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# TRUST IN CANADA: RECENT TRENDS IN MEASURES OF TRUST

TRuST Scholarly Network



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For further information regarding this report and the TRuST Network visit <https://uwaterloo.ca/trust-network/>

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## Territorial Acknowledgement

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## Introduction

Trust has been described as “one of the most fascinating and fundamental social phenomena” (Lyon et al., 2012, p. 1). Trust is central to many important aspects of society such as social capital, collective progress, and security. In the face of increasing polarization, widespread misinformation, and the sociopolitical fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, trust has become a vital concept to understand in order to navigate the modern world and its crises. For instance, both the likelihood of following public health guidelines (such as getting vaccinated), and belief in conspiracy theories has been found to correlate with trust in institutions (Caulfield et al., 2021, section 3). To better understand public trust, this report explores relevant recent polling of Canadian residents with a particular focus on results since (and immediately preceding) the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

This report was created by the Trust in Research Undertaken in Science and Technology (TRuST) network at the University of Waterloo, which brings together leading experts in various fields for an interdisciplinary examination of trust with a particular focus on public trust in scientific and technical information. Our network is currently preparing a report that will focus on exploring various methods for measuring trust, along with a diverse range of trust-related research papers and public lectures. Our network members have already begun work to improve tools for the measurement of trust. For example, TRuST network member Dr. Meyer, following a review of existing measures of trust in social institutions internationally (Aboueid et al., 2023), developed a measure of trust in government that responds to the limitations of these existing measures in order to track public trust in the Canadian Federal Government (Burns et al., 2023).

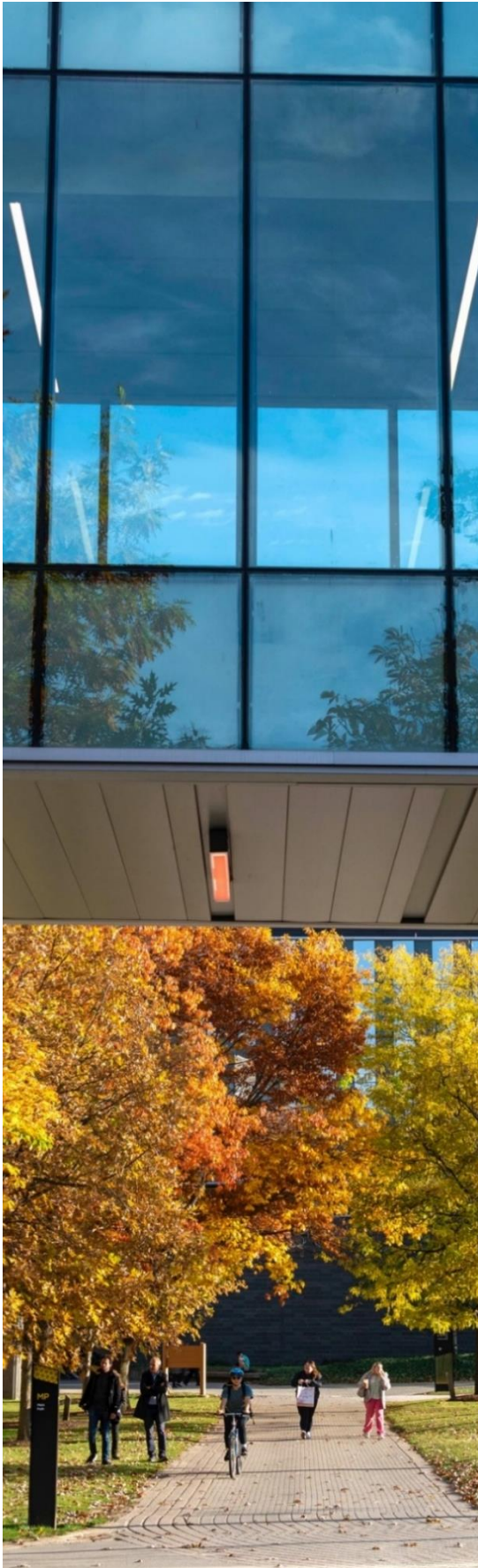
While TRuST focuses predominantly on trust in science, technology, and health, this report also encompasses many related topics such as politics, the economy, and news media due to the intricate nature of trust. Research has shown that trust in one domain is affected by a wide range of values and opinions in other domains. For instance, one study found that a positive opinion of government was an “important predictor” of trust in climate science and a positive opinion of corporations had the same connection with trust in the safety of genetically modified foods (Pechar et al., 2018, p. 307). Trust in media has also been identified as an important consideration in the study of trust in science since so much scientific information is mediated through journalists (Lyon et al., 2012, p. 3). Also, life satisfaction was found to correlate with trust in other people and the media which highlights the importance of considering broader societal trends such as happiness, relationships, and economic conditions as they relate to trust (Statistics Canada, 2023d).

Of course, trust’s complexity and context-dependent nature makes it impossible to thoroughly explore with simple survey questions (Rousseau et al., 1998). In addition to this, some researchers have criticized the effectiveness of trust measurements such as those used in the surveys below (Mangold, 2023; Reif & Guenther, 2021).<sup>2</sup> Others have even questioned if trust can be quantified at all (O’Doherty, 2023). It is hoped, however, that this report’s examination of Canadian survey results will help reveal trends in public trust, support further research into these trends and how to effectively measure trust, and, critically, understand better the concept of trust in today’s complex informational landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> This report also contains some references to surveys of residents of other countries. While the report focuses on survey results from shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 until the end of 2023, some results from before this time period are also explored.

<sup>2</sup> A forthcoming TRuST report will examine in more detail the limitations of trust surveys and explore approaches to improving the accuracy and nuance of trust measurements.



## *Summary: Trends in Trust Surveys in Canada*

Most surveys measuring trust in Canada have asked respondents about their degree of trust in an institution or an individual, either generally or specifically to act ethically or provide reliable information. While survey findings varied, some findings from recurring surveys indicated that Canadians' trust in many institutions and individuals (especially the government) increased at the beginning of the pandemic and has since waned back to near pre-pandemic levels (for instance, see Appendix A which summarizes Edelman's findings on institutions; see Appendix B which summarizes Proof Strategies' findings on individuals). However, some surveys from 2022 and 2023 such as Korzinski (2022b, para. 18), suggest that trust had fallen lower (especially regarding the government and the media) than before the pandemic. Some signs that trust is beginning to decline may reflect worsening economic conditions for many Canadians. These broad trends in public trust since 2020 would be consistent with the findings of Delhey et al. (2022) who found that, based on recent polling done in Germany, worsening health-related fears increased both social and institutional trust while economic fears weakened institutional trust. There are, of course, exceptions to this general trend in survey data, such as Proof Strategies' measurement of institutional trust (as summarized in Appendix C).

Many surveys have consistently found that Canadians' overall trust in most institutions and public figures has been low recently and was low before the pandemic, with total rates of trust between one third and one half of the public being typical (for most except the most trusted, such as scientists, who are usually around three quarters) (e.g., Edelman, 2023a; Proof Strategies, 2023a; Environics, 2023 (p. 2); Pollara, 2022 (pp. 32, 34); see also Appendices B and D). Of course, these typical rates of trust are broad generalizations, and they vary. For instance, while Edelman (2023a, p. 4) found trust in business, government, NGOs, and media to be around half and nearly identical to one another (within 3%), Proof Strategies (2023a, p. 17) found that Canadians had highest trust in NGOs (50%), followed by the news media (43%), small and medium business (42%), government (37%), and large business (28%). Different findings can be explained in part by how questions were worded

and how trust was determined. In the above example, Proof Strategies (2023a, p. 17) asked if respondents trusted the institutions to both be competent and do what is right, whereas Edelman (2023a, p.4) only asked about trust to do what is right.

