

DON'T MISTAKE STABILITY FOR ENDURANCE

An Ipsos Canada
Point of View on the
Endurance Economy





HOUSEHOLDS ARE SURVIVING STRUCTURAL CHANGE, MISTAKING THAT SURVIVAL FOR STABILITY IS A STRATEGIC ERROR.

At Ipsos, we work at the intersection of consumer behaviour and public opinion. It is from this unique vantage point that we see the emergence of the Endurance Economy. This is more than a moment of consumer caution. We are seeing a deeper structural shift in how Canadians assess security, institutions, and the future.

For much of the past several decades, Canadians have lived through a period of relative stability: sustained economic growth, improving health outcomes, predictable geo-political rules; and a broad sense that technological progress would expand opportunity over time. While the pace of change accelerated, it remained broadly beneficial, as it was fast enough to drive innovation, but slow enough for institutions and households to adapt.

Canada is now operating in an environment defined by mismatched speeds of change and rising uncertainty.

Artificial intelligence is advancing faster than regulatory systems and social norms can adjust. Climate change and demographic shifts continue steadily, often failing to command attention precisely because they unfold gradually, yet they will shape economic and social conditions for decades. At the same time, geopolitics have become more volatile, disrupting assumptions that underpinned the last half-century of relative predictability in trade and security.

These conditions create a difficult operating environment. Markets often respond to near-term opportunity and disruption, while governments attempt to plan against long-term structural pressures with limited capacity and certainty. Households are left adapting in real time, recalibrating expectations about stability, affordability, and redefining progress. It is within this context that what can be described as an Endurance Economy is taking hold.

The Endurance Economy: From Affordability Crisis to Chronic Condition

The Endurance Economy reflects a shift in how Canadians experience affordability and economic security. Affordability is no longer understood as a temporary crisis with a defined endpoint. Instead, it is increasingly perceived as a chronic condition. It is structural rather than cyclical. Unlike a crisis, there is no clear endpoint.

This shift is evident even as some macroeconomic indicators show improvement. Equity markets may set new record highs, inflation may moderate, and interest rates may stabilize, but household sentiment remains strained.

The result is pessimism, and a shortening of time horizons. Consumers are moving away from aspirational planning and toward risk avoidance, defensive budgeting, and a greater focus on immediate stability.

Uneven Adaptation and the Generational Divide

The Endurance Economy is not experienced the same way by everybody. A widening generational divide is reshaping household behaviour, lifestyle expectations, and longer-term social cohesion.

For younger Canadians, upward mobility appears less attainable than it did for previous generations. Many face delays in homeownership (some have completely given up on it), family formation, and wealth accumulation. Record housing costs as well as a challenging labour market are delaying the start of “traditional adulthood” for many younger workers.

For older Canadians, the Endurance Economy is showing up as a new kind of strain: rising costs, stretched healthcare access, and less confidence that retirement will be the stable, protected life stage it was once assumed to be.

Older Canadians are often focused on preserving

accumulated assets and delaying major spending decisions to protect what they already have.

Younger Canadians are reconfiguring lifestyles to maintain flexibility, including greater reliance on multi-generational living arrangements. In Toronto, nearly half of young adults now live with their parents. Financial tools such as “Buy Now, Pay Later” are increasingly used not as discretionary credit, but as a mechanism for smoothing everyday constraint. Their goal is to come to terms with a reality where it appears that they will never get what they were implicitly promised.

This generational divide is compounded by the fact that older Canadians are more likely to believe success is attained through merit and effort and so see younger Canadians as authors of their own misfortune. Younger Canadians are equally likely to believe success is due to merit and efforts as they are to believe it is due to factors beyond their control.

While the financial implications and outlooks differ between the generations, they all share the fatigue of continuous change, the anxiety of uncertainty and the belief that what they are experiencing is of a long-term nature.

Implications for Business: Value, Trust, and Constraint

For Canadian businesses, the Endurance Economy changes the role of price, value, and consumer decision-making.

Price is no longer simply one factor among many. It increasingly functions as an early gatekeeper, disqualifying options before deeper brand evaluation occurs. This has contributed to a “good enough” standard when the price gate is cleared, in which consumers seek reliability and affordability over other, previously more important factors like quality, style or brand recognition.

In this environment, brand strength is less about aspiration and more about dependability. Loyalty is increasingly pragmatic. Consumers return to brands that feel predictable, fair, present in their lives every day and with which they have made a long-standing connection.

Endurance does not imply permanent austerity. It is adaptation within constraint. Consumers continue to seek meaning, small progress and moments of joy, but within tighter boundaries.

Implications for Government: Institutional Competence and Social Cohesion

The Endurance Economy also presents a significant governance challenge.

When affordability becomes structural, citizens become less responsive to long-term reassurance and more focused on near-term relief. Public expectations shift toward stability, delivery, and tangible support. This is occurring at precisely the time when governments are being forced to plan for a longer-term future that is materially different from the stable world Canada has experienced. All levels of government are in the difficult position of asking people to think about the long-term at the expense of immediate rewards.

Governments must operate across conflicting time horizons: slow-moving structural pressures such as housing supply, aging populations, and climate resilience, alongside sudden shocks driven by geopolitics, trade disruption, and technological acceleration.

Housing is a particularly institutional test. It is not only a market issue, but the point at which affordability, demographics, immigration capacity, and social cohesion converge. Failure to address housing constraints risks reinforcing broader perceptions of institutional inability to solve other problems. The generational divide

also means that the solution – cheaper housing – helps younger or more economically precarious Canadians at the expense of older Canadians’, whose wealth (and retirement) is invested in the increased value of their home.

Endurance conditions can also intensify scarcity politics. Intergenerational tensions as well as regional divides and immigration pressures become harder to manage when households feel economically fragile.

In this context, the role of government shifts from enabling optimism to sustaining resilience: maintaining cohesion, protecting institutional trust, and building capacity for a future defined less by return to normal and more by ongoing adjustment.

The “Permanent” Nature of Endurance

The Endurance Economy should not be treated as a passing phase. It reflects a structural shift that we expect will remain. There is no “back to normal” to wait for. This, in turn, changes consumer behaviour and institutional expectations.

Cost-of-living pressure is likely to remain persistent. Economic, geopolitical, and technological volatility will continue. Canadians have become, and will increasingly be, more value literate, risk aware, and cautious about the future.

Canadians are not waiting for “normal days” to return. Their shift to an endurance mindset tells us they see today as the new normal. Business and government need to catch up to Canadians. The next decade will be less about waiting for constraint to lift, and more about operating effectively within it.

For more information about how to thrive in the Endurance Economy:



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