

# POLICY BRIEF: Public support exists for labour reform

Colin Craig | May 2020



## Executive summary

In the United States, significant changes to labour legislation have taken place over the past decade. From giving workers the right to decide if they wish to pay union dues to conducting regular votes to decide if workers want to remain in a union, states have been active with reforming many elements of labour legislation.<sup>1 2</sup>

In Canada, major reform has been less common. Jurisdictions often change how unions are certified (often alternating between secret ballot votes versus using card sign-up), and Ottawa previously passed mandatory transparency measures for unions, but reform efforts have not been as significant as they have been south of the border.

SecondStreet.org decided to poll Canadians to see where they stand on several labour reform options and assess the public's appetite for change. Highlights of the March 13 – March 16, 2020 public opinion research, include:

- 73% of Canadians believe that unions should have to disclose detailed financial statements publicly on a regular basis. This policy option was supported by a slightly higher percentage of current and former unionized workers (76%) than the general public;
- 70% of respondents believe that unions should not be allowed to spend union dues on political ads and other activities that aren't related to the workplace. This is significant as unions are typically the highest spenders among third parties during elections;
- 47% of Canadians believe unions should collect their own dues while 26% believe employers should collect the funds; and
- 70% indicated unions should not be allowed to block the public or other workers from entering a business or public building during a strike. This is a common union tactic and was utilized during the 2018 Canada Post strike and the 2019-20 Co-op strike in Regina.

With the exception of not allowing unions to block people from entering buildings or businesses, each of the potential reform options were supported slightly more by unionized or formerly unionized workers than the general public. When it came to the matter of unions blocking people during strikes, the results were similar (70% of general respondents oppose unions obstructing people during strikes versus 66% among current/former unionized workers).



## Methodology

The data represented in this report is from a national online survey with 1,538 adult Canadians between March 13 – March 16, 2020. The data has been weighted to reflect the regional, age and gender population distribution of Canada. The respondents for this survey were drawn from Leger's research panel which has proven to be a representative sample of the broader Canadian population. Were this a probability sample, the margin of error of a survey of this size would be +/- 2.5 percent 19 times out of 20. Some figures in this report may not add to 100 due to rounding. Please see appendix for polling data.

## Results

The following section includes the survey questions posed to Canadians, results and related information. For a breakdown of the data by age, gender and geographic region, please see the appendix.

### Question 1

*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
“It should be mandatory for unions from both the private and public sectors to publicly disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis.”*

<b>Total agree</b>	<b>73%</b>
Somewhat agree	42%
Strongly agree	31%
<b>Total disagree</b>	<b>13%</b>
Strongly disagree	6%
Somewhat disagree	7%
Don't know	14%

Each year, unionized workers in Canada pay billions of dollars to their unions through mandatory union dues.<sup>3</sup> These dues pay for a number of activities: core union functions such as bargaining with employers and handling workplace grievances, as well as non-core activities including donations to political causes. For instance, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) routinely supports “peace” flotillas to Gaza and works with those who advocate divestment in the State of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

In 2015, the federal government passed bill C-377, legislation that required unions to disclose publicly all transactions over \$5,000 and reveal the pay of officers or staff earning more than \$100,000 annually. However, this legislation was repealed in 2017 by the current federal government.<sup>5,6</sup>

Even without the statutory requirement, some unions voluntarily disclose their financial statements online. For example, the Canadian Union of Public Employees posts its audited financial statements on its website.<sup>7</sup> The public can see the union had \$228 million in revenue in 2018 and spent

\$4.7 million on “major organizing campaigns.” However, there is no breakdown that shows what the \$4.7 million was spent on, the salaries of senior staff or details of transactions exceeding \$5,000.