Low trust in large businesses reflects a loss of trust in the global economic system in roughly the last twenty years. Nearly half of Canadians in one survey agreed that capitalism today does more harm than good (Edelman, 2022c, p. 7) and the percentage of Canadians that hold an optimistic view of globalization plummeted from 52% in 1999 to 14% in 2023 in another survey (Graves, 2023a, p. 9). A long-running annual survey found that confidence in business leaders had also fallen from a range of 62-72% from 1983 to 2006 down to low 40s since 2020 (Envionics, 2023, p. 6). Examination of public trust should also consider disillusionment and alienation, which appears to be on the rise in Canada, particularly as it relates to the economy and politics. These feelings can directly lead to distrust in all institutions and most messengers. Recent survey trends relating to opinions on the economy in Canada have been more pessimistic and more consistently trending downwards compared to measurements of trust.<sup>3</sup>

Many trust-related surveys measure trust in messengers. The messengers that are most often seen as credible and trustworthy have been academics (Edelman, 2019, p. 15), doctors, scientists (Envionics, 2023, p. 2), healthcare professionals, and friends and family (Edelman, 2023b, p. 37; Léger, 2018, p.31; Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 49). Doctors, academics, and scientists are seen as especially trustworthy messengers when it comes to certain topics such as health (Coletto, 2023, para. 4; Edelman, 2023b, p. 17), or climate change (Edelman, 2022a, p. 33; Proof Strategies, 2023a, pp. 59, 63). One 2022 survey found that people were about three times more likely to say that the pandemic experience had made their trust in scientists and healthcare workers increase rather than decrease (Earnscliffe Strategy Group, 2023, p. 3). One annual survey found an increase in trust in scientists at the beginning of the pandemic that has since returned to pre-pandemic levels (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 49, 2020, p. 47).

The least trusted sources of information were usually social media (Léger, 2022, p. 22), advertising, corporations, journalists, and politicians (Edelman, 2022, p. 17). Politicians at all levels have seen particularly low trust levels in recent years (Proof Strategies, 2023a, pp. 4-6, 54). Recent reductions in trust in mainstream media news sources (Edelman 2023a, p. 7 compared to Edelman, 2020, p.14), social media (Earnscliffe Strategy Group, 2023, p. 5), and the internet in general have been seen in some surveys (Ipsos, 2022c).

In longer term trends, Envionics (2023) found that 2023 trust levels in governments, political leaders and journalists fell within the ranges they have recorded since they began measuring trust in 1983, although trust in political leaders and journalists in 2023 fell in the lower end of the historical range (pp. 5-6). Graves (2023b) found that Canadians' trust in the federal government in the last decade had been similar (and at times higher) than in the two decades prior (p. 10). Pollara (2022) found that trust in the federal government to provide accurate information had risen from 23% in 1992 to 41% in 2022 (p. 34). As a result, the recent levels of public trust, at least in government and media, appear not to have deviated dramatically from the recent past. However, these trends may be due to limitations in the surveys themselves rather than real trends in trust and distrust.<sup>4</sup> Regardless, by many metrics Canadians' trust in most institutions and many messengers appears low and was low immediately preceding the pandemic. For instance, in late 2019 about two-thirds of respondents agreed that "I do not have confidence that our current leaders will be able to successfully address our country's challenges" (Edelman, 2020, p. 15).

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<sup>3</sup> As economic concerns such as inflation and the cost of living worsen, the public's focus may also shift away from scientific and large-scale issues such as climate change and public health.

<sup>4</sup> It is also worth considering how the conversion of trust into a binary (trust or do not trust) ignores distrust entirely, and hides important trends such as polarization, which is of particular importance in today's sociopolitical climate.



Trust levels have been found to vary by demographic characteristics and wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> For instance, trust has been found to be higher in older Canadians (Proof Strategies, 2023a, pp. 13, 15, 30), those who believe that “most people can be trusted” (Proof Strategies, 2022a, p. 15), those with a high level of “life satisfaction” or a “hopeful view of the future” (Statistics Canada, 2023e) and highly socially connected people (Korzinski, 2022b). Also, recent declines in trust were found to be largest in politically right identified Canadians (Environics, 2023, p. 12; see Appendix E; Korzinski, 2022a; Monopoli, 2022, paras. 4, 7; see also Graves, 2023a, p. 24 on the connection between politically right identified voting and belief in disinformation). In terms of income, Edelman (2020) found that high income, formally educated Canadians had much higher institutional trust and that the trust gap from the rest of Canadians had grown significantly from 2015 to 2020 (p. 7). Edelman stopped segmenting their survey data this way in 2020, so post-pandemic trends are unexplored in their data. However, another survey found that from 2020 to 2022 institutional trust fell slightly more in high income earners (Proof Strategies, 2022a, p.16). At the same time, this survey found that those in the highest income bracket (\$100k or more household annually) were still more trusting of most messengers, particularly medical doctors (+14%), scientists (+13%), and educators (+12%) than those in the lowest income bracket (<\$35k household annual) (Proof Strategies, 2022a, p. 34).

The variety of findings and the volatility of recent trust levels makes the trajectory of trust in the wake of the pandemic more difficult to understand and predict. It is unclear whether reductions in trust in the last two years that some surveys found are a return to the norm following a boost in trust in certain institutions (especially the government) at the beginning of the pandemic or if these trends signal the dawn of a crisis of (dis)trust. With that, we turn to a more detailed examination of trust surveys, beginning with the methods and results of annual trust indexes.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a trend that has also been noticed in other countries. For instance, a review of American trust surveys found that those who lived in rural areas were less trusting of science and those who were non-religious were found to be more trusting of science (Krause et al., 2019).



## Ongoing Annual Trust Indexes

### Methods and Approaches in Trust Measures

#### Edelman Trust Barometer's Methods

Edelman's *Trust Barometer* has been updated annually since 2001 with special reports on individual countries including Canada (Edelman 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022c, 2023a) and on specific topics such as climate change, technology, and health (Edelman 2022a, 2022b, 2023b). For their 2023 index Edelman surveyed over 32,000 people online in 28 countries, with 1,000 to 1,500 people per country, with surveys having been completed in November 2022. Edelman's "trust index" combined respondents' grades of their trust in five groups (NGOs, government, business, media, and "my employer") to do what is right on a nine-point scale, and all ratings from six to nine were counted as trust. This conversion of a scale of trust (from one to nine) into a binary hides nuanced trends such as increased polarization. Edelman's surveys also included a variety of questions regarding trust generally as well as elements of perceived trustworthiness (which explore attributes such as competency, honesty, and integrity).

#### CanTrust's Methods

Proof Inc.'s *CanTrust Index* is an annual survey that has been running since 2016 (Proof Strategies, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022a, 2023a). They also release reports on specific topics, such as Black Canadians' trust, and trust in democracy (Proof Strategies, 2022b, 2023b). *CanTrust* surveys about 1,500 Canadians online every January in both French and English. In 2020 there was a supplemental 1,000 Canadians surveyed in May to track changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *CanTrust's* findings are relatively detailed and include demographic breakdowns of many questions. Like Edelman, CanTrust uses a seven-point scale rating trust for many questions, with a five or higher being counted as trust. The framing of *CanTrust's* trust related question are varied, for instance they have asked if people trust a politician to "do what is right for Canada"; if they trust an institution to be fair, to represent people, or to be competent and effective; or if they trust Canada to live up to certain values. Unlike many surveys, *CanTrust* explicitly frames many of their questions in a Canadian context. Like Edelman (2023a), competency and ethics were measured as key components of trust in institutions (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p.17).

#### Confidence in Leaders' Methods

EnviroNics' *Confidence in Leaders* report is of particular interest because it tracks Canadians' attitudes surrounding trust and confidence with data going as far back as 1983 (EnviroNics, 2023). Most recently they surveyed 5,300 adults in early 2023 (EnviroNics, 2023, p. ii). Like CanTrust, this survey often prompts respondents to consider their level of trust in a Canadian context. EnviroNics (2023) differs from many trust surveys by presenting trust on a Likert scale (either "a lot of confidence," "some confidence," "little confidence," "no confidence at all," or "cannot say" (EnviroNics, 2023, p. 2). It should be noted that while the terms "trust" and "confidence" are very similar, they could have different meanings for respondents, which makes comparing surveys with different word choice more problematic (Mangold, 2023, p. 4).

