberta, and to a lesser extent in neighbouring Saskatchewan: in both those provinces, support for equalization has grown. While the proportion in favour of the equalization program is lower in Alberta than in any other province, it has nonetheless grown

## Support for equalization

2019 - 2021 Strongly or somewhat support



Q.17

*As you may know, under the federal equalization program, the federal government transfers money to the poorer provinces, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. How much do you support or oppose the equalization program?*

by eight points over the past two years (from 51% to 59%), while opposition has dropped 10 points (from 40% to 30%). The change is smaller in Saskatchewan (the proportion in favour is up 4 points compared to 2019, while opposition is down 7 points), but in the same direction.

Table 2: Opinions on the equalization program (2019-2021)

PROVINCE	OPINION	2019	2020	2021	PROVINCE	OPINION	2019	2020	2021
TOTAL (CANADA)	Support	75	74	75	Newfoundland and Labrador	Support	79	83	77
	Oppose	17	16	13		Oppose	11	10	9
Prince Edward Island	Support	76	85	86	Ontario <sup>3</sup>	Support	78	76	77
	Oppose	7	2	5		Oppose	15	15	12
Nova Scotia	Support	88	84	86	Saskatchewan	Support	63	60	67
	Oppose	7	7	4		Oppose	29	29	22
New Brunswick	Support	80	80	78	Alberta	Support	51	57	59
	Oppose	8	8	6		Oppose	40	34	30
Quebec	Support	80	77	78	British Columbia	Support	72	72	75
	Oppose	10	10	8		Oppose	17	18	15
Manitoba	Support	81	79	81	All non-recipient provinces	Support	72	72	73
	Oppose	9	12	10		Oppose	20	19	16
All recipient provinces	Support	81	78	79					
	Oppose	10	9	8					

Q.17

As you may know, under the federal equalization program, the federal government transfers money to the poorer provinces, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. How much do you support or oppose the equalization program?

<sup>3</sup> At the time of the January 2019 survey, Ontario was a recipient province (in the 2018-19 fiscal year), but was transitioning to a non-recipient province (in the 2019-20 fiscal year). It is included as a non-recipient province in all survey years in this table for the sake of consistency.

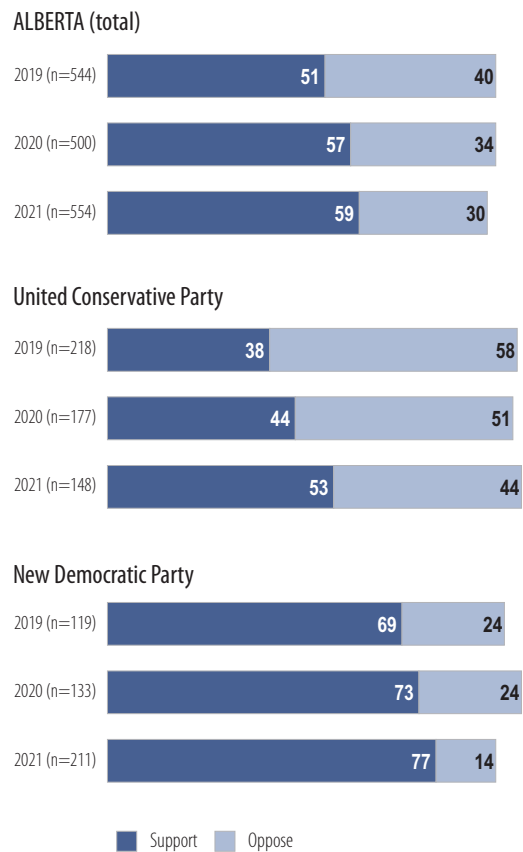
Notably, support for equalization in Alberta has grown among supporters of both the governing and opposition parties in the province.

- Among supporters of the opposition NDP, support is stronger and has grown, from 69 percent in 2019 to 77 percent in 2021.
- Among supporters of the governing UCP, support is less strong, but has grown more sharply, from 38 percent in 2019 to 53 percent in 2021.

Support for equalization has fallen over this period, however, among Albertans who support neither of the two main parties (who would vote for another party or who are undecided) – from 55 percent in 2019 to 47 percent in 2021.<sup>4</sup> Keeping in mind that support for the UCP has declined over this period, these results suggests it is those who are most opposed to equalization who have been more likely to shift their support from the UCP to a smaller party.<sup>5</sup>

## Support for equalization in Alberta

2019 - 2021 By provincial vote intention



Q.17

*As you may know, under the federal equalization program, the federal government transfers money to the poorer provinces, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. How much do you support or oppose the equalization program?*

<sup>4</sup> It is not possible to present results for supporters of each smaller party or for undecided voters separately, as sample sizes for these groups are too small.

<sup>5</sup> Support for the UCP fell from 40 percent in 2019 to 29 percent in 2021.

# Focus on the West

Two in five Westerners agree that their region gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own – a proportion that has edged upwards since last year. Only one in five Westerners currently agree that the centre of power is shifting away from Central Canada toward the West.

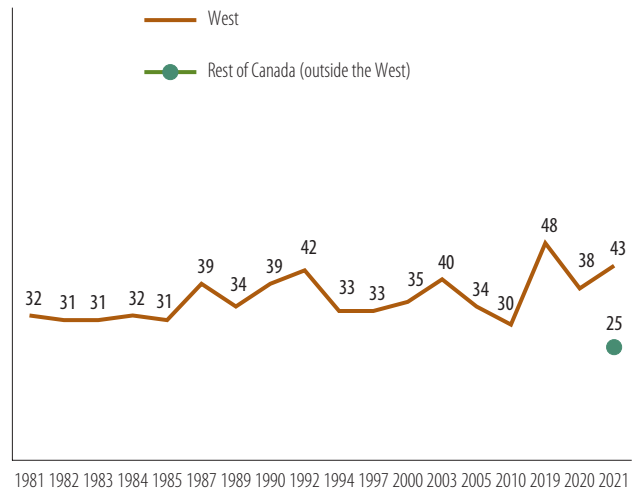
## Should the West “go it alone”?

In 2019, the Confederation of Tomorrow survey reported that discontent with the federation in the West had reached an all-time high.<sup>6</sup> This conclusion was based in part on the level of agreement with the proposition that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own.” In that year, almost one in two (48%) residents of Western Canada agreed, including majorities in both Alberta (56%) and Saskatchewan (53%).

The level of agreement with this statement dropped by 10 points in 2020, to 38 percent. The 2021 survey, however, finds that it has edged back up again, to 43 percent. Agreement has increased in each of the four western provinces: almost one in two in Alberta (45%) and Saskatchewan (47%) currently agree, as do almost two in five in Manitoba (40%) and B.C. (41%).

One way to put these current figures into perspective is to compare them to the results from 2010, when the federal government was led by a Conservative prime minister from Western Canada. Compared to 2010, agreement in 2021 that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own” is almost 20 points higher in each of the Prairie provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba). Only in B.C. has there been no real change over that period.

## Should the West go it on its own? 1987 - 2021 Strongly or somewhat agree



Q.22a

Agree/Disagree: Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own

<sup>6</sup> See: Environics Institute for Survey Research, *Canada: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?* (April 2019); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/confederation-of-tomorrow---2018>.