While CUPE posts some financial information online (in a manner so that it is available to the public), many other unions do not. For example, SecondStreet.org searched on the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg’s website for “financial statements” and “annual report” but could not find such materials.<sup>8</sup> A search for the same terms on the United Nurses of Alberta’s website also came up empty.<sup>9</sup>

Based on our polling, it’s clear that an overwhelming majority of Canadians support public disclosure of union spending (73% somewhat or strongly agree versus 13% somewhat or strongly disagree). Support for disclosure was slightly higher among those who were current or former union members (76% somewhat or strongly agree).

One policy option in this area for lawmakers to consider would be to reintroduce the federal government’s previous transparency legislation or a variation of it.

### Question 2

*Do you think unions should be able to use union dues to finance political ads and other activities that aren’t related to the workplace?*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>15%</b>

As previously noted, unions often engage in activities that are unrelated to the workplace – it’s hard to see the connection between a postal worker delivering mail in Canada and the agelong conflict in the Middle East.

Similarly, one unionized worker that SecondStreet.org spoke with expressed disappointment that his union once gave money to a local politician to pay for some of his legal bills that arose as a result of a lawsuit.

Unions are also very active during elections. During the 2015 federal election, third parties spent just over \$6 million on advertising; over \$4 million of which was spent directly by unions.<sup>10 11</sup> However, not included in the \$4 million figure are some third-party groups which are largely funded by unions, such as the B.C. Health coalition.<sup>12</sup>

A similar phenomenon exists at the provincial level. In 2016, the *Globe and Mail* reported: “Ontario unions have spent more than \$15-million to campaign in the past three [provincial] elections, 94 per cent of all third-party advertising.”<sup>13</sup>

Our public opinion research suggests Canadians overwhelmingly do not think unions should be able to use union dues (which are mandatory for workers whose positions are covered under collective agreements that are negotiated by unions) for activities such as political ads and activities that are unrelated to the workplace.

One policy option to address this sentiment would be to restrict union dues to paying for core union activities – bargaining activities, costs related to workplace grievances, etc. – rather than political activities and initiatives that are unrelated to the workplace. Ultimately, this option could allow for a reduction in union dues, empowering unionized workers to decide for themselves which political activities they may wish to support.

<b>Question 3</b>	
<i>When it comes to employees paying union dues, who do you think should collect the union dues?</i>	
The union	<b>47%</b>
The employer	<b>26%</b>
Other	<b>5%</b>
Don't know	<b>22%</b>

Currently, employers are required to collect union dues in Canada and regularly remit the funds to the union. In the past, some governments have considered requiring unions to collect their own dues.<sup>14</sup>

SecondStreet.org decided to ask Canadians who they think should have to collect union dues. By a margin of nearly 2:1, respondents indicated that they believe unions should have to collect their own dues (47%) versus requiring employers to collect them (26%).

<b>Question 4</b>	
<i>When unions go on strike, do you think they should be allowed to block or delay the public and/or other workers from entering a business or public building?</i>	
Yes	<b>20%</b>
No	<b>70%</b>
I don't know	<b>10%</b>

It's not uncommon for striking workers to block the entrance of a store, workplace or government building.

During the 2019-20 strike at the Co-op Refinery Complex (CRC) in Saskatchewan, picketers blocked other workers and supplies from entering and exiting the plant. CRC's management told the Regina Leader-Post:

*“CRC employees have been harassed, accosted and verbally abused when crossing picket lines, and we simply won't stand for that behaviour. Unifor members have also held up shipments of food for management focused on running the plant safely, as well as attempted to block shipments of parts needed to safely run the refinery.”<sup>15</sup>*

Unifor Local 594 President Kevin Bittman told the Leader-Post:

*“For sure there are trucks that aren't getting in, but that's part of our strategy ... It's about standing up for our rights.”*

While trucks obviously need road access to enter the facility, the employer eventually used helicopters to transport staff safely to and from the facility.

Another example of unions restricting the free movement of people occurred during the 2018 Canada Post strike. After Canadian Union of Public Employees were legislated back to work after five weeks of rotating strikes, other unions began protesting in front of Canada Post mail sorting facilities in Vancouver, Mississauga and other parts of the country and prevented mail trucks from leaving the facilities.<sup>16 17 18</sup>

Our public opinion poll suggests Canadians are overwhelmingly opposed to striking workers blocking others from entering and exiting buildings – 70% opposed versus 20% who support such actions.