#### Global Trustworthiness Monitor's Methods

Ipsos' *Global Trustworthiness Monitor* surveyed 16,017 people in 2022 (500 to 1,000 people from each of 21 countries including Canada) and has four released reports (2019-2022) (Ipsos, 2023b). Questions include opinions on the nature of trust, and trustworthiness of government and various professions. However, most of their results are explored on a global scale rather than by country.



## Recent Findings in Ongoing Trust Indexes

### Edelman Trust Barometer's Findings

Edelman's main report tracked Canadian public trust in the following institutions to "do what is right": respondents' employer (75% in November 2022), NGOs (53%), business (52%), government (51%), and media (50%) (Edelman, 2023a, p. 4). These latter four institutions saw an increase of trust at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that has since faded. For instance, trust in government grew from 50% in late 2019 to 70% in May of 2020, then declined to 59% in late 2020 (Edelman, 2021, p. 7). These four levels of trust in 2023 are in between trust levels found in 2018 and 2019 (Edelman, 2019, p. 6). For more detailed recent trends of Edelman's institutional trust, see Appendix A.

Edelman (2023a) also found that economic optimism had declined since the previous year in Canada (and globally). Trust in various types of media "for information" was also measured: traditional media (60% in late 2022, down 5% from late 2019), search engines (54%, up 1%), owned media (35%, down 2%), and social media (21%, down 5%) (Edelman 2023a, p. 7 compared to Edelman, 2020, p.14).

Some findings from past years were not updated in 2023 but are still of interest. For instance, Edelman (2022c, p. 7) found that faith in capitalism was low in Canada with 48% agreeing that capitalism "as it exists today does more harm than good" (compared to 52% globally and 39% in the USA). Canadians were also asked if they believed information from various sources. The percentage of respondents who believed information (either automatically or if the information is seen elsewhere once or twice) compared to "I will never believe it if this is the only place I see it" was: my employer (68% believe vs 10% never believe), national government (65% vs 17%), media reports - named sources (60% vs 18%), major corporations (54% vs 26%), media reports - anonymous sources (50% vs 26%), advertising (46% vs 32%), and "my social media feed" (33% vs 46%) (Edelman, 2022c, p.17).

Similarly, Edelman (2019) examined the credibility of various spokespeople, although they have not updated this in more recent years. The percentage of Canadians who identified each group as either very or extremely credible were: company technical expert (65%), academic expert (64%), a person like yourself (58%), financial industry analyst (55%), regular employee (55%), successful entrepreneur (51%), NGO representative (46%), journalist (43%), CEO (41%), board of directors (38%), and government official (38%) (Edelman, 2019, p. 15).

Edelman's 2023 report on trust and health found a noteworthy drop in Canadians' confidence in the media to "report accurate information about healthcare" (51% in November 2022 down from 63% in November 2021) (Edelman, 2023b, p. 16). They also asked about trust in sub-sectors of health, with the percentage of people saying they trust them to "do what is right" being: your local pharmacy 82%, hospitals 79%, private/government health insurance 67%, health technology 64%, biotech/life sciences 61%, consumer health/over the counter 61%, vitamins/natural supplements 56%, and pharmaceuticals 55% (Edelman, 2023b, p. 35). They also found that the percentage of Canadians who trusted (with broad agreement on a scale of 6 out of 9 or higher) different types of people "to tell the truth about health issues and about how to best protect the health of the public" to be: my doctor 84%, nurses 84%, pharmacists 80%, 76% health experts/scientists, my friends and family 75%, teachers 66%, national health authorities 65%, my chief health officer 58%, and my CEO 55% (Edelman, 2023b, p. 37). This relatively high trust in scientists was also reflected in earlier Edelman reports such as the trust barometer completed a few months before the pandemic, in which 83% of Canadians trusted scientists to "do what is right" (compared to 58% for journalists, 42% for government leaders, and 33% for the very wealthy" (Edelman, 2020, p. 15). Surprisingly, Edelman (2021) found that trust in scientists declined to 77% in late 2020, which is unlike some other surveys that showed an increase during the early part of the pandemic (p. 20).

When Canadians were asked if they trusted various groups “to do what is right in addressing climate change” the November 2021 survey results were: national environmental authorities 66%, universities and research institutions: 63%, my employer 59%, climate activists and advocates 58%, NGOs 56%, citizens of my country 56%, federal government 55%, regional government 55%, the UN 53%, the EU 52%, my local government 52%, government (generally) 52%, media 45%, and business 43% (Edelman, 2022a, p. 38). Canadians were skeptical of national climate policy, with 54% selecting the statement that climate policy in Canada is “driven by politics regardless of what the science says” rather than being “driven by science and scientific evidence” (Edelman 2022a, p. 11).

Edelman’s reports from before the pandemic show that the erosion of trust in Canada has been occurring for many years. For instance, in late 2019 65% of Canadians agreed with the statement “I do not have confidence that our current leaders will be able to successfully address our country’s challenges” (Edelman, 2020, p. 15)

### CanTrust’s Recent Findings

*CanTrust* tracks an aggregate trust level based on trust in five institutions (NGOs, news media, governments, small and medium corporations, and large corporations) “to be competent and effective and to do the right thing” (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 17). Trust was measured by respondents on a seven-point scale, with ratings of five or higher counting as trust. Since 2019 aggregate trust declined gradually from 39% to 34% in 2022, before rebounding to 39% in 2023. Their surveys are completed each January, and there was a second sampling done in May 2020 to measure the impact of the COVID-19 crisis which saw a significant increase in trust (for example, trust increased from January to May 2020 for governments (from 33% to 40%), doctors (76% to 87%) and scientists (70% to 82%) (Proof Strategies, 2020, p. 4)). Trust in all five institutions was higher in 2023 than either 2021 or 2022. Since January 2020, trust has been stable for NGOs (around 50%), small and medium corporations (around 40%), and large corporations (around 27%). On the other hand, trust in both government and news media declined sharply in 2021/2022 but returned to near pre-pandemic levels in 2023 (37% and 43% respectively in 2023 (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p.17)). This is a key difference from Edelman (2023a, p. 3), which found that institutional trust had continued to decline slightly from 2022 to 2023. Trends in these trust levels were analyzed by generation, political affiliation, and province. Immigrants and Baby Boomers were found to have higher than average levels of trust in institutions (Proof Strategies, 2023a, pp. 15, 30; 2019, p.18). *CanTrust* also measures trust in more specific Canadian institutions such as the healthcare system (58% in 2023), military (57%), and electoral system (46%) (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 28).

*CanTrust* also tracks trust in various messengers to provide reliable information. Medical doctors and scientists were the most trusted in this way in 2023 (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 49). They had an increase in trust at the beginning of the pandemic, followed by a slight decline each year until their level of trust returned to near pre-pandemic levels in 2023. Some messengers such as friends and family, educators, and religious leaders saw decreased trust for information at the start of the pandemic that has remained ever since. Trust in politicians’ information quality remains extremely low, but increased at the start of the pandemic and has maintained this increase (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 49). See Appendix B for more detailed results.

*CanTrust* also tracks the reliability of sources of information on COVID-19, which have almost all declined each year since 2021, including doctors (75% in 2021 to 72% in 2023), and scientists (74% in 2021 to 68% in 2023) (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 59). Reliability of sources of information on climate change have almost all declined from 2022 to 2023, and scientists and medical doctors remain by far most trusted (Proof Strategies, 2023a, p. 63).