For the first time, the 2021 asked this question to all Canadians, and not just to residents of the West. One in four Canadians (25%) living outside of the West agree that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own.” Just over one in two (55%) disagree, and 20 percent do not offer an opinion. Agreement is higher in the North (37%) and lowest in Atlantic Canada (18%); 26 percent of Quebecers agree, as do 25 percent of Ontarians.

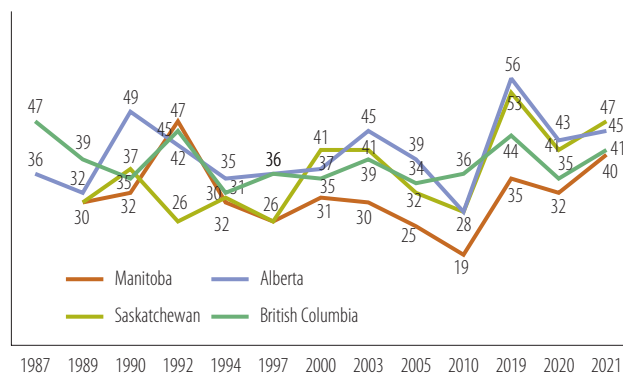
Outside the West, agreement with this notion does not vary that much between those who think their own province is treated with respect and those who do not – suggesting that discontent with one’s own province’s treatment does not necessarily lead to more support for Western independence. At the same time, within Quebec specifically, those who identify as “mainly sovereigntist” (40%) are twice as likely as other Quebecers (21%) to agree that the Westerners might as well go it on their own.

Within the West, agreement that the region might as well go it alone is higher among both those age 18 to 24 (53%) and those age 55 and over (46%), but lower among those between the ages of 25 and 54 (39%). It is also higher among those who did not continue their education past high school (49%) and lower among those with a university degree (36%). The responses of men (44%) and women (42%) are similar.

More important than these demographic factors, however, is political ideology. Agreement that “Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own” is much higher in the region among those who place themselves on the right of the political spectrum (66%), compared to those who place themselves in the centre (42%) or on the left (15%).<sup>7</sup>

## Should the West go it on its own?

1987 - 2021 Strongly or somewhat agree, four Western provinces



Q.22a

Agree/Disagree: Western Canada gets so few benefits from being part of Canada that they might as well go it on their own

<sup>7</sup> The survey asked: “In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the scale below?” The scale runs from zero (left) to 10 (right). Those who answer between zero and three are classified as being on the left, those who answer between four and six are classified as being in the centre, and those who answer between seven and 10 are classified as being on the right.

## Is power shifting toward the West?

The 2021 survey included a second question relating to Western Canada: both Westerners and other Canadians were asked whether they agree that “the centre of power is shifting away from Central Canada toward the West.” One in five Westerners (20%) currently agree with this statement, but three times as many (59%) disagree; an additional one in five (21%) do not express an opinion. Disagreement is highest in Alberta (68%) and Saskatchewan (63%), somewhat lower in B.C. (54%) and lowest in Manitoba (44%).

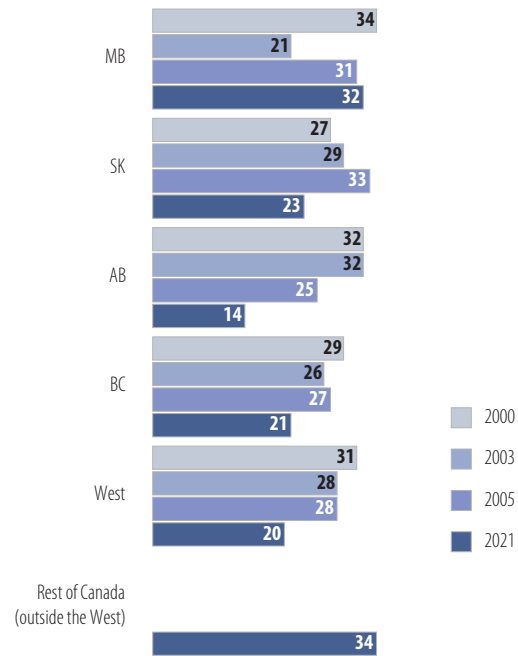
Non-Westerners are somewhat more likely than Westerners to agree that “the centre of power is shifting away from Central Canada toward the West”: one in three (34%) non-Westerners agree. A slightly higher proportion (38%) disagrees, and 29 percent do not express an opinion either way. That said, the notion that the centre of power is shifting away from Central Canada toward the West is a minority view both inside and outside the region.

This question was also asked in the West in the early 2000s. Over the past two decades, agreement with this statement within the region has declined: in 2000, 31 percent of Westerners agreed, in comparison to the 20 percent who feel the same way in 2021. The decline in agreement since 2000 is steepest in Alberta (down 18 points), and more modest in the other three provinces.

It is notable that the patterns of opinion among demographic groups within the West do not match those for the previous question on whether the West should go it alone. In the case of opinions about the country’s centre of power, there is less variation on the basis of educational attainment and ideology, and much more on the basis of age and gender. Among Westerners, men (67%) are more likely than women (52%) to disagree that “the centre of power is shifting away from Central Canada toward the West.” The difference among age groups is even more stark: Westerners age 55 and older (80%) are twice as likely as those under the age of 35 (39%) to disagree.

## Is the centre of power shifting from central Canada to the West?

2000 - 2021 Strongly or somewhat agree



Q.22e

Agree/Disagree: The centre of power is shifting away from Central Canada towards the West

# Focus on Quebec

One in two francophone Quebecers agree that Quebec sovereignty is an idea whose time has passed, but more than one in three disagree. The level of agreement has not changed noticeably over the past 20 years. But the sense among Quebec francophones that the French language in the province is threatened is much higher than 20 years ago, and is edging upwards.

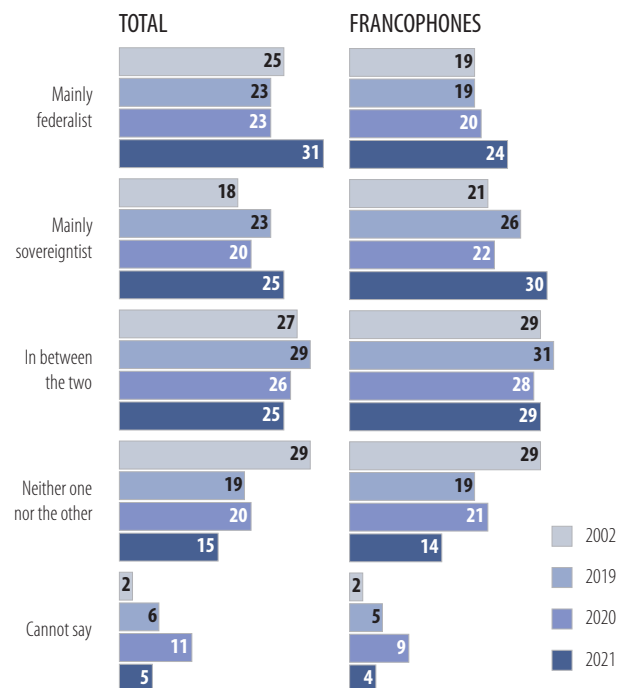
For many years, the debates within Quebec on the province's place in Canada created an impression of a society deeply divided between federalists and sovereigntists. Survey research revealed, however, that the extent of this division was somewhat exaggerated, as only a minority of Quebecers – and only a minority of francophones in the province particularly – identified with one side in the debate over the other. Quebecers were in fact more likely to identify with either a mix of both options, or with neither.