## Economic benefits

Restricting union dues to bargaining activities could empower workers as they would be allowed to keep more of their paycheques and decide for themselves which causes to support financially. Improving the transparency of union activities could also help workers hold their unions accountable and evaluate whether their dues are being spent wisely.

However, evidence suggests some labour reform options could also increase economic growth. In the United States, a number of jurisdictions have passed what are known as “right to work” laws. Simply put, instead of making workers pay mandatory union dues, these laws provide workers with a choice – contribute funds to their workplace union or not.

A 2013 report by the Fraser Institute examines research that suggests such legislation has helped states with right to work legislation increase economic growth and employment by 1.8% and 1.0% respectively. Based on findings from the United States, the Fraser Institute estimated that if the two provinces they examined, British Columbia and Ontario, introduced “Right to work” laws, total economic output would increase by \$3.9 billion and \$11.8 billion respectively.<sup>19</sup>

As governments in Canada reopen large segments of our economy, and search for ways to kickstart our economy, labour reform could assist with such efforts. Most importantly, unlike large stimulus spending programs, labour legislation reform does not require incurring debt and spending taxpayers’ money.

## Conclusion

SecondStreet.org’s public opinion research suggests the public believes there is merit in updating existing labour legislation. Elected officials who are seeking to update labour legislation to better reflect the views of Canadians, may wish to examine transparency requirements for unions, regulations around what union dues can be spent on, how the dues are collected and laws pertaining to strikes.

As noted, broader labour reform could also help contribute to economic growth.

## About the author

Colin Craig is the President of SecondStreet.org. He has an MBA and a BA (economics) from the University of Manitoba and is the author of *The Government Wears Prada* – a book that examines how Canada can meet the needs of our nation’s aging population without raising taxes.

## About Leger

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Report

## Labour Research



DATE 2020-05-11

# Leger

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*We know Canadians*

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## Union Membership

**7 out of 10 Canadians agree that it should be mandatory that unions from both private and public sectors to publicly disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis**

Those age 35+ are more likely to agree that it should be mandatory that unions disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis (77% vs. 62% under age 35).

**7 out of 10 Canadians agree that unions should not be able to use union dues to finance political ads and other activities that aren't related to the workplace**

Subgroups more likely to agree that unions should not be able to use union dues to finance aggressive political ads and other activities that aren't related to the workplace include:

- Women (74% vs. 66% of men); and,
- Age 55+ (78% vs. 65% under age 55).

Interestingly, current or Past union members are more likely to agree funds should not be used for political ads (72%) compared to non-union households (69%)



**About half of Canadians believe that unions should collect union dues. About a quarter of Canadians say that the employer should collect the dues.**

- Younger Canadians age 18-34 are more likely say that the union collect dues (54% vs. 45% of respondents age 55+).
- Subgroups more likely to say the employer collect union dues include:
  - Current/Past union members (32% vs. 21% of non-union)
  - Age 55+ (30% vs. 20% of age 18-34).

**7 out of 10 Canadians reported that when unions go on strike, they should not be allowed to block or delay the public and/or other workers from entering a business or public building**

Subgroups more likely to say that unions on strike should not be allowed to block or delay the public and/or workers from entering a business or public building include:

- Age 55+ (75% vs. 64% of 18-34%)
- Non-Union (74% vs. 64% of Union)

# METHODOLOGY

## Study Population

Canadians aged 18 and older.

## Data Collection

- A total of n=1538 online surveys were conducted in Canada
- Interviews were conducted March 13<sup>th</sup> to March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- The full questionnaire is provided as a separate appendix to this report. Refer to it for complete wording to questions as some questions and answer choices have been abbreviated to properly display in the charts and figures.