Proof Strategies (2022a) also contains interesting findings such as: a positive correlation between individual trust in “most people” and institutional trust (p. 15), and the fact that since 2020 institutional trust fell most



in high income earners (p. 16), which is contrary to what conventional wisdom might suggest (because those with lower incomes have been struggling most to cope with disruptions caused by the pandemic and the cost of living crisis). Household incomes were separated into four groups and their aggregate institutional trust percentages (in NGOs, media, small and medium businesses, governments, and large corporations) can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** *Institutional Trust Aggregate of Canadians by Income*

Income	Trust in January 2020	Trust in January 2022
<\$35k	37%	32%
\$35k-\$74k	38%	36%
\$75k-\$99k	39%	34%
\$100k+	41%	33%

*Note.* Adapted from “2022 Results Report Proof Strategies CanTrust Index,” by Proof Strategies, 2022, p. 16.

On the other hand, when trust in messengers by those in the lowest and highest income bracket were compared, high income individuals were more likely to trust every messenger (such as doctors, scientists, friends, and family, etc.) with the sole exception of “religious or spiritual leaders” (Proof Strategies, 2022a, p. 34).

### Confidence in Leaders’ Findings

Scientists were the most trusted group by far in 2023, with 75% of Canadians in 2023 saying they had either “a lot” or “some confidence” in them generally, compared to 52% for leaders of environmental groups, 50% for journalists, 49% for Indigenous leaders, 43% for governments, 42% for business leaders, and 33% for political leaders (Enviroics, 2023, p. 2; see Appendix F for trends over time). Trust in scientists was particularly noteworthy here, with almost three times more respondents saying they had “a lot of confidence” in them (34%) than any other group (Enviroics, 2023, p. 2). They found that Canadians’ confidence in scientists, journalists, and governments decreased from early 2021 to 2023. They noted that their 2021 responses may have been particularly high immediately following the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines (Enviroics, 2023, p. 2). Taking a more long-term perspective, confidence in each group has been both lower and higher since 1983, apart from business leaders who have seen a steady decline in confidence since 2006 after enjoying decades of high confidence. While confidence in journalists has been declining in recent years, in 2023 the results were not unprecedented - they were about the same as when the question was first asked in 1983 (Enviroics, 2023, p. 5). The most striking demographic trend in their data is how Conservative Party supporters have seen the largest decline in confidence since 2006 for business leaders, governments, and journalists, whereas Liberal and NDP supporters have seen less dramatic changes in confidence (Enviroics, 2023, p. 12; see Appendix E).

### Global Trustworthiness Monitor’s Findings

This report found that trust in government in Canada increased 7.5% from 2019 to 2021, and another 0.5% from 2021 to 2022. This increase in government trust at the beginning of the pandemic is consistent with most other surveys, but the fact that this trust has since been sustained is unlike most other surveys. They also found Canadians are the least likely of any country polled to trust business leaders to tell the truth (18% vs. 30% global average) (Ipsos, 2023b). Most of their other findings were reported on a global scale.

## Other Trust-Related Surveys

The *COVID-19 Monitor* from Vox Pop Labs (2022) measured the Canadian public's pandemic-related concerns, feelings, precautions, and trust multiple times a month from late March 2020 to mid-February 2022. It provides insight into the fluctuating public opinion as pandemic restrictions changed, variants arose, and vaccines were developed and delivered. The most relevant question asked how much trust Canadians had in four institutions (the federal government, media, public health officials, and the WHO) in providing factual and objective information about COVID-19. Trust in all four groups declined from 2020 to 2022 (with media having the smallest reduction in trust) (Vox Pop Labs, 2022). Another survey that examined the impact of COVID-19 found that when Canadians were asked how their trust in different groups had changed because of their pandemic experience, people were more likely to report an increase rather than a decrease in trust in healthcare workers (34% vs. 9%) and scientists (31% vs. 12%), while the opposite was true for social media (4% vs. 25%), and traditional media (11% vs. 22%) (Earncliffe Strategy Group, 2023, p. 3).

A survey by Pollara (2022) asked Canadians if they trusted information from various sources and found that “family and friends” ranked highest (80% “tend to trust”), followed by scientists and experts (79%). Other sources of information included: municipal governments (52%), banks (47%), news media (44%), provincial government (44%), federal government (41%), and politicians (11%) (Pollara, 2022, pp. 32, 34). They ran the same poll in 1992, and since then trust decreased in family and friends (-13%), municipal governments (-13%), and banks (-25%), while news media (-3%) and provincial governments (+6%) remained relatively stable, and federal government trust increased (+18%) (Pollara, 2022, p. 34).<sup>6</sup> Relatively low trust in information from news media and governments was also found in Monopoli (2022, para. 6) and Korzinski (2022a);<sup>7</sup> in both surveys politically right identified respondents were found to be more distrustful of the media and the government (Korzinski, 2022a; Monopoli, 2022, paras. 4, 7).

A survey from Léger (2023c) measured Canadians' direct trust in a variety of institutions. Given a binary option of trust or lack of trust, 73% of respondents chose that they trusted the police compared to 69% for Elections Canada, 66% for the Supreme Court of Canada, 57% for the Bank of Canada, 55% for “your municipal administration,” 53% for federal government employees, 49% for the United Nations, 45% for the House of Commons' Speaker, 44% for the House of Commons, 43% for “your provincial government,” 40% for the media, 37% for the Senate, 37% for the Prime Minister's Office, and 28% for large corporations (Léger, 2023c, p. 7). On a similar note, pride in institutions is closely related to trust and a January 2023 Nanos poll found that Canadians felt the institutions that contributed most to Canada being a better country by a wide margin were its universities and colleges, and its healthcare system (Nanos, 2023b, p. 6).



<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately trust in “scientists and experts” was not measured in 1992 so there is no data for comparison.

<sup>7</sup> Nearly half of Canadians (44%) agreed that “much of the information we receive from news organizations is false” and just over half of Canadians (52%) agreed that “official government accounts of events cannot be trusted” (Monopoli, 2022, para. 6). In a similar 2022 survey from Angus Reid, 39% of Canadians chose the statement “most of the stories in the news can't be trusted” compared to 61% who preferred to choose other option that “news media does a good job of presenting stories and facts” (Korzinski, 2022a).



## Special Topics Related to Trust

### Science

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, science has become more politicized, and scientists have increasingly been the target of online harassment (Nogrady, 2021). Some have even argued that there is a growing anti-science political movement that has manifested itself in Canada and around the world in incidents such as anti-vaccine sentiment and elements of the Freedom Convoy (Hotez, 2023, Chapter 1). As a result, there has been increasing concern about levels of public (dis)trust in science (Bloomgarden, 2023). Despite these concerns, scientists (along with doctors and researchers) remain one of the most trusted groups in Canada in a wide range of survey responses including the trust indexes explored above. Other examples include Pollara (2022) in which respondents rated their impressions of various groups, and scientists had the highest favourable rate (72% rated a seven or higher out of ten) and the lowest unfavourable rate (only 6% rated a four or lower) (p. 21). High public support for scientists is also reflected in the surveys explored below. Evidence of a crisis of trust in science is limited, although rising distrust might be hidden by methodological shortcomings of surveys (Reif & Guenther, 2021). What is clearer in survey data is that trust in science is becoming politicized and polarized, with politically right identified people increasingly likely to be less trusting of science (along with most institutions) in Canada.

There is evidence in survey data that Canada has a strong culture of science. The analysis of various surveys and indexes by Council of Canadian Academies (2014) found that, relative to citizens of other countries, Canadians had positive attitudes towards, and were highly engaged in science and technology; had “low levels of reservations about science”; and their scientific knowledge was similar or higher than most other nationalities (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014, pp. xv-xviii). Gallup (2019) found that respondents from Canada were among the most likely in the world to respond “yes” to the question “In general, do you think the work that scientists do benefits people like you in this country?” (p. 79). More recently, a 2021 survey of Canadian youth found that a majority held scientifically accurate beliefs such as human impacts on climate change (CFI & Ipsos, 2021, p. 5). 63% strongly or somewhat agreed that STEM knowledge will be increasingly important in high paying jobs in the near future (CFI & Ipsos, 2021, p. 13) and 70% strongly or somewhat agreed that “science can be relied upon because it is based on facts and not opinion” (p. 14).