This pattern was confirmed by the Confederation of Tomorrow surveys in 2019 and 2020; both surveys showed that about one in two francophones in the province identified, not as federalist or sovereigntist, but either as being in between the two options, or as neither. The 2021 survey, however, shows a modest change, with slightly more Quebec francophones identifying as either mainly federalist (24%) or mainly sovereigntist (30%), and fewer identifying as neither (14%) (the proportion identifying as being in between the two is roughly unchanged, at 29%). The proportion “choosing sides” (whether federalist or sovereigntist) increased from 42 percent in 2020 to 54 percent in 2021. This suggests that opinions in Quebec on the question of sovereignty have polarized somewhat over the past year.

Currently, among Quebec francophones, the “mainly sovereigntist” identity holds more appeal for older compared to younger age cohorts, and for men compared to women. One in three (33%) Quebec francophones age 55 or older identify as mainly sovereigntist, compared to 21 percent of those under the age of 55; this identity is also preferred by 34 percent of men compared to 23 percent of women.

## Quebecers: mainly federalist, mainly sovereigntist, in between or neither?

2002 - 2021 Quebec

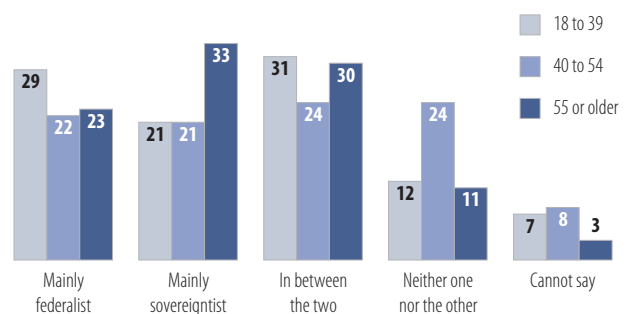


Q.29

Do you consider yourself to be mainly a federalist, mainly a sovereigntist, someone who is in between the two, or someone who is neither one nor the other?

## Quebecers: mainly federalist, mainly sovereigntist, in between or neither?

2021 Quebec francophones, by age group



Q.29

Do you consider yourself to be mainly a federalist, mainly a sovereigntist, someone who is in between the two, or someone who is neither one nor the other?



Francophone Quebecers under the age of 40 are more likely to say that they are mainly federalist (29%) than mainly sovereigntist (21%), but even among this group, the most favoured option is “in between the two” (31%).

There has been less change in opinion on the related question of whether Quebec sovereignty is an idea whose time has passed. Currently, 59 percent of Quebecers (including 53% of francophone Quebecers) agree that this is the case, while 31 percent (including 36% of francophones) disagree. The level of agreement, particularly among francophones in the province, has not changed noticeably over the past 20 years. The level of disagreement has edged downward, while the proportion that do not express an opinion has increased – a trend that is likely a result of the switch from telephone to online surveys.<sup>8</sup>

As is the case with the previous question, opinions as to whether Quebec sovereignty is an idea whose time has passed vary by age and gender. Among francophones in Quebec, 39 percent of those age 55 and over disagree with this proposition, compared to 33 percent of those between the ages of 40 and 54, and 23 percent of those under the age of 40. Disagreement is also higher among men (43%) compared to women (28%).

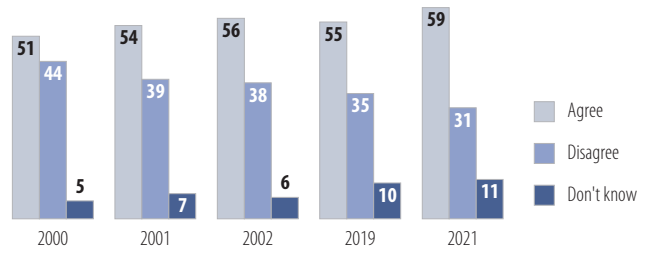
Support for Quebec’s autonomy within the Canadian federation, if not for sovereignty itself, is strongly related to concerns about the security of the French language in the province. The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys show that, among Quebec francophones, the sense that the French language in the province is threatened continues to be much higher than 20 years ago, and is edging upwards. Currently, three in four (75%) Quebec francophones agree that the French language is threatened in Quebec – the highest level of concern yet recorded; only 20 percent disagree.

As is the case with favourable opinions on sovereignty, among Quebec francophones, concerns about the security of the French language increase with age. In this case, however, there is no difference in opinion between men and women.

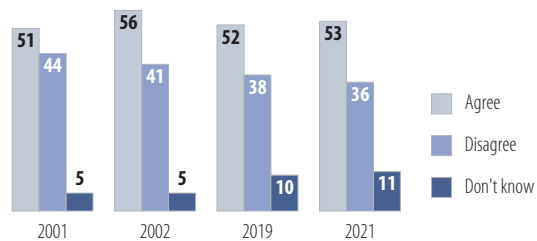
## Is Quebec sovereignty is an idea whose time has passed?

2000 - 2021 Quebec

TOTAL



FRANCOPHONES (2001 - 2021)

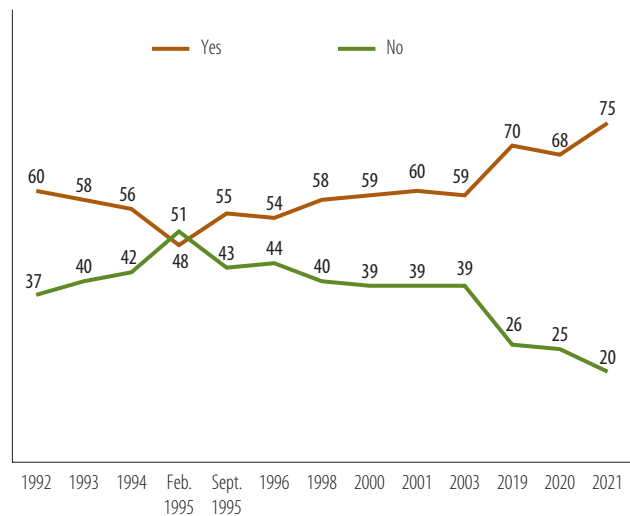


Q.30

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: “Quebec sovereignty is an idea whose time has passed”?

## Is the French language in Quebec threatened?

1992 - 2021 Quebec Francophones



Q.6a

In your opinion, is the French language in Quebec threatened or not?

Sources: Data from 1992 to 1996 is provided by Maurice Pinard; data from 1998 to 2003 is from CRIC; data from 2019 to 2021 is from the Confederation of Tomorrow surveys.

<sup>8</sup> Telephone surveys typically elicit fewer “don’t know” responses, in large part because this response is not prompted by the interviewer.

Some insight into the dynamics of Quebec politics can be gained by exploring how the identification with federalism or sovereigntist varies among supporters of the different political parties.

