

The Governance Monitor

The Governance Monitor tracks the impact of the election campaign on Canadians' trust in government.

During the federal-election campaign, the Institute on Governance partnered with Advanced Symbolics, using AI to measure Canadians' views on trust in government against five OECD indicators: responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness, and fairness. We observed social-media activity and sentiment (positive and negative) across the ideological spectrum, from left to right.

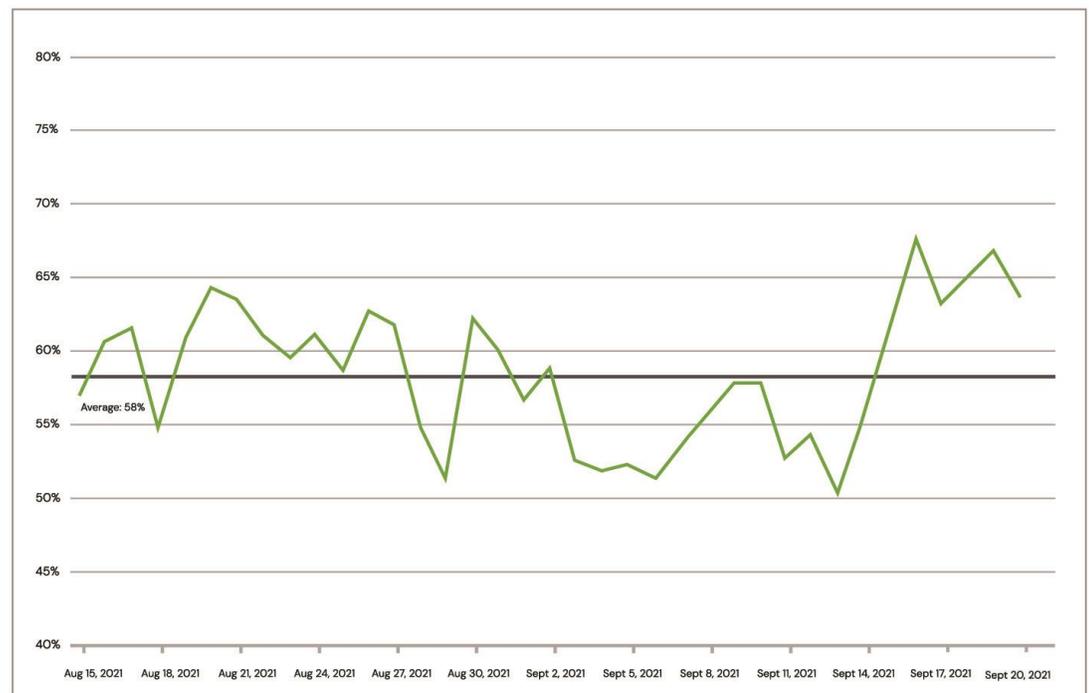
DATA TRENDS

- The Daily Trust Tracker closed on election day at 63 per cent, above the campaign's average of 58 per cent.

- After an initial "election bump," trust in government dissipated as the political rhetoric sharpened on issues such as private health care, access to abortion services, and gun control.

- Throughout the election, trust in government institutions remained highest in Atlantic Canada and lower in Quebec, Alberta, and the remaining Prairie provinces.

DAILY TRACKER



- With respect to the OECD trust indicators, Canadians are engaged most on the need for government to be responsive and open.
- We also note that, consistent with historical trends, those 5 per cent of Canadians on the far right have the least trust in public institutions.

WHAT IT MEANS

There was no dominant issue during the election campaign that affected Canadians' trust in government. Trust in government has a regional dimension; the lowest levels of trust are found in regions with anti-Ottawa sentiment.

The reasons ideological cohorts trust — or do not trust — government to do the job are significantly different. For example, most Canadians show positive trust in government's ability to tackle climate change. Trust levels, though, are weaker in the left and right cohorts: The left has less trust that government is able to deliver on its climate-change commitments. The right worries about the economic impact of government action on climate change. The 5 per cent on the far right is the most negative and questions the very premise of addressing climate change and the government's motives for doing so.

The public and political mobilization of the far right in Canada is a new phenomenon. No longer are these “fringe” perspectives echoing within the confines of chat rooms and the outer reaches of the internet. They have become visible and active in mainstream social media and at public events, and institutionalized in our political system under the banner of the People's Party of Canada.

WHY IT MATTERS

Trust in public institutions has been eroding in Canada and other Western democracies. While the decline has been more muted in Canada when compared with the United States or the United Kingdom, it must be of concern to the new government.

A key priority for the new government must be to build increased trust in our public institutions as it pursues its mandate.

It will need to engage Canadians to find ways to build greater understanding and appreciation of the importance of our public institutions.

The new government will need to consult openly with Canadians if it is to forge consensus and implement its mandate. Its policy agenda cannot be set to attract an ideological segment of voters or to reward those who might have formed the margins that granted the Liberals the most seats. This could work in the short term; in the long term, it would continue to drive down trust in government.

Equal attention will need to be paid to how the government's agenda is addressed. The prime minister should ensure that his government is responsive, reliable, honest, open, and fair in its dealings with every Canadian. The tone of ongoing political discourse in Parliament (and outside it) will have a bearing on rebuilding trust in our institutions.

The government should reform the federal public service to be more responsive and relevant. Public servants are the stewards of the institutions that serve our democracy — yet they work in a Westminster system that is struggling to adapt to 21st-century realities and to become as diverse as the population it serves.

Institutional trust in a federation refers to all orders of government: federal, provincial, and municipal. The election reflected the priorities of Canadians: health care, managing the pandemic, housing, child care, and the environment. By working collaboratively with provinces and municipalities to achieve real progress, the government will build trust and strengthen the federation.

The government will need to reflect on what the extreme right's lack of trust in government really means. This ideological cohort's populism, its belief that government institutions do not represent “real people,” is doubly concerning given that the cohort is social-media savvy and has received coverage in traditional media. The new government should respond to legitimate regional political pressures yet ensure that their influence is not disproportionately emphasized such that the federation and its democratic systems and institutions are put at risk.

Trust is the currency of our public institutions and, ultimately, of our democracy. All politicians have a responsibility to promote trust in our democratic institutions. Our politicians' commitment to supporting the public interest and Canadians' needs will demonstrate their commitment to maintaining trust in our institutions.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Governance Monitor looked beyond the electoral horse race to produce informed insights and expert analysis on how #Elxn44 is affecting Canadians' faith and trust in our government and its institutions.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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