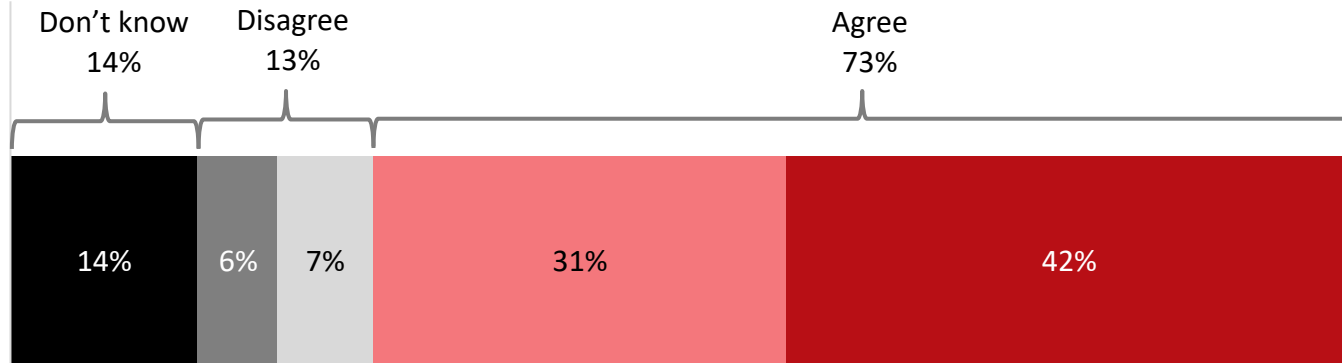
## Statistical Analysis

- In this report, data in bold **red** characters indicate a significantly lower proportion than that of other respondents.
- Conversely, data in bold **green** characters indicate a significantly higher proportion than that of other respondents.
- As a non-random internet survey, a margin of error is not reported.
- If the data were collected through a random sample, the margin of error for an n=1538 is  $\pm 2.5\%$ , 19 times out of 20.
- Using the data from the 2016 census, results were weighted according to age, gender, and region in order to ensure a representative sample of the population.
- The numbers have been presented have been rounded to the nearest whole number. However, raw values were used to calculate the sums, and therefore may not correspond to the manual addition of these numbers.
- Additional methodological information can be found in the appendix of this report.

LABOUR

# 7 out of 10 Canadians agree that it should be mandatory that unions from both private and public sectors to publicly disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis

Agree/Disagree: Unions should Publicly Disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis



Respondents age 35+ are more likely to agree with the statement "it should be mandatory for unions from both the private and public sectors to publicly disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis" (77% vs. 62% under age 35)

■ Don't Know Enough ■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

Base: All respondents (n=1538)

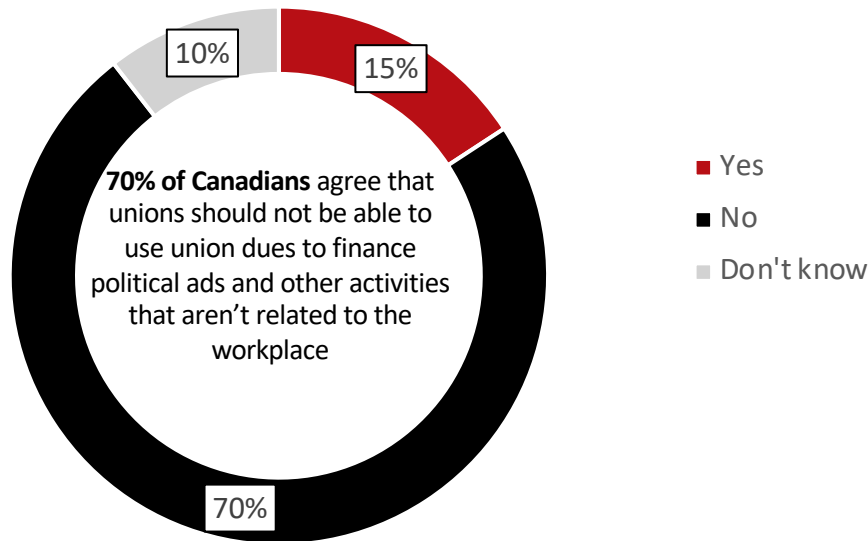
Q6: Below is a statement about workplaces and unions. Please tell me if you completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or completely disagree with the statement. It should be mandatory for unions from both the private and public sectors to publicly disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis.