Not surprisingly, most supporters of the federal and provincial Liberal parties identify as mainly federalist, while supporters of both the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois identify as mainly sovereigntist. But supporters of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), which currently forms the government in the province, are more divided: 28 percent say they are mainly federalist, 24 percent say they are mainly sovereigntist, 33 percent say they are in between the two, and 11 percent they are neither (among the party's francophone supporters, the figures are similar: 25%, 26%, 34% and 11%, respectively). It is striking that the distribution of opinions among CAQ supporters is much closer to that for the province as a whole than is the case for either the Liberals, or for the PQ or BQ.

Supporters of the federal Conservative Party resemble CAQ supporters somewhat, in that neither of the two options attracts majority support. Among that party's supporters in the province, 42 percent identify as mainly federalist, 18 percent as mainly sovereigntist, 24 percent as in between the two, and 14 percent as neither. Among the party's francophone supporters in the province, identities are even more evenly divided: 34 percent, 21 percent, 27 percent and 15 percent, respectively. This suggests that the Conservative Party occupies a place in Quebec politics that is similar to that of the CAQ – appealing to those who do not gravitate as strongly to one pole or the other of the federalist-sovereigntist divide.

This position creates both opportunities for the Conservative Party in Quebec, and the potential for tensions internally within the party at the national level. For instance, while supporters of the federal Liberal Party inside and outside Quebec are equally likely to feel attached to Canada, this is not the case for supporters of the Conservative Party: its Quebec supporters feel less strongly attached to Canada compared to its supporters in the rest of the country. One in five (21%) Conservative supporters in Quebec do not feel attached to Canada, compared to one in ten (11%) of those outside Quebec.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The NDP also appears to face the same type of difference between its supporters inside and outside of Quebec, but the survey sample of NDP supporters in Quebec is too small to support reaching this conclusion with confidence.

# Support for Independence

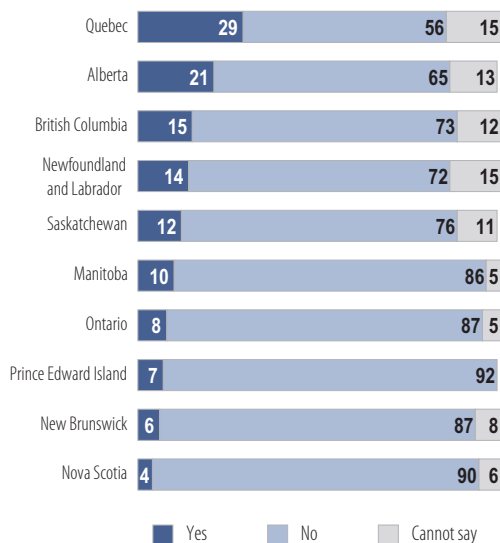
More than one in four Quebecers say their province should separate from Canada and form an independent country, as do one in five Albertans. The 2021 figure for Quebec is slightly higher than in the early 2000s, while in Alberta there has been little change.

One measure of the extreme dissatisfaction with the Canadian federation is the extent of support for independence for one's province. This option has been part of mainstream political debate in Quebec for 50 years, even if strict independence (as opposed to sovereignty-association) has typically attracted the support of only a minority in the province. In the rest of Canada, the option of independence has generally been much more marginal, although it is currently being championed in Alberta by the newly formed Wildrose Independence Party.

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2021 survey asked Canadians in all provinces whether they thought their province should separate from Canada and form an independent country. The proportion supporting independence ranges from a low of four percent in Nova Scotia to a high of 29 percent in Quebec.

The figure in Quebec is lower than what would have been seen at the height of the constitutional crises of the early 1990s and the lead-up to the 1995 referendum, but somewhat higher (especially among francophones) than was recorded in the early 2000s (though the survey questions are not exactly comparable). In 2001, for instance, the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC) found that 25 percent of Quebecers, including 29 percent of Quebec francophones, said they would vote "yes" if a referendum was held asking whether Quebec should become a completely independent country. The 2021 Confederation of Tomorrow survey finds that 29 percent of Quebecers, including 36 percent of Quebec francophones, say that their province should separate from Canada and form an independent country.

Should your province separate from Canada?  
2021



Q.21  
Should [name of province] separate from Canada and form an independent country?

Outside Quebec, 12 percent support independence for their province, while 81 percent are opposed and eight percent do not offer an opinion either way. Support for independence is lowest in the Maritime provinces (5%) and Ontario (8%); matches or edges above the 10-percent mark in Manitoba (10%) and Saskatchewan (12%); and is highest in Newfoundland and Labrador (14%), B.C. (15%) and Alberta (21%).

A Focus Canada survey conducted in 2003 found a broadly similar pattern, although again the survey question was somewhat different: at that time, the proportion favourable to their province becoming an independent country was also very low in Atlantic Canada and Ontario, but somewhat higher in B.C. and Alberta. The main difference between the two surveys is that, in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the proportion favourable to independence has increased from fewer than five percent to around 10 percent. The proportions favouring independence for their province in 2003 in B.C. (12%) and Alberta (23%) are similar to those recorded in the 2021 survey.

Across the West as a whole, 16 percent say their province should separate from Canada and form an independent country, which is similar to the 14 percent who favoured independence for their province in 2003.

In each of the four western provinces, men are more likely to favour independence than women (in the region as a whole, 20% of men and 12% of women say their province should separate). Older residents are also more likely than their younger counterparts to favour independence in each of the three Prairie provinces, but not in B.C. In the Prairies, provincial independence is supported by 21 percent of those age 55 and over, compared to 14 percent of those under

the age of 35; in B.C., fewer of those age 55 plus support provincial independence, but the option is more popular among those under the age of 35 (27%). This means that younger residents in B.C. are about twice as likely as their younger counterparts in the Prairies to support this option.

Support for independence for one's province is also closely related to party preference. For instance, independence is favoured by 28 percent of UCP supporters in Alberta, compared to six percent who support the provincial NDP.<sup>10</sup> In B.C., independence is favoured by 26 percent of provincial Liberal Party supporters, compared to seven percent who support the provincial NDP.

Among francophones in Quebec, the gap between the opinions of men and women on this question is even bigger than in the West: 42 percent of francophone men in Quebec support independence, compared to only 27 percent of francophone women. The independence option is also more likely to be supported by Quebec francophones age 55 and over (38%) than by those under the age 35 (21%).

Finally, not surprisingly, support for Quebec independence is strongly related to party preference: among francophones, four in five (81%) supporters of the Parti Québécois are in favour, while a similar proportion of Quebec Liberal Party supporters (86%) are against. Notably, however, supporters of the governing Coalition Avenir Québec are more evenly divided: 32 percent say that Quebec should separate from Canada and form an independent country, while 49 percent disagree and 18 percent do not take sides. This pattern closely matches views of the francophones in the province as a whole, where 36 percent think Quebec should separate, 48 percent disagree, and 16 do not offer an opinion either way.

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<sup>10</sup> Support for independence appears to be higher among supporters of smaller parties, such as the Wildrose Independence Party in Alberta, but the sample sizes are too small to allow results to be reported with confidence.

# Trust in federal and provincial governments

Despite the economic shock triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been little change overall to Canadians' views on how the economy should be managed within the federation. Saskatchewan and Alberta are exceptions; in those provinces, the proportions trusting the federal government more to promote economic growth and create jobs have increased significantly.