A survey by Léger (2018) was particularly thorough in its examination of opinions on science and found that Canadians had high trust and interest in science.<sup>8</sup> 83% agreed that they “would like to know more about science and how it affects our world” (p. 11). When asked where Canadians turn to check the accuracy of scientific findings, their most likely first choice was scientists and professors (47%) followed by the internet (25%) and science centers and museums (9%) (p. 15). In terms of how comfortable Canadians were with the fluid nature of scientific understanding, the most supportive statement read: “When it comes to science, I am comfortable knowing that scientific answers may not be definite” to which 19% of Canadians strongly agreed and 60% simply agreed, while in contrast, the least supportive statement, “Because scientific ideas are fluid and subject to change, they can’t be trusted” was strongly agreed to by only 3% of Canadians and simply agreed to by 26% (p. 22). When asked if more funding should be spent on science research and education 36% strongly agreed and 46% simply agreed (p. 24). 84% of respondents agreed that science is “contributing to an improvement in the quality of life” (p. 25). Nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that critical challenges “will need to be solved by science and technology,” “science will vastly help solve more problems than it creates,” and that “science should play a more prominent role in our day-to-day lives (pp. 27, 46). When asked which sources they trust to “deliver accurate and fact-based information” respondents said they “trusted” or “trusted very much” museums and science centers, and scientists most often (90%), followed by educational institutions (87%), friends and family (76%), science-

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the results of this survey were broken down by demographics as well as thinking styles (analytical, balanced, and intuitive based on how people make decisions) (p. 8).

based personalities (76%), journalists (56%), government (46%), comedians (31%), religious leaders (25%), bloggers and influencers (19%), celebrities (10%) (p. 31; see p. 32 for trust in mediums). There was some concern about how media coverage of science could be distorted, with 69% agreeing or strongly agreeing that scientific issues are “reported selectively to support news media objectives,” and 63% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are “presented to support a political position” (p. 34). This finding highlights the importance of how trust in science is affected when filtered through or influenced by other messengers or institutions.

Evidence of the politicization of science in Canada can be found in the results from a survey by EKOS (2023). Respondents were asked “When raising children, which of the following do you think is more important to emphasize?” 61% chose “trust in science and experts” while only 17% chose “skepticism of experts and elites.” However, when it came to supporters of the Conservative Party, the trusting response fell to 42%, and the skeptical response increased to 32% (EKOS, 2023). The political polarization affecting trust in science has also been observed in a study from Germany which found that supporting the populist right political party (AfD) reduced the likelihood of having trust in science and that this connection increased after the pandemic began (Bromme et al., 2022).<sup>9</sup>

Similar evidence of the politicization of science and increasing polarization have also been seen in surveys in the United States where there has been evidence of declining trust in science since the beginning of the pandemic, particularly among politically right identified Americans. For instance, a May 2023 survey found that nearly half of respondents agreed that scientific research had become “less trustworthy in recent years,” and this number was nearly three-quarters for Republicans while it was only about one-quarter for Democrats (Cox et al., 2023). A recent Pew survey had similar findings: American trust in scientists had fallen since before the pandemic, however this reduction was overwhelmingly observed among Republican voters (Kennedy & Tyson, 2023, p. 1). Republicans were found to be far more likely than Democrats to choose “not too much” or “none at all” to describe their confidence in scientists “to act in the best interests of the public” (38% among Republicans compared to 13% for Democrats) (Kennedy & Tyson, 2023, p. 1). However, it should be noted that despite a recent decline in trust, medical scientists and scientists generally remain highly trusted relative to other groups in the United States. See Appendix G for more detail about Americans’ confidence in scientists and other groups (Kennedy & Tyson, 2023).

## Technology

Digital technology such as smart devices, the internet, and social media have been increasingly prevalent and important in nearly every aspect of daily life in Canada. The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly accelerated an already astounding pace of technological integration and buy-in. Considering technology’s role in sharing information, understanding public trust in various technologies is more important than ever.

Edelman (2022b) found technology to be consistently one of the most trusted sectors “to do what is right” in Canada (as in most other high-income countries) (p. 45).<sup>10</sup> Relative to other countries, Canadian respondents were less likely trust foreign tech companies, and slower to adopt new technology before it is well established (pp. 11, 13). Trust in technology companies (to behave ethically) in Canada by sub-sector of technology was: health tech 61%, voting tech 53%, 5G 49%, internet of things 45%, digital assistants 41%

<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting that Bromme et al., (2022) found that trust in scientists increased at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and then faded in subsequent months and years in Germany which is very similar to Canadian surveys such as Proof Strategies (2020, p. 47, 2023a, p. 49).

<sup>10</sup> In 2022 education, healthcare, and transportation were the only sectors that had higher trust, and this was by a narrow margin. It should be noted that only eighteen sectors were measured. They were, in order of highest trust in Canada to lowest: education, healthcare, transportation, technology, hotels and hospitality, professional services, food and beverage, retail, manufacturing, financial services, consumer packaged goods, energy, telecommunications, automotive, airlines, entertainment, fashion, and social media (which was by far the least trusted).



AI/robotics 39%, VR/AR/MR platforms 38%, web 3 36%, blockchain tech 33%, autonomous tech 30%, self-driving cars 28%, and cryptocurrency 27% (Edelman, 2022b, p. 41). This wide variety of levels of trust highlights the importance of considering individual technologies with as much context as possible.

Other survey data has shown that people are increasingly concerned about the negative impact of technology on their life, which is undoubtedly connected to trust, especially in the sense of being personally vulnerable to the impact of technology. For instance, given the severe statement “I fear that technical progress is destroying our lives,” 53% of Canadians agreed compared to only 38% that disagreed (Ipsos, 2023c, p. 56). This low opinion is likely tied to peoples’ relationship with the internet and related technologies. Trust in the Internet has declined recently, with an Ipsos poll finding 57% of Canadians trust the internet, which is down 14% since 2019 (Ipsos, 2022c). This trend is connected to findings in other surveys that public opinion on social media is poor and has been declining further recently, particularly as it relates to trust in information quality (Earncliffe Strategy Group, 2023, pp. 3-5; Edelman, 2020, p. 14, 2022, p. 17 2023a, p. 7; Graves, 2023b, p. 11; Léger, 2022, p. 22). Concern about technology’s impact could also be connected to the rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence, opinions on which are explored in detail below.

### Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Recent breakthroughs in artificial intelligence (AI) have brought the technology to the forefront of public discourse. Text and image generative AI programs such as Chat GPT and DALL·E are extremely popular in Canada and around the world. These transformative, rapidly spreading technologies have raised important questions about the risks and benefits they bring. Many surveys have explored recent Canadian public opinion on AI and have found conflicting feelings of hopeful curiosity alongside fears of catastrophe. As a result, Canadians’ trust in AI has been found to be highly context dependent. When considering trust in AI, one possible definition is “a willingness to accept vulnerability to an AI system (e.g. by relying on system recommendations or output, or sharing data) based upon positive expectations of how the system will operate (e.g. accuracy, helpfulness, data privacy and security)” (Gillespie et al., 2023, p. 12).

Based on recent survey results Canadian public opinion on the net benefit or drawback of AI is divided, although pessimism is often more common than optimism. For instance, a September 2023 survey found that 46% of Canadians thought AI is either definitely or probably “a threat for humanity,” while 40% consider it to be definitely or probably “an opportunity for humanity” (Canseco, 2023). Another survey found that only 38% of Canadians agreed that “products using AI have more benefits than drawbacks” and Canadians were nearly twice as likely to feel nervous than excited from using products that use AI (63% and 37% respectively) (Ipsos, 2023d). In another survey Canadians were divided on the impact of AI tools on society with 36% saying they were good, 25% saying they were bad, and 39% saying they did not know or preferred not to answer (Léger 2023a, p. 14). Income appears to be the most important demographic factor regarding trust in AI. In one survey, the likelihood of seeing AI as an opportunity for humanity was lowest among those in the lowest income bracket (Canseco, 2023) while another survey’s finding that optimism about AI as a positive force increased with income (Graves, 2023a, p. 25).