# Q6: % breakdown by Demographic type

Q6: Below is a statement about workplaces and unions. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement. "It should be mandatory for unions from both the private and public sectors to publicly disclose detailed financial information on a regular basis."

	TOTAL	ATL	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	18-34	35-54	55+	MALE	FEMALE	Union (past/present)	Non-Union
Weighted n=	1538	105	361	590	100	173	209	419	524	594	747	791	760	747
Unweighted n=	1538	100	416	604	131	132	155	389	540	609	784	754	776	730
DISAGREE	13%	9%	14%	12%	10%	18%	12%	17%	11%	11%	14%	11%	17%	9%
Strongly disagree	6%	6%	5%	6%	3%	8%	5%	7%	5%	5%	7%	5%	8%	4%
Somewhat disagree	7%	3%	9%	6%	7%	10%	8%	11%	6%	6%	8%	7%	10%	5%
AGREE	73%	74%	74%	74%	76%	67%	71%	62%	74%	80%	74%	72%	76%	72%
Somewhat agree	31%	32%	31%	30%	30%	32%	33%	34%	31%	28%	29%	32%	31%	30%
Strongly agree	42%	42%	43%	44%	47%	36%	38%	28%	43%	52%	45%	40%	44%	42%
I don't know	14%	17%	12%	14%	14%	15%	16%	21%	14%	9%	12%	16%	7%	20%

# 7 out of 10 Canadians agree that unions should not be able to use union dues to finance political ads and other activities that aren't related to the workplace



Respondents more likely to agree that unions should not be able to use union dues to finance political ads and other activities that aren't related to the workplace include:

- Women (74% vs. 66% of men); and,
- Age 55+ (78% vs. 65% under age 55)

Base: All respondents (n=1538)

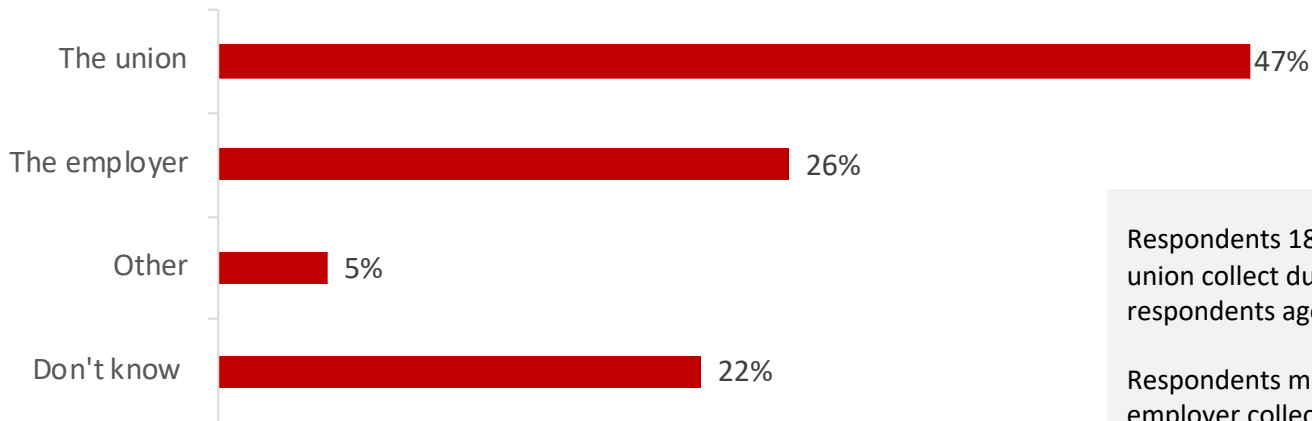
Q7: Currently, workers in unionized workplaces are required to pay dues to their union each year. Unions will then use those dollars to negotiate contracts and settle workplace grievances. Union dues are sometimes used for advertising, including political ads during election campaigns and around certain issues. Do you think unions should be able to use union dues to finance political ads and other activities that aren't related to the workplace?

