

# CANADIAN VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY & CORRUPTION



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## CANADIAN VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY & CORRUPTION

**Vancouver, BC** — A new Ipsos Reid poll on public policy issues in Canada, conducted on behalf of the University of Ottawa, has found that the Canadian public is critical of the way government is being managed in this country. However, they're more inclined to lay the blame on the institutions of government and the way the system works than on the individuals who are elected to office. Canadians are also more likely to believe government corruption is on the rise than on the decline compared to 10 years ago, and don't feel governments are doing enough to protect "whistle blowers" who may seek to reveal problems in government.

### *Three-Quarters of Canadians (74%) Believe Governments Are Not Being Accountable for the Decisions They Make*

Fully 74% of the Canadian population believes governments in Canada doing a poor job when it comes to "being accountable for the decisions they make". This includes 41% who feel they're doing a "very poor job", and 33% who say "somewhat poor". By comparison, 24% view government accountability more positively, though just 3% think believe governments are doing a "very good job" on accountability, and 21% consider government's performance as only "somewhat good" in this regard. Another 3% simply had no opinion.

Nearly all those polled hold similarly negative views of government accountability, However, Canadians in the Atlantic provinces stand out for holding more positive views of governments than others (32% vs. 19% in BC, and 17% in Alberta).

Views also vary slightly by age and household income. Middle-aged and older Canadians (35+ years of age), for example, give less positive evaluations of governments' accountability than those 18 to 34 (77% "poor job" vs. 65%, respectively). Further, people living in households with \$60K+ in annual income are decidedly more critical of governments than those in lower income households (77% "poor job" vs. 67% of those in less than \$30K annual household income).

## ***Significant Majority of Canadians (76%) Don't Feel Governments Are Spending Taxpayers Dollars Wisely***

For the most part, Canadians do not believe their governments are spending their tax dollars wisely. Fully 76% say governments are doing a “poor job” in this regard. This includes 44% who give a “very poor job” rating to governments, and another 32% who say “somewhat poor job”. By comparison, about 1-in-4 Canadians (23%) feel their governments are doing a “good job” in spending tax dollars wisely (3% “very good job”, 20% “somewhat good job”. Two percent had no opinion.

These opinions are consistent across all provinces, age groups and gender. However, residents in Quebec (86% “poor job”) hold more negative views of governments’ spending habits than those elsewhere in the country (e.g. Atlantic provinces – 64% “poor job”, Ontario – 72%, Saskatchewan/Manitoba – 70%, and BC – 75%).

Further, Canadians over 35 years of age are more critical of the government for the ways they spend taxpayers’ dollars than those in the 18-34 age group (80% “poor job” vs. 67%, respectively). And, Canadians with less than a high school education hold more negative views of how governments spend their tax dollars than those with more formal education (84% “poor job” vs. 73% of university graduates, and 74% of high school graduates). Lastly, French-speaking Canadians are notably more negative than their English-speaking counterparts (86% “poor job” vs. 73%, respectively).

## ***Close to Two-Thirds of Canadian Public (64%) Does Not Believe They're Getting Good Value For Their Tax Dollars In Terms of the Services They Receive***

A full 64% of Canadians feel governments in the country are doing a “poor job” when it comes to “ensuring the public receives good value for their tax dollars in terms of the service they receive”. This includes 30% who believe governments are doing a “very poor job”, and another 34% who say “somewhat good job”. On the other hand, a third of the Canadian public give governments more positive marks, though it’s mostly polite applause, rather than a standing ovation (4% “very good job”, 30% “somewhat good job”).

While this general pattern of views is held consistently across all regions and demographic groups in the population, there are some significant variations. Regionally, for example, Alberta (72%), Quebec (70%), and Ontario (64%) residents are more likely than those elsewhere in the country to feel governments are doing a “poor job” (e.g. Saskatchewan – 50%, and Atlantic provinces – 49%).

Demographically, middle-aged and older Canadians (35+) are more likely than those 18-34 years of age to be critical of governments (69% “poor job” vs. 55%, respectively).

### ***More Than 6-in-10 Canadians (64%) Believe Governments Are Failing to Represent the Interests of All Citizens***

Close to two-thirds (64%) of the Canadian population feels governments in this country are doing a “poor job” representing the interests of all citizens and not just a particular group in society”. Three-in-10 (31%) hold this view quite strongly (“very poor job”), while another third give more muted criticism (33% “somewhat poor job”).

Comparatively, far fewer Canadians (34%) give governments positive marks for their efforts in representing all Canadians rather than specific groups. Few hold strong views in this regard (5% “very good job”, 29% “somewhat good job”).

Regionally, Albertans (76%) and Quebeckers (71%) are more likely than those living elsewhere to be critical of government on this level (Saskatchewan/Manitoba - 46%, Atlantic Canada - 52%, and BC - 61%).

Demographically, Canadians over 35 years of age hold more negative views of governments than those under 35 (68% vs. 56, respectively). Women also tend to be more critical than men (67% “poor job” vs. 61%, respectively).

### ***Close to Six-in-Ten Canadians (58%) Believe the Level of Corruption in Government Today is No Different Than 10 Years Ago***

A majority of Canadians (58%) believe that the degree of corruption in government has not changed over the past decade. Among those who do see change, most are inclined to believe things are worse rather than better. A third of the Canadian population (33%) believe there is “more corruption” today than 10 years ago, with 19% saying there’s “a

lot more”, and 14% saying “somewhat more”. By comparison, 8% of those surveyed see less corruption (2% “much less”, 6% “somewhat less”).

Canadians from all regions and all walks of life hold virtually the same views across the country. However, there are some statistically significant variations. For example, Canadians with some post-secondary education or with a university degree are more likely than others to feel there has been no change in the level of government corruption over the past decade (61% and 60% “no change”, respectively vs. 55% of high school graduates and 46% of those with less than a high school education). And, people with \$60K+ in annual household income are more likely than those in households with less than \$30K in annual income to see no change in the level of government corruption (63% vs. 49%, respectively).

### ***Seven-in-Ten Canadians (70%) Blame the Institutions and Processes of Government for What’s Wrong With Government Today***

Seventy percent of the Canadian population is more likely to believe the “system” of government is what’s causing problems today, and not elected politicians. Four-in-ten (42%) feel “the problems we have with government are related to the institutions of government and the way the system works”. Another 28% lay blame for the problems on “conflicts between the different levels of government”. By comparison, 28% feel it’s the individuals elected to office who are responsible.

This view is shared broadly across all regional and demographic sub-groups in the population, with no statistically significant variations of note.

*These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid telephone poll conducted on behalf of the University of Ottawa from November 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005 with a randomly selected sample of 1,000 adult Canadian residents aged 18 or older. The results are considered accurate to within  $\pm 3.1$  points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire Canadian adult population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within provincial breakdowns 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 2001 Census.*

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