The unusual circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to disrupt how Canadians see the roles of their federal, provincial and municipal governments. Each of these stood both to gain or lose the support of citizens, depending on perceptions of the effectiveness of their respective responses to the crisis.

## Which government best represents your interests?

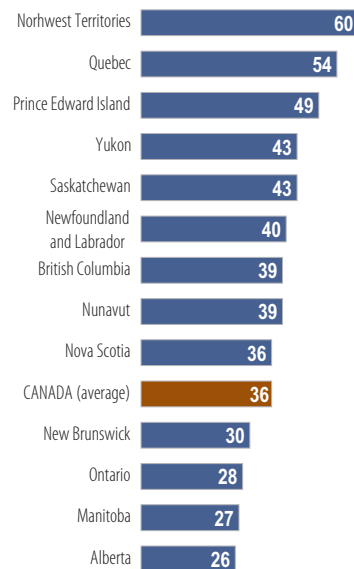
When it comes to the question of which government is seen as best representing Canadians' interests, there have been only minor changes since the pandemic.

Canadians continue to be much more likely to say that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests: 36 percent take this view in 2021, up five points from 2020. This is now more than double the proportion that says they are best represented by either the federal (15%) or their municipal government (13%).<sup>11</sup> Canadians are actually more likely to say that no government best represents their interests (22%) than they are to say that it is either the federal or their municipal government. An additional 12 percent do not offer an opinion.

The fact that Canadians are more likely to say their provincial or territorial government, and not their federal or municipal governments, best represents their interests is hardly surprising. The very purpose of federalism is to ensure that many of the core services that affect people's daily lives are

## Which government best represents your interests?

2021 Provincial/territorial government



Q.15

Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

delivered by a government that has substantial autonomy in its areas of jurisdiction, but which remains closer to them than the national government. In that context, it is the not the overall results to the question, but the variations in opinions across jurisdictions and over time that are most revealing.

<sup>11</sup> Indigenous Peoples were asked a question that included the option of saying their Indigenous government best represents their interests. The results of this version of the question are reported in Environics Institute for Survey Research, *Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation* (June 2021); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/indigenous-relations-and-reconciliation>.

In 12 of 13 provinces and territories, a plurality of residents say that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests. The exception is Alberta, where residents are slightly more likely to say that no government best represents their interests (31%) than they are to say that their provincial government does (26%). Among the other 12 jurisdictions, the proportion saying their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests ranges from highs of 60 percent in the Northwest Territories and 54 percent in Quebec, to lows of 28 percent in Ontario and 27 percent in Manitoba. In no jurisdiction do more than one in five residents say that the federal government best represents their interests.

Another way to present the results is to look at the gap between the proportion that says that their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests, and the proportion that chooses the next most popular answer (indicating the extent of the provincial or territorial government's lead over the others). This gap is much higher than average in the Northwest Territories, Quebec and Prince Edward Island, and just a little above average in Yukon and Saskatchewan. It is much smaller than average in Ontario and Manitoba. In Ontario, Manitoba, and – for the reason mentioned earlier – Alberta, there is much less of a shared view about which government is best at representing residents' interests.

It is also notable that the opinions expressed in this question mirror those on a different question about the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, which were reported in an earlier report in this series.<sup>12</sup> The three jurisdictions where residents are most likely to say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests (Northwest Territories, Quebec and Prince Edward Island) are also among those with the highest proportions saying they trust their provincial or territorial government more to manage the pandemic. Conversely, the three jurisdictions where residents are least likely to say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests (Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta) are also the ones with the lowest proportions saying they trust their provincial or territorial government more to manage the pandemic.

In terms of changes over time, the modest five-point increase since 2020 in the proportion of Canadians who say their provincial or territorial government best represents their interests is distributed unevenly across the country. There are much more significant increases in the Northwest Territories (up 29 points), PEI (up 19 points) and New Brunswick (up 19 points). Increases in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, B.C. and Yukon are smaller and mirror the national average. In four jurisdictions, the trend goes the other way: residents of Nunavut (down 3 points), Manitoba (down 4 points), Saskatchewan (down 4 points) and Alberta (down 5 points) are all slightly less likely to say it is their provincial or territorial government that best represents their interests.

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<sup>12</sup> See: Environics Institute for Survey Research, *The Role of Governments and the Division of Powers: Federalism in the Context of a Pandemic* (April 2021); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/the-role-of-governments-and-the-division-of-powers-federalism-in-the-context-of-a-pandemic>.

## Managing the economy<sup>13</sup>

While the shutdowns initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic triggered one of the biggest economic shocks in Canada's history, it did not upset Canadians' views on how the economy should be managed within the federation. On the question of which government is more trusted to make the right decisions in promoting economic growth and job creation, opinions remain fairly divided. One in three (32%) trust both the federal and their provincial or territorial government equally; almost as many (31%) trust their provincial or territorial government more; and fewer trust the federal government more (18%); while 12 percent trust neither government and seven percent do not offer an opinion.

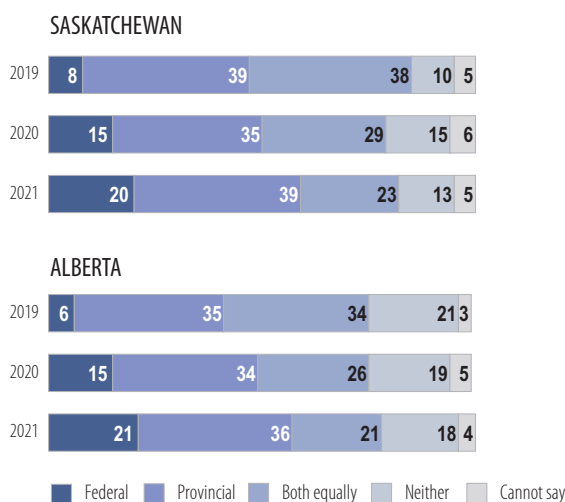
There has been very little overall change, either since last year or since 2019, but there are exceptions within individual jurisdictions. The most notable of these are Saskatchewan and Alberta. In both provinces, the proportions trusting the federal government more to promote economic growth and create jobs have increased significantly (up 12 points since 2019 in Saskatchewan, and 15 points in Alberta). Residents of these two provinces continue to be more likely to trust their provincial government more in this area, but the gap between the proportion that trust their provincial government more and that trusting the federal government more has declined significantly (from 31 points to 19 points in Saskatchewan, and from 29 points to 15 points in Alberta).

The shift in trust toward the federal government in these provinces has not come at the expense of trust in the provincial government, which has remained stable; rather it is the proportion that trust both the federal and the provincial government equally that has declined.

The other region in which significant change has occurred is the North: in the three territories, the proportion trusting their territorial government more to promote economic growth and create jobs has declined by 26 points since 2019, while the proportion trusting both the federal and their territorial government equally has increased by 23 points.

## Which government is trusted more to promote economic growth and create jobs?

2019 - 2021



Q.25b

Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas: promoting economic growth and job creation?

In the North, and in Alberta and Saskatchewan, however, the changes have unfolded since 2019, and not only in the past year – indicating that they are related to factors that go beyond the onset of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>13</sup> Questions related to which government is trusted more to manage health systems, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and energy resources were previously reported in: Environics Institute, *The Role of Governments and the Division of Powers*; and in Environics Institute for Survey Research, *Addressing Climate Change in the Canadian Federation* (June 2021); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/addressing-climate-change-in-the-canadian-federation>.