# Q7: % breakdown by Demographic type

Q7: Do you think unions should be able to use union dues to finance political ads and other activities that aren't related to the workplace?	TOTAL	ATL	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	18-34	35-54	55+	MALE	FEMALE	Union (past/present)	Non-Union
Weighted n=	1538	105	361	590	100	173	209	419	524	594	747	791	760	747
Unweighted n=	1538	100	416	604	131	132	155	389	540	609	784	754	776	730
Yes	15%	9%	14%	17%	14%	18%	11%	18%	15%	12%	19%	10%	18%	12%
No	70%	73%	72%	68%	70%	69%	73%	61%	68%	78%	66%	74%	72%	69%
I don't know	15%	18%	14%	16%	15%	14%	16%	21%	17%	10%	15%	16%	10%	19%



# About half of Canadians believe that Unions should collect union dues. About a quarter of Canadians say that the employer should collect dues.



Respondents 18-34 are more likely to say the union collect dues (54% vs. 45% of respondents age 55+).

Respondents more likely to say the employer collect union dues include:

- Current/Previous Union members (32% vs. 21% of non-union); and,
- Age 55+ (30% vs. 20% of age 18-34).

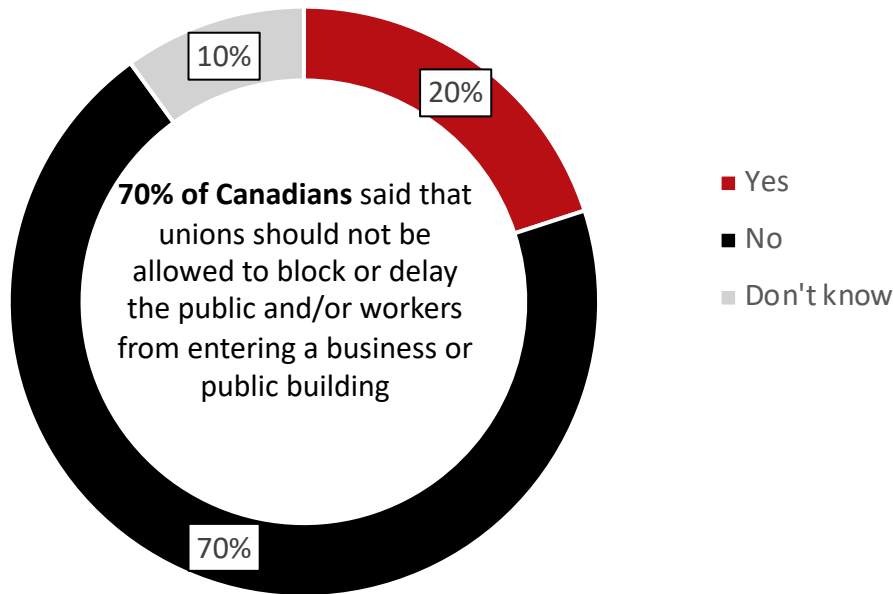
Base: All respondents (n=1538)

Q8: When it comes to employees paying union dues, who do you think should collect the union dues?

