

Splits and Fractures: Canadians Evenly Divided On Whether Scrapping of Mandatory Long-Form Census is a 'Good' (49%) or 'Bad' (51%) Decision

*Two in Ten (19%) Canadians Say Outright That if They Receive
the New Voluntary Version, They Will Not Complete the Form*

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Splits and Fractures: Canadians Evenly Divided On Whether Scrapping of Mandatory Long-Form Census is a 'Good' (49%) or 'Bad' (51%) Decision

Two in Ten (19%) Canadians Say Outright That if They Receive the New Voluntary Version, They Will Not Complete the Form

Toronto, ON – As the country is caught up in a heated debate about the merits and demerits of the recent decision by the Federal Government to scrap the mandatory long-form census in favour of a voluntary version that would go out to more households, a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted exclusively for Canada.com has revealed that the country is evenly split on whether the move is a 'good' (49%) or 'bad' (51%) decision.

Interestingly, a majority (57%) of those who have been required to fill out the long-form census in the past think that it's a 'bad' decision, suggesting that most of those who have previously been compelled to fill out the long-form census in the past have either not been bothered by it or saw some collective benefit to it. A majority (55%) of those who have never been required to fill out the long-form think the decision to make it voluntary is a 'good decision', while a minority (45%) thinks it is a bad decision.

The debate has divided the country into two separate camps, pitting old against young, region against region, parents against non-parents, wealthy against those of more modest means, educated against less educated:

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- Quebecers (62%) are by far the most likely to think that scrapping the mandatory long-form that went to twenty percent of all households and replacing it with a voluntary version that would go to one-third of all households is a 'good' decision, while fewer Canadians living in British Columbia (51%), Atlantic Canada (51%), Alberta (48%), Ontario (42%), and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (38%) think it's a good idea.
- Conversely, residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (62%) are most inclined to think it is a 'bad' decision, followed by those living in Ontario (58%), Alberta (52%), British Columbia (49%), Atlantic Canada (49%), and finally Quebec (38%).
- A majority of those with kids (58%) still in their household think it's a good decision, while a minority (42%) thinks it's bad. Conversely, a majority (53%) of those without kids thinks it's a bad decision, while a minority (47%) thinks it's good.
- A majority (56%) of those aged 18 to 34 think it's a good decision, while a minority of those aged 35 to 54 (48%) or 55+ (44%) think it's a good decision. On the other hand, a majority of older (56%) and middle-aged (52%) Canadians think it's a bad decision, but only a minority of younger adults (44%) think it's a bad decision.
- Six in ten (59%) university graduates think the changes are a bad decision, while those with some postsecondary education (53%), a high-school diploma (47%) or no high school diploma (44%) think it's a bad decision. Conversely, a majority (56%) of those without a high school education think it's a good idea, compared to 53% of those with a diploma, 47% of those with some postsecondary education and 41% of those with a degree what think it's a good decision.

Critics of the government's decision claim that if individuals are able to opt out of the survey, certain groups of individuals would be more likely to opt out than others, thus skewing the results or under-representing certain groups of society. These data suggest that this is a distinct possibility, as two in ten (19%) say they will not fill out the voluntary form if they receive it. However, certain individuals are more likely to say so than others:

- Those whose family earns under \$30,000 a year are most likely (27%) to say they won't complete the long-form census if they receive a voluntary version, compared to 20% of those who earn between \$30,000 and \$60,000 a year and 15% of those whose family earn more than \$60,000 a year who say they'll opt out.
- Younger Canadians (25%) are more likely than middle-aged (20%) or older (13%) Canadians to say they won't complete the voluntary, long-form census.
- Nearly one quarter (24%) of Atlantic Canadians and Albertans (24%) say they won't complete the voluntary long-form census if they receive it, while fewer Ontarians (16%), British Columbians (17%), Quebecers (16%) and residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (16%) say they would not complete the form.
- Men (22%) are significantly more likely than women (16%) to say they won't complete the form.
- Interestingly, whether or not people believe the decision to be good or bad appears to have no bearing on their willingness to fill out the voluntary long form.

Canadians are also split on whether the long-form census is intrusive: one half (50%) 'agrees' (18% strongly/32% somewhat) that 'completing a long-form census, which includes information on religion, ethnicity, income and other sensitive information is an intrusion into my personal privacy'. The other half (50%) of Canadians 'disagrees' (21% strongly/29% somewhat) that it is an intrusion.

However, most (68%) believe that intrusion is reasonable, 'agreeing' (24% strongly/44% somewhat) that 'completing a detailed census is a reasonable intrusion into what would otherwise be my private life'. Still, one in three (32%) 'disagree' (10% strongly/22% somewhat) that it is a reasonable intrusion. In fact, a majority (56%) 'disagrees' (20% strongly/36% somewhat) that 'the government has no right to ask me personal questions about my family', while a minority (44%) 'agrees' (13% strongly/31% somewhat) that the government has no right to ask such things.

The tactics of obtaining the data aside, most (88%) Canadians 'agree' (46% strongly/42% somewhat) that 'as a country, we should try to know as much as we can about ourselves', while just one in ten (12%) 'disagree' (3% strongly/9% somewhat) with this goal. Most (77%) also 'agree' (40% strongly/38% somewhat) that 'as a Canadian, it is my civic duty to complete the census with whatever questions are asked of me'. However, one quarter (23%) believe the line needs to be drawn somewhere, 'disagreeing' (7% strongly/16% somewhat) that it's their duty to answer whatever questions are asked of them.



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These are some of the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted between July 16 and 19, 2010, on behalf of Canada.com. For this survey, a sample of 1,036 adults from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had the entire population of adults in Canada been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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