# Attitudes toward federalism

Views on the advantages of federalism and on Canadians' ability to resolve their differences have changed very little, if at all, since 2019. Immigrants, racialized Canadians and allophones are among those most likely to agree that a federal system of government is the best one for a country like Canada that is made up of different peoples and nations.

## The advantages of federalism

A year ago, the 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey found that, for the first time, agreement with the proposition that Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for one's province or territory had fallen below the 50 percent mark. This change was accompanied, not by a rise in disagreement, but rather by an increase the proportion opting not to express an opinion either way.

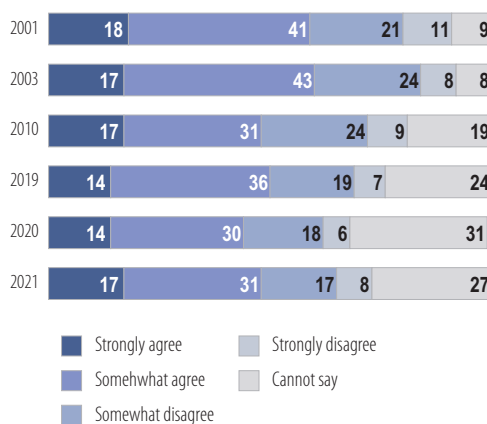
Soon after the 2020 survey was conducted, the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in Canada. Views among commentators differed as to whether the country's federal structure helped or hindered its response. While some pointed to the ability of each province or territory to implement public health measures tailored to its particular situation, with Ottawa using its spending power to distribute emergency benefits, others criticized as confusing the differences in restrictions across the country, and found the response in some parts of the country too weak.

This experience, however, does not seem to have significantly changed Canadians' opinions on the advantages of federalism. The proportion agreeing that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their province or territory is up very slightly, from 45 percent in 2020 to 48 percent in 2021; slightly fewer (27%, compared to 31% in 2020) now decline to offer an opinion. But, overall, responses to this question are similar to those seen in both 2020 and 2019.

The increase in agreement since last year is highest in Saskatchewan (up 11 points) and Quebec (up 8 points). In the North, however, there has been a significant 20-point drop in agreement.

## Does Canadian federalism have more advantages than disadvantages for province/territory?

2001 - 2021



Q.22d

Agree/Disagree: Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for [PROVINCE / TERRITORY]

It is notable that opinions on the advantages of federalism do not vary widely across the country, despite the wide variation in opinions on other questions related to how one's jurisdiction is treated within the federation. Agreement that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages ranges from a high of 53 percent in Ontario (5 points above the national average) to a low of 40 percent in Alberta (8 points below average) – for an overall range of 13 points. By comparison, the view that one's province is treated with the respect it deserves in Canada ranges from a high of 65 percent in Ontario (16 points above average) to a low of 25 percent in Newfoundland and Labrador (24 points below average) – for an overall range of 40 points. This suggests that, for some Canadians, their discontent with how federalism is working for their province does not necessarily translate into a rejection of the idea of federalism itself. That said, it remains the case that, in only one of the federation's 13 jurisdictions (Ontario) does majority agree that, from their province's point of view, Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages.



## Is a federal system the best one for Canada?

There has also been considerable stability in opinions on the question of whether a federal system of government is the best one for Canada, because we are a country made up of different peoples and nations. In 2021, 69 percent of Canadians agree that it is the best system for the country for this reason, virtually unchanged from 2020 (67%) or 2019 (71%). Agreement in 2021 ranges from lows of 56 percent in Nunavut and 62 percent in Quebec and Alberta, to highs of 73 percent in Nova Scotia and 74 percent in Ontario and PEI.

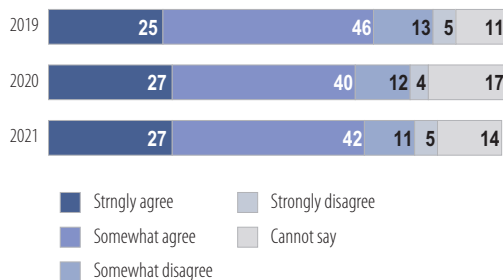
## Resolving our differences

A similar stability in opinion is evident on the question of whether Canadians will be able to resolve their internal differences. Currently, 15 percent of Canadians have a great deal of confidence in our capacity to resolve our internal differences, and 51 percent have some confidence, while 26 percent have little confidence and eight percent do not offer an opinion either way. Two-thirds (66%) have either a great deal or some confidence – exactly the same proportion as in 2019.

In 2021, the proportion with at least some confidence in our capacity to resolve our internal differences is highest in Yukon (77%), PEI (72%) and Ontario (71%). It is lowest in Quebec (61%), Alberta (60%), Nunavut (59%) and Saskatchewan (56%).

## Is a federal system the best one for Canada?

2019 - 2021

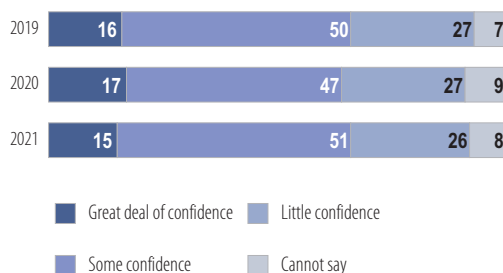


Q.22f

Agree/Disagree: A federal system of government is the best one for Canada because we are a country made up of different peoples and nations

## Can Canadians resolve their internal differences?

2019 - 2021



Q.32

Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, some confidence or little confidence in the capacity or ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences?

## Federalism and Canadian diversity

Federalism, in principle, is a system of government designed to help balance diversity and unity: the communities that make up the federation can preserve their differences by exercising an important degree of autonomy while nonetheless agreeing to be governed together in certain areas through the federal state. But the federal system is designed to respond to a very specific kind of diversity: that of territorially-defined communities that take the form of provinces or states. Importantly, these territorial communities sometimes correspond to cultural or linguistic ones, such as in the case of Quebec. In these cases, the federal system also allows for the self-government of national minorities within a larger multi-national state.

Generally speaking, federalism is not designed specifically to accommodate forms of ethnic or cultural diversity that are not territorially-based: federalism and multiculturalism may overlap in spirit (each seeks to balance diversity and unity), but they are very different political principles. Multiculturalism relates to the expression of identities and the accommodation of differences, but, unlike federalism, not to self-government.

All this said, it is striking that, in Canada, federalism is more strongly supported by “new Canadians” – who are less likely than those who have been here for several generations

to be of either British or French background (the two peoples the Canadian federation was originally intended to accommodate). For instance, the proportion agreeing that “a federal system of government is the best one for Canada, because we are a country made up of different peoples and nations” is noticeably higher among first-generation immigrants (79%) compared to those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents (65%); among racialized Canadians (81%) compared to those who identify as white (66%); and among allophones (whose home language is neither English nor French) (85%) compared to anglophones (70%) or francophones (58%). The same pattern holds in the case of the questions about the advantages of Canadian federalism, or about our ability to resolve our internal differences.