Trust in AI has been found to vary greatly based on its purpose and context. One survey used a Likert scale to ask Canadians how much they would trust AI in various contexts. Trust was highest for “completing tasks at home” (63% trust “a great deal” or “somewhat”), answering questions via chat about a product or service (52%), and using facial recognition to access personal information (51%). Trust was lowest for “teaching your child(ren) (replacing their teacher)” (14% trust “a great deal” or “somewhat”), finding a life partner online (19%), driverless vehicles (22%), answering health questions (29%), social media content algorithms (34%), and creating content for a project (36%) (Léger 2023a, p. 18). This survey found high public fear and skepticism of AI’s decision-making, security, and threat to human jobs (Léger 2023a, p. 19). On the other hand, the public felt relatively positive about AI’s usefulness and ability to improve efficiency (Léger 2023a, p. 19; for more detail see Appendix H).

Trust in AI has also been found to vary based on who controls it. One survey question examined Canadians' various levels of trust in various groups to "develop and manage Artificial Intelligence" using a Likert scale (Canseco, 2023). The most trusted group was doctors/nurses (62% "definitely" or "probably trust") followed by universities (59%), tech executives (40%), the federal government (34%), your provincial government (33%), business executives (24%), and international governments (22%) were the least trusted (Canseco, 2023, data tables p. 4)

Recent surveys have shown a high awareness of, and concern about the many risks that AI poses. More than seven in ten Canadians were either "very" or "moderately concerned" about AI "causing an event that leads to the loss of human life," "AI leading to less intelligent students at schools [or] universities," and "AI taking over jobs currently performed by humans" (Canseco, 2023). There is evidence that Canadians were also concerned about AI's impact on disinformation, with an EKOS survey finding that 67% of Canadians agree with the statement "I really worry that the rise of generative AI is going to lead to a surge in consumer disinformation" (Graves, 2023b, p. 18).

Americans also appear to be worried about a diverse collection of potential negative consequences of AI on society. Over two thirds of American respondents to an August 2023 survey were either somewhat or very concerned about fifteen potential consequences of AI ranging from the loss of human jobs, spreading of misinformation and propaganda, reduced human creativity, loss privacy, and increased power of big technology companies (YouGov, 2023, p. 2). These concerns help explain the results from an August 2023 survey which found that respondents were nearly three times more likely to choose that AI's effects on society will be either "more negative than positive" or "entirely negative" (40%) compared to 15% that said it will be "more positive than negative" or "entirely positive" (YouGov, 2023, p. 1). When it came to AI's impact on their own life, respondents were slightly less negative (30% negative total and 20% positive total) (YouGov, 2023, p. 1). In light of these concerns, it may be unsurprising that nearly six in ten Americans respondents either somewhat or strongly supported a six month pause on "some kinds of AI development" (YouGov, 2023, p. 3) and about three quarters of both Republican and Democratic voters support increased regulation of AI (with over one half responding that AI should be "much more regulated" and about one quarter saying AI should be "somewhat more regulated") (p. 22). This rare example political consensus in modern American society highlights how a wide variety of people feel concerned about AI.

A particularly sound and thorough global survey of trust in AI gathered qualitative and quantitative data from participants from 17 countries (Gillespie et al., 2023, p. 2).<sup>11</sup> The survey asked about AI-related trust and perceived trustworthiness, emotions, risks and benefits, regulation, and AI in the contexts of healthcare, public safety/security, human resources, and consumer recommendations. Trust and acceptance of AI was found to be highest in the "emerging economies" of Brazil, India, China, and South Africa (p. 13). Compared to respondents from other countries, Canadian respondents were more likely to feel fear and worry about AI in general, were less comfortable with using AI at work, saw a slightly lower amount of potential benefit from AI, and were less satisfied with current safeguards against the risks of AI (pp. 3-4, 77). The biggest potential benefits of AI for Canadian respondents were innovation and improved efficiency, while the biggest risks were cybersecurity and job loss due to automation (pp. 25-26). Canadians felt a large amount of uncertainty about AI's impacts (p. 36). Of the various principles for creating trustworthy AI, Canadians ranked "data privacy, security, and governance" as the most important (p. 42). The vast majority of Canadians wanted to learn more about AI, while slightly less than half consider their knowledge of AI to be moderate or high (p. 56). Compared to their survey results from 2020, Canadian respondents were more aware of AI; more trusting of AI; had higher understanding of how to use AI; while confidence in government and business to safely use, develop, and regulate AI remained low (p. 6). The report also

<sup>11</sup> The countries were Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, the UK, and the USA.

includes a model that summarizes the drivers of trust in AI which is the basis for the report's recommendations for increasing trust in AI (p. 63; see Appendix I).

### Healthcare and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Trust in medical professionals has obviously been of particular interest following the COVID-19 pandemic. Earncliffe Strategy Group (2023) used both qualitative and quantitative data to examine how the pandemic experience affected Canadians' health perspectives, especially relating to vaccination, other health measures, and information sources. The qualitative data had noteworthy findings relating to information sources; for instance, few participants said that their trust in any source had increased while many said they lost trust in sources (p. 5). They also found that many people became disengaged in finding new information about the pandemic for various reasons such as it having become "overwhelming, or difficult to reconcile, or too heated an issue" (p. 5). The survey also found that people were about three times more likely to say that the pandemic experience had made their trust in scientists and healthcare workers increase rather than decrease (p. 3).

EnviroNics' "Public Trust and Readiness Barometer: COVID-19" was conducted in February 2022 and measured Canadians' opinions on the state of the healthcare system, vaccination, government response to COVID-19, and various other pandemic-related topics (EnviroNics, 2022). It found that Canadians had rapidly reducing concern about COVID-19 (EnviroNics, 2022, p. 6), and increasing concern about the state of Canada's health care system generally (p. 8). Respondents were more likely to be concerned about the state of the health care system if they based their opinion on information from the media rather than their own experiences (p. 9). This survey also explored respondents' "confidence... in the skills and competence" of various medical professionals with the highest to lowest being: nurses (91%), pharmacists (90%), physicians (89%), dentists (88%), physiotherapists (83%), registered massage therapists (76%), PHAC & Health Canada (67%), your Chief Medical Officer of Health (66%), chiropractors (64%), the Chief Medical Officer of Canada (64%), your provincial health ministry (56%), and hospital administrators (56%) (p. 12).

Evidence of how discrepancies in different health guidelines affect the Canadian public's opinion were explored in an Abacus survey about alcohol consumption and relevant guidelines (Coletto, 2023). Trust in doctors, scientists, and various health agencies to give credible health-related advice was found to be high (78% to 88% highly trust, trust, or somewhat trust) (para. 4). Respondents were first shown the government of Canada's low risk drinking guidelines, and about two thirds of respondents found these credible (para 5). However, after being told that other guidelines and research recommended fewer drinks, these discrepancies made respondents feel the following ways: "unsure about the quality of scientific evidence about alcohol and health" (31%), "interested in information explaining the discrepancy" (30%), "mistrustful of government" (17%), "confused on what to do going forward" (17%), "mistrustful of public health guidelines" (16%), mistrustful of the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse and Addiction (12%), and only 28% selected "none of the above" (multiple responses were possible) (para. 7). In a related question, about 6 in 10 respondents either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that hearing this contradictory information made them less trustful of "the scientific process" and the government (para. 8). These findings have implications for the impact of contradictory information on other scientific and health-related issues such as pandemics and vaccination.

