

CANADIAN SUPREME DECISIONS: PUBLIC'S VIEW OF THE SUPREME COURT

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But, Half (50%) of Canadians Say the Decisions of the Supreme Court Are "Sometimes Influenced By Partisan Politics" - - Two in Ten (18%) Say Politics "Almost Always Plays a Role" in their Decisions

The Supreme Court's Robert Latimer Decision (15%) is the One That Stands Out Most in the Minds of Canadians



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Toronto, ON –The results of a recent Ipsos-Reid survey show that seven in ten (70%) say they approve of the actions of the Supreme Court over the last year or so. An even larger number (89%) say they have respect for Supreme Court Justices – including more than four in ten (44%) who say they have “a great deal” of respect.

Yet, despite enjoying the respect and approval of many Canadians, eight in ten (84%) Canadians think that the decisions of the Supreme Court are influenced to some degree by partisan politics. This includes half (50%) who say that the Court's decisions are “sometimes influenced by partisan politics”, two in ten (18%) who say that partisan politics “almost always” plays a role in the Court's decisions and 16 percent who say decisions are “rarely influenced”. However, one in ten (10%) take the opposite viewpoint, saying the court is “completely independent”. Sitting definitively atop the list of decisions that stand out most in the minds of Canadians is the Robert Latimer case (mentioned by 15% of those surveyed) followed by the Clarity Bill/Quebec referendum/Bill C-20 (4%).



These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid/CTV/Globe and Mail poll conducted between May 1st to May 3rd, 2001. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,000 adult Canadians. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the most recent national Census data.

Seven in Ten (70%) Say they Approve of the Actions of the Supreme Court Over the Last Year and an Even Greater Number (89%) Say they Have Respect for Supreme Court Justices

Seven in ten (70%) of the Canadian public say that generally speaking, over the last year or so — a timeframe that includes the controversial Robert Latimer appeal regarding the killing of his daughter — they approve of the actions of the Supreme Court. Only two in ten (20%) say they disapprove. In addition to high levels of approval almost nine in ten (89%) say they have respect for Supreme Court Justices. A plurality (44%) say they have “a great deal” of respect and another four in ten (45%) say they have “a fair amount of respect”. In contrast, one in ten (9%) are on the other end of the spectrum, with 6 percent saying they have “not much respect” and 3 percent saying they have “very little respect” for Supreme Court Justices. These figures are in line with the respect the public has for judges in general, with 91 percent saying they respect judges.

- Quebecers (77%) are most likely to approve of the actions of the Supreme Court over the last year or so, while residents of Saskatchewan (the province where Robert Latimer resides) /Manitoba (62%) are significantly less likely.



- The approval rating of the Supreme Court generally increases with education and income. University graduates (78%) are more likely than those with less than a high school education (59%) to approve of the highest Court's decisions over the last year or so. Canadians with a household income of \$30k or more (74%) are more likely than lower income households (65%) to approve.

But Half (50%) of Canadians Say the Decisions of the Supreme Court are “Sometimes Influenced By Partisan Politics” - -Two in Ten (18%) Say Politics “Almost Always Plays a Role” in their Decisions

While respect and approval run high, there is a widespread perception across the country (84%) that the decisions made by the Supreme Court are influenced to some degree by partisan politics. Half (50%) say the Court's decisions are “sometimes influenced” by partisan politics but 18 percent says that “partisan politics almost always plays a role in Supreme Court Decisions”. Meanwhile, 16 percent say that the court is “rarely influenced” by partisan politics. In contrast, one in ten (10%) think the Supreme Court is “completely independent of partisan politics”.

The Supreme Court's Robert Latimer Decision (15%) is the One That Stands Out Most in the Minds of Canadians

When the public is asked to identify in their own words which one decision made by the Supreme Court over the last few years stands out most in their minds, the largest number (15%) say the Robert Latimer decision — the case of the father who killed his daughter. The next most frequently mentioned cases are Quebec Referendum/Clarity Bill/Bill C-20 (4%) and a number of specific decisions including: rulings related to same-sex benefits/gay rights (3%), Aboriginal fishing rights/Burnt Church, N.B. (3%) and pornography/ child pornography (3%).



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