These differences could be due simply to the enthusiasm of newer citizens to embrace the political ideology and system of their host country. But they may also be due to the fact that the promise of federalism – to allow for the preservation and promotion of differences within a larger political community – resonates in particular with immigrant, racialized and allophone Canadians, despite the fact that they do not form one of the federation’s territorially-defined units.

Table 3: Attitudes toward federalism (2021)

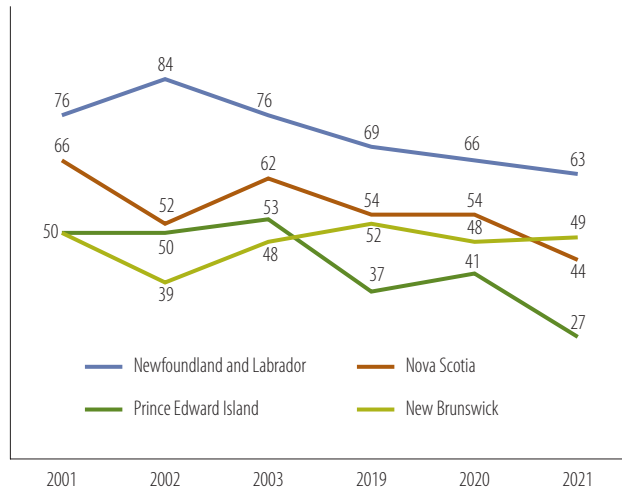
<b>Population group</b>	<b>Agree: Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for one's province</b>	<b>Agree: a federal system of government is the best one for Canada, because we are a country made up of different peoples and nations</b>	<b>Great deal or some confidence in the capacity or ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences</b>
CANADA (AVERAGE)	48	69	66
First-generation immigrants	56	79	74
Second-generation immigrants	49	70	67
Born in Canada to Canadian-born parents	45	65	63
Non-racialized	46	66	64
Racialized	56	81	77
Anglophone	48	70	67
Francophone	43	58	59
Allophone	62	85	76

# Appendix

## Supplemental regional charts

### Province is not treated with respect

2001 - 2021 Atlantic Canada

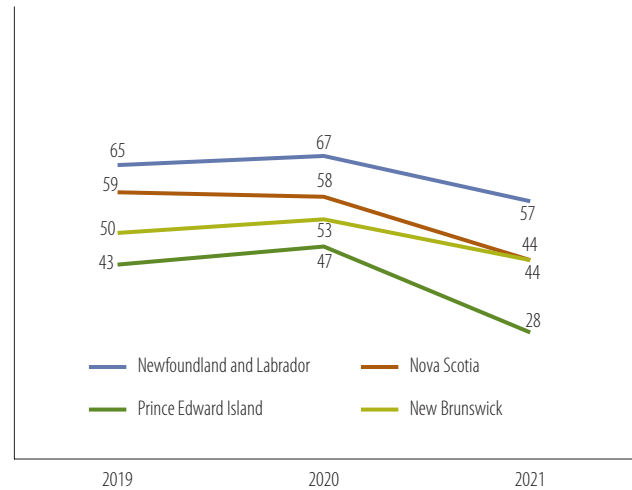


Q.9

In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

### Province receives less than its fair share of federal spending

2019 - 2021 Atlantic Canada

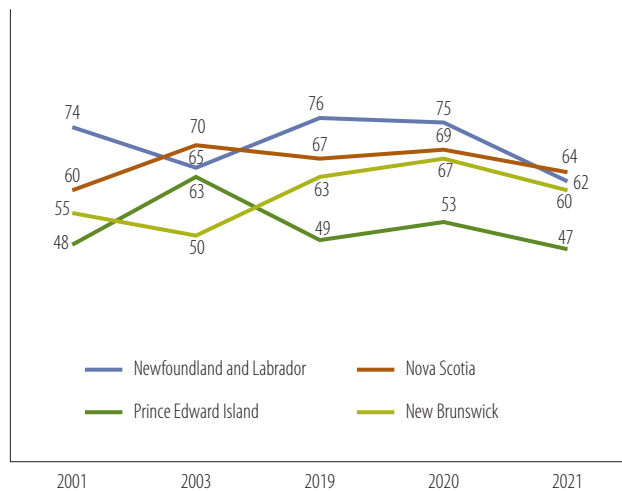


Q.13

Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives ... ?

### Province has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions

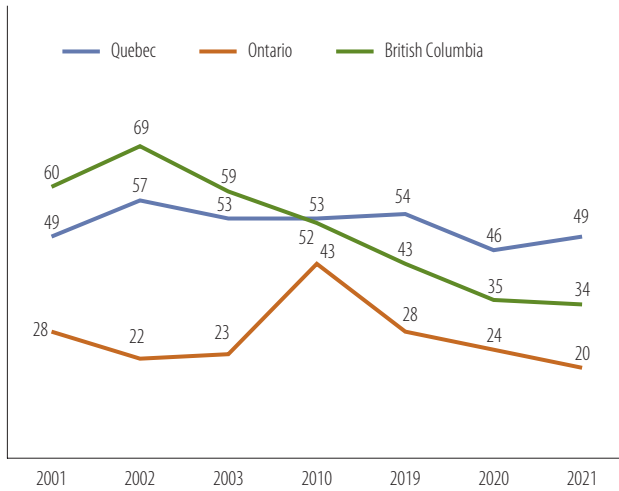
2001 - 2021 Atlantic Canada



Q.10

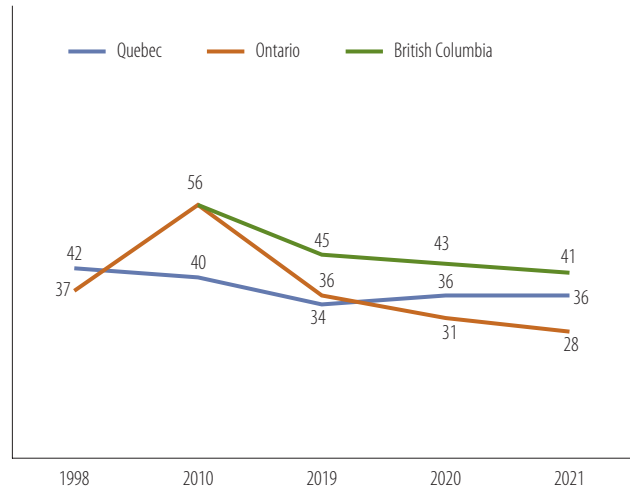
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

### Province is not treated with respect 2001 - 2021 Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia



Q.9  
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

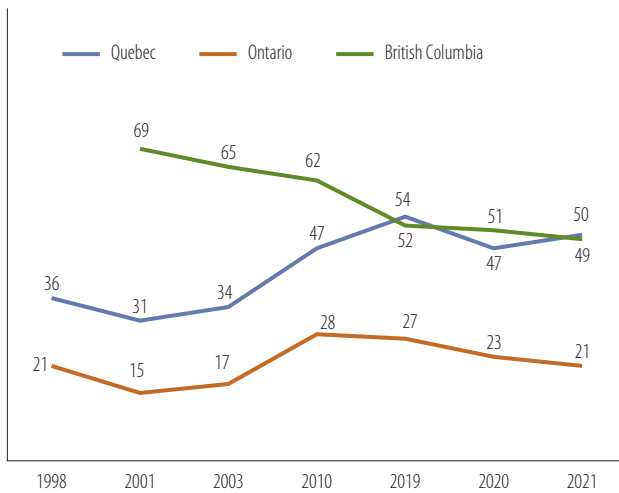
### Province receives less than its fair share of federal spending 1998 - 2021 Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia



Q.13  
Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives ... ?