Support for vaccines is high but not unanimous in Canada. In a survey completed shortly before the pandemic, Canadians were asked about the risks and benefits of childhood vaccines ("for diseases such as measles, mumps, and rubella") (Pew Research, 2020). 68% of Canadians said there was low or no risk of side effects and 75% said there were high preventative health benefits. However, 9% said the risk of side effects was high and 20% chose medium. A similar number (7%) said there were low or no preventative health benefits of childhood vaccines and 16% chose medium (para. 11). In another survey, the most common concern among those who said they were not likely to get future COVID-19 vaccine doses were:

“long-term side effects of the vaccines” (32%), inefficacy of the vaccine (29%), and the belief that they were protected enough by the doses they have (20%) (Earnscliffe Strategy Group, 2023, p. 2).

In the United States, support for childhood vaccines against measles, mumps and rubella has been consistently high, with nearly nine in ten respondents saying the benefits of these vaccines outweigh the risks in 2016, 2019, and 2023 (Funk et al., 2023). Increasing politicization and polarization about health issues in the United States can be seen in the sharp decrease in Republican voters who say children should be required to be vaccinated to attend public school (which declined from 79% in 2019 to 57% in 2023, whereas Democrats remained stable at 86% and 85% respectively) (Funk et al., 2023). Americans with higher levels of formal education were found to have higher trust in scientific research and were more likely to be vaccinated against COVID-19 (Cox et al., 2023). Those with higher trust in institutions were also much more likely to be partially or fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (Cox et al., 2023) which highlights the importance of public trust in relation to public health measures.

### Trust in Other People

Trust is central to society’s functioning and individual well-being. As Statistics Canada (2023d) argued, “trust in others can facilitate interpersonal relationships and promote cooperation between individuals. A higher level of trust in others not only has benefits for individuals but also society as a whole, with greater overall social cohesion.” Recent survey results have shown the importance of context and demographic aspects in shaping trust in other people. Statistics Canada has asked the Canadian public a variety of trust-related questions as part of their extensive public surveys. For instance, Canadians were asked to choose which statement they agreed with more: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?” (Statistics Canada, 2023b). In Q4 2022 46% of respondents chose the former, more trusting option, while 54% chose the latter, less trusting option (Statistics Canada, 2023b). The following demographic groups were more likely to choose the trusting option: retirees (49%), men (48%), and, to a lesser degree, immigrants (47%). In contrast, the following groups were less trusting than average: LGBTQ2+ people (41%), people with a disability (40%), and Indigenous identifying people (37%) (Statistics Canada, 2023b).<sup>12</sup> More formal education and older age both correlated with higher trust in most people (Statistics Canada, 2023b).<sup>13</sup>

Another survey from Statistics Canada (2023c) examined to what degree Canadian respondents trust their neighbours. Data from mid 2022 found that 53% of people trust many or most people in their neighbourhood (para. 2). Older people had higher trust in neighbours, while young women, people in large cities, and racialized groups were less likely to trust their neighbours (Statistics Canada, 2023c, paras. 3-7).<sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada (2023c) also found that people who had higher trust in their neighbours also had other positive quality of life indicators, such as “a stronger sense of belonging to their local community, higher life satisfaction and a better sense of meaning and purpose compared with those who reported not trusting as many neighbours” (paras. 9-11).

The importance of relationships in determining trust is reflected in a Q3 Statistics Canada (2023c) survey that asked respondents to rate on ten-point scale, “where 0 means ‘Cannot be trusted at all’ and 10 means ‘Can be trusted completely,’ what is your level of trust in ‘group of people?’” The percentage of respondents that reported a high level of trust (a score of 8 or more) was 89% for family members, 70% for friends, 30% for neighbours, and only 4% for strangers. (Statistics Canada, 2023c)

<sup>12</sup> This survey data did not include people living on reserves.

<sup>13</sup> Urban/rural differences were very minimal as were differences between those who were visible minorities and those who were not.

<sup>14</sup> However, as Statistics Canada points out, other factors such as the fact that there are far more racialized people in urban areas could contribute to these last two findings.



An Ipsos (2022a, 2022b) poll examined social cohesion and found recently decreasing trust between average people around the world including in Canada. It found decreased agreement from late 2020 to early 2022 with the statements: “I would trust in other Canadians to in act in the best interest of the country” (down from 72% to 61%), and “I have the same outlook on life/priority issues as other Canadians” (down from 83% to 67%). Also, only 33% of respondents selected that “most people can be trusted” compared to 67% who selected the other possible statement that “you can’t be too careful dealing with people” - this trust increased with income and education, and was lowest in middle-aged people (Ipsos, 2022b, para. 8).

## Politics and Society

Based on recent survey results, Canadians’ trust in politicians and governments is low and alienation and frustration with their political systems are growing. While some surveys found an increase in trust in government at the onset of the pandemic, trust has mostly been found to have declined since then. For instance, A 2022 OECD study asked Canadians, “In Canada, do you have confidence in the national government?” and 50.7% said yes in 2022 (compared to 31% in the US, 43% in France, and 61% in Germany) (OECD, 2023). This is down from high 50s and low 60s in the few years preceding the pandemic and 60% in 2020 (OECD, 2023). Similarly, an Ipsos poll from 2022 found that 43% of Canadians trusted the government to do what is right, which was down from 58% in 2019 (Ipsos, 2022b, para. 2). Earncliffe Strategy Group (2023) found that many Canadians had reduced trust in one or more levels of government due to their pandemic experience (p. 5).

A 2022 survey from Angus Reid found distrust of the government was on the rise in Canada with 56% of respondents having said they disagree with the statement “I generally trust the government in general to act in the best interests of the people,” which was up from 47% in 2016 (Korzinski, 2022b). Men aged 18-34 were the least likely to agree (24%) and women 55+ were the most likely to agree (52%). There is evidence of a connection between distrust of government and loneliness, with 63% of the most socially isolated having said they do not trust the government but only 49% of the most socially connected Canadians having said the same (Korzinski, 2022b). Many Canadians feel disempowered, too, with about two-thirds of respondents agreeing that it is “impossible for people like me to have any real influence on the political decisions that affect me” (Korzinski, 2022b). The percentage of Canadians that responded this way has been similar since 2016 and most age and gender groups agree with this statement, although young men are more likely to feel this way (Korzinski, 2022b, para. 17).

Politicians had low levels of public trust before the pandemic, with one 2019 Angus Reid poll finding 63% of Canadians agree strongly or agree with the statement “most politicians can’t be trusted” compared to the 28% of respondents who disagreed or disagreed strongly (Korzinski, 2019). EKOS has been tracking trust in the Canadian federal government since 2000 and has also found consistently low trust (Graves, 2023b, p. 10). When asked, “How much do you trust the federal government to do what is right?” the percentage of respondents who said either most or all of the time has mostly been between 20% and 40% since 2000 (Graves, 2023b, p. 10). Immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, trust in the government “to do what is right” spiked to just over 50% before returning to the mid-30s% in 2023, which is similar to trust levels in the earlier parts of the Trudeau government (Graves, 2023b, p. 10).

*Ipsos Global Trends 2023* painted a dark picture of how Canadians perceived the trajectory of society (Ipsos, 2023a). For instance, 62% of Canadians agreed that Canada was on the wrong track, 70% of Canadians were worried “that the government and public services will do little to help people in the years ahead,” 68% of Canadians agreed that the world was changing too fast, and 81% of Canadians agreed that it’s inevitable we will lose some privacy in the future (Ipsos, 2023a). Another survey from Ipsos (2022d) had similar findings surrounding feelings of alienation and frustration with institutional injustice. For instance, more than half of Canadian respondents agreed that “traditional parties and politicians don’t care about people like me,” “Canada’s economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful,” “Canada needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful,” and “experts in this country don’t understand

the lives of people like me” (p. 4). However, average agreement with these statements was down slightly from previous years (about -3% from 2021, and -8% compared to 2019) (p. 4). A similarly pessimistic result from Nanos (2023b) found that satisfaction “with Canada as a country” has declined each year since 2021, with an average rating on a scale of zero to ten going from 7.2 in 2021, to 6.8 in 2022, and to 6.6 in 2023 (p. 4).