## Q8: % breakdown by Demographic type

Q8: When it comes to employees paying union dues, who do you think should collect the union dues?	TOTAL	ATL	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	18-34	35-54	55+	MALE	FEMALE	Union (past/present)	Non-Union
Weighted n=	1538	105	361	590	100	173	209	419	524	594	747	791	760	747
Unweighted n=	1538	100	416	604	131	132	155	389	540	609	784	754	776	730
The union	47%	45%	44%	50%	41%	50%	45%	54%	47%	43%	45%	49%	49%	46%
The employer	26%	24%	28%	24%	34%	26%	23%	20%	26%	30%	32%	20%	32%	21%
Other	5%	6%	6%	4%	0%	2%	10%	2%	4%	8%	5%	5%	5%	5%
I don't know	22%	26%	21%	22%	24%	22%	22%	25%	23%	19%	18%	26%	14%	29%

# 7 out of 10 Canadians reported that when unions go on strike, they should not be allowed to block or delay the public and/or other workers from entering a business or public building



Respondents more likely to say that unions should not be allowed to block or delay the public and/or workers from entering a business or public building include:

- Age 55+ (75% vs. 64% of 18-34%); and,
- Non-Union (74% vs. 64% of Union)

Base: All respondents (n=1538)

Q9: When unions go on strike, do you think they should be allowed to block or delay the public and/or other workers from entering a business or public building?

## Q9: % breakdown by Demographic type

Q9: When unions go on strike, do you think they should be allowed to block or delay the public and/or other workers from entering a business or public building?

	TOTAL	ATL	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	18-34	35-54	55+	MALE	FEMALE	Union (past/present)	Non-Union
Weighted n=	1538	105	361	590	100	173	209	419	524	594	747	791	760	747
Unweighted n=	1538	100	416	604	131	132	155	389	540	609	784	754	776	730
Yes	20%	19%	25%	19%	12%	19%	21%	22%	21%	18%	22%	19%	26%	15%
No	70%	70%	65%	71%	76%	74%	68%	64%	69%	75%	70%	69%	66%	74%
I don't know	10%	10%	10%	10%	12%	7%	11%	14%	10%	7%	8%	12%	8%	11%

# APPENDIX

# Detailed Methodology

## Sampling Frame

Participants were randomly selected from LEO's online panel.

Leger owns and manages an Internet panel that includes more than 400,000 Canadians coast to coast. An online panel consists of Web users profiled according to different demographic variables. The majority of Leger's panel members (60%) were randomly recruited over the phone in the past ten years, which makes this panel very similar to the current Canadian population on a number of demographic characteristics. Moreover, 35% of panelists were recruited through affiliate programs and 5% through partner campaigns and programs.

To be eligible, respondents were required to be 18 years of age or older.

If you have questions about the data presented in this report, please contact **Andrew Enns**, Executive Vice President, at the following email address: [aenns@leger360.com](mailto:aenns@leger360.com).

# RESPONDENT PROFILE

## RESPONDENT PROFILE - *Canada*

	Weighted
	<b>1538</b>
<b>n=</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	49
Female	51
<b>Age</b>	
18 to 34	27
35 to 54	34
55 years of age or older	38
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single	30
Married/Common-Law	56
Divorced/Separated	9
<b>Union Membership</b>	
Currently belong to a union	18
Previously belonged to a union	31
I have never belonged to a union	49



## RESPONDENT PROFILE - *Canada*

	Weighted
<b>n=</b>	<b>1538</b>
<b>Children Under 18 in HH</b>	
Yes	26
No	73
<b>HH Income</b>	
Under \$40k	24
\$40k to \$79k	32
\$80k to \$100k	13
\$100k or more	21
<b>Region</b>	
British Columbia	14
Alberta	11
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	7
Ontario	38
Quebec	23
Atlantic	7

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Worldwide Independent Network (WIN)

**600**  
EMPLOYEES



**185**  
CONSULTANTS



**8**  
OFFICES

CALGARY | EDMONTON | MONTREAL | PHILADELPHIA  
QUEBEC CITY | TORONTO | VANCOUVER | WINNIPEG

# OUR CREDENTIALS



Leger is a member of the [Canadian Research Insights Council \(CRIC\)](#), the industry association for the market/survey/insights research industry.



Leger is a member of [ESOMAR](#) (European Society for Opinion and Market Research), the global association of opinion polls and marketing research professionals. As such, Leger is committed to applying the [international ICC/ESOMAR](#) code of Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics.



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