### Province has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions

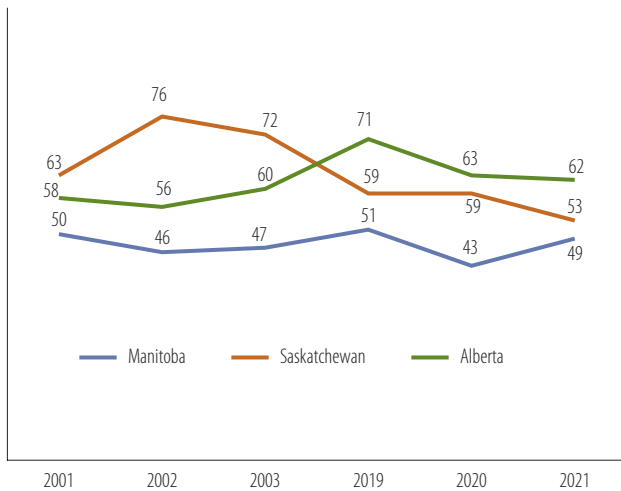
1998 - 2021 Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia



Q.10  
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

### Province is not treated with respect

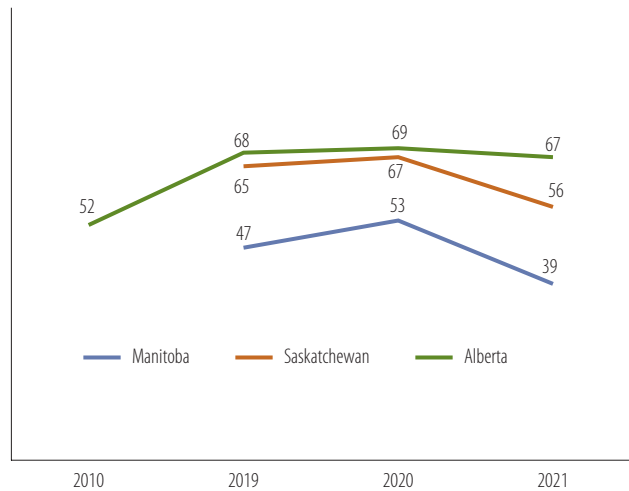
2001 - 2021 The Prairies



Q.9  
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

### Province receives less than its fair share of federal spending

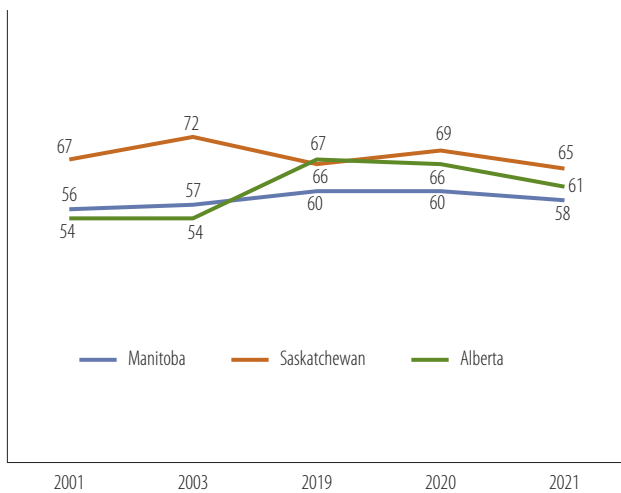
2010 - 2021 The Prairies



Q.13  
Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives ... ?

### Province has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions

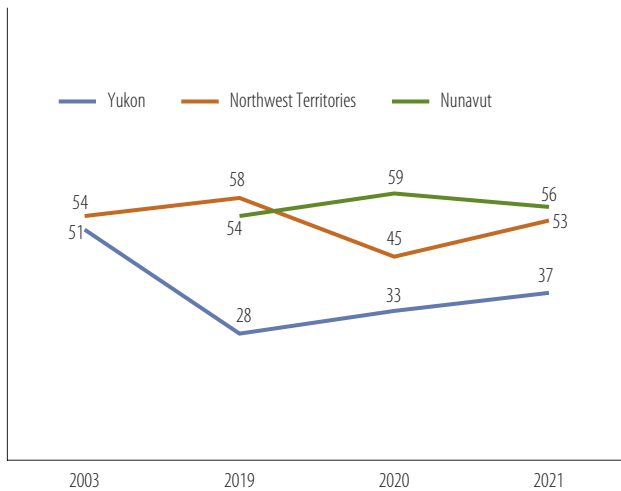
2001 - 2021 The Prairies



Q.10  
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?

### Territory is not treated with respect

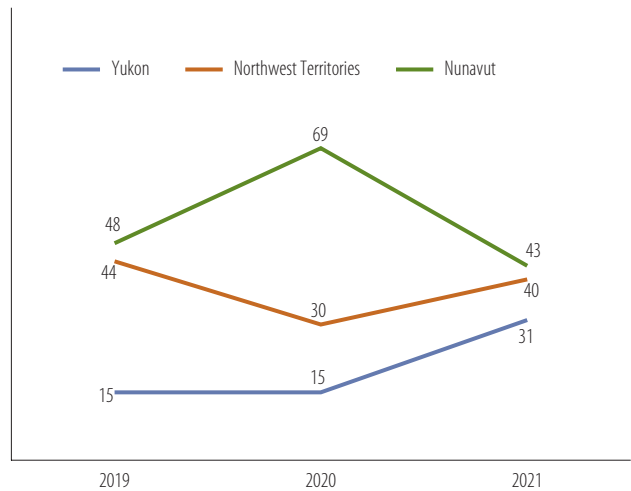
2003 - 2021 The North



Q.9  
In your opinion, is [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

### Territory receives less than its fair share of federal spending

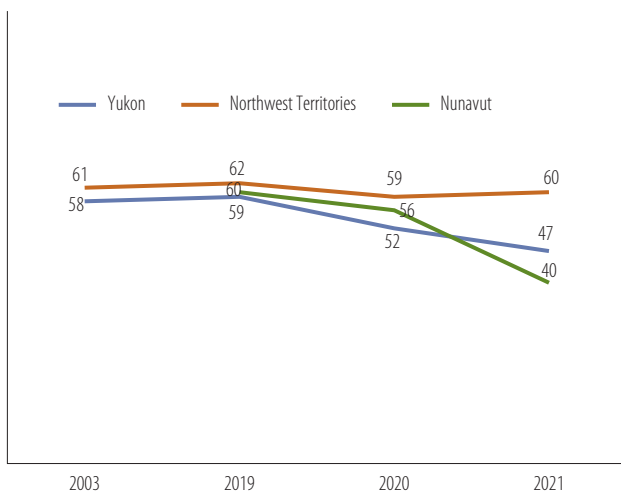
2019 - 2021 The North



Q.13  
Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] receives ... ?

### Territory has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions

2003 - 2021 The North



Q.10  
In your opinion, how much influence does [PROVINCE / TERRITORY] have on important national decisions in Canada?



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