## News Media

Many decisions that people make depend on media information that they cannot verify themselves. In an age of increasing complexity and information overload, the interpretation of, and trust in media is of great importance (Mangold, 2023, p. 3). Media trust is also important to explore because it has important connections to trust in other messengers and institutions.<sup>15</sup> For instance, research has found a close connection between political trust and press trust, which may be connected by opinions about elites (Hanitzsch et al., 2018).<sup>16</sup> Surveys have found some evidence of declining trust in mainstream news media, especially among politically right identified Canadians.<sup>17</sup>

A Statistics Canada (2023d) survey found some distrust of news media in Canada: only 16% of respondents had a high level of trust (having rated their trust in news media as eight or higher out of ten), while 32% had a moderate level of trust (a score of six or seven) and 53% had a low level of trust (a score of five or less). This same survey found that trust was particularly low in social media (only 5% had high trust) and the internet (13% high trust), while television, radio, and print media each had 28% high trust. Respondents over 65 and those who were highly trusting of other people both had higher levels of trust in news media (Statistics Canada, 2023d).

A survey by Léger (2022) of Canadians found that the most trusted sources for providing “accurate news or information” in descending order were: family (75% “a lot” or “some” trust), people like me (74%), local broadcast news (72%), friends (71%), CBC News (68%), my local paper (67%), CTV news (66%), internet search engines (64%), local/municipal government (63%), and CBC Radio (60%) (p.19). On the other hand, the least-trusted sources were the Russian government (86% “do not trust”), the Chinese government (84%), celebrities (77%), Facebook (76%), TikTok (73%), Snapchat (71%), marketers and advertisers (71%), politicians (70%), political activist groups (69%), and Fox News (65%) (Léger, 2022, p. 22).

A survey from Pollara (2023b) measured trust in particular news sources and found that the most trusted sources were: The Weather Network (net trust +62%), Global News (+53%), CBC (+51%), The Globe and Mail (+40%), The National Post (+30%), Maclean’s (+28%), and The Toronto Star (+26%) (p. 4). In contrast, some sources were seen as more untrustworthy than trustworthy such as The Western Standard (-2%), the satire website The Beaverton (-5%), Rebel Media (-8%), and FOX News (-27%) (p.4). Conservative Party supporters were found to be less trusting of most media (aside from FOX News, Rebel Media, The Western Standard, and the Sun newspapers) and the largest trust gap between Liberal and Conservative voters was for the CBC (p. 4).

A survey from the University of Laval explored how Canadians consume news content online and found reduced trust in news curated by either journalists or algorithms (Brin et al., 2023). Agreement with the statement “Having stories selected for me by editors and journalists is a good way to get news” fell from 29% in 2016 to 20% in 2023 while “Having stories automatically selected for me on the basis of what I have consumed in the past is a good way to get news” was agreed to by 37% of respondents in 2016 and 26% in

<sup>15</sup> In the context of news media, a definition of trust is “the willingness of the audience to be vulnerable to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform in a satisfactory manner” (Hanitzsch et al., 2018, p. 5).

<sup>16</sup> This connection between media and political trust has been found to be even stronger in highly polarized countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2018).

<sup>17</sup> In addition to the surveys discussed here, see also Appendix D for additional evidence of politically polarized trust levels in journalists (Envionics, 2023, p. 12).

2023 (pp. 24-25). However, people were less worried that “personalized news may mean they miss out on important information” with 60% having agreed in 2016 compared to 49% in 2023 (p. 27). More generally, 40% of respondents trusted most news most of the time (which was down from 52% in 2019 and 44% in 2020) (p. 7).

## Economy

Economic conditions have worsened in Canada following the pandemic as rising wealth inequality, interest rates, cost of living, and inflation have put a strain on many Canadians. When examining trust, financial hardship is an important consideration as it has been found to reduce trust in governments and other institutions while also increasing alienation and the likelihood of believing conspiracy theories (Adam-Troian et al., 2023).

The impact of the cost of living and housing crises is clear in recent survey results. One survey from Nanos (2023a) taken in June 2023 found increasing economic pessimism and personal financial hardship. Those who thought that the next generation of Canadians will have a standard of living that is higher (10%) or the same (18%) compared to today has been steadily shrinking in the last couple years and the belief that their standard of living will be worse (65%) was the highest in June 2023 compared to any time since the question was first asked in 2012 (p. 3). The percentage of Canadians concerned about paying next month’s rent was remarkably high (11% worried and 19% somewhat worried in mid-2023) after increasing sharply in mid-2022. Young Canadians were most likely to be worried (all = 11%, aged 18-34 = 16%) (p. 6-7). Most Canadians have either had to cancel a major purchase because of inflation, have struggled to afford basic necessities, or both. The percentage who said inflation has not been a problem decreased from 48% to 40% from March 2022 to June 2023 (p. 8). Similarly, a survey from Pollara (2023a) has been tracking the Canadian public’s outlook on the economy for three decades and the update completed in December 2022 found Canadians “the most pessimistic about the Canadian economy and their personal finances... since the 2008 financial crisis” (Pollara, 2023a).

The housing crisis is a severe and widespread problem in Canada, with over half of Canadians having worried about paying their mortgage or rent in the previous two months (with about two thirds of those in Alberta and British Columbia, and young adults having said the same) (Léger, 2023b). There is near unanimous concern among Canadians about affordable housing with 95% of Canadians having chosen that increasing rental costs and the lack of affordable rental homes in Canada is a serious problem (66% very serious, 28% somewhat serious)” (Léger, 2023b, p. 5).

Heightened concern about affordable housing is part of the larger cost of living crisis that has been having an increasingly negative effect on Canadians’ wellbeing. In fact, half of Canadians said their financial situation has had a negative impact on their mental health in the past two months (Léger, 2023c). In addition, nearly two-in-ten Canadians said they had worried frequently about paying their bills, their credit card balance, and the safety of their savings and investments (Léger, 2023c).

EKOS found evidence that certain sectors of the economy have recently experienced more reduced trust than others (Graves, 2023b). For instance, 74% of respondents said their trust in the grocery industry had worsened since 2020, 71% said the same of social media, 58% for airlines, 51% for mainstream media, 47% for telecommunications, 45% for energy, and 40% for banks (p. 11). Also, EKOS found that trust in the global economic system fell dramatically, with just 14% of Canadians holding an optimistic view of globalization in 2023, which is down from 52% in 1999 (p. 9).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Edelman’s Recent Institutional Trust

**Table 2:** *Percentage of respondents who trust based on responses to the question “For each one, please indicate how much you trust that institution to do what is right. 9-point scale; top 4 box, trust. General population, Canada.”*

Survey Date	Aggregate	Business	Government	NGOs	Media
Nov 2017 <sup>a</sup>	49 <sup>b</sup>	49	46	50	49
Nov 2018 <sup>a</sup>	56	56	53	59	57
Nov 2019 <sup>a</sup>	53	53	50	55	53
May 2020	63 <sup>b</sup>	61	70	61	58
Nov 2020 <sup>a</sup>	56	56	59	55	54
Nov 2021 <sup>a</sup>	54	54	53	55	52
Nov 2022 <sup>a</sup>	52	52	51	53	50

*Note.* Adapted from “2019 Edelman Trust Barometer: Canada,” by Edelman, 2019, p. 6

(<https://www.edelman.ca/trust-barometer/trust-barometer-2019>); “Edelman Trust Barometer: Country Report Trust In Canada,” by Edelman, 2021, p. 7 (<https://www.edelman.ca/trust-barometer/edelman-trust-barometer-2021>); and “2023 Edelman Trust Barometer Canada Report” by Edelman, 2023, pp. 3-4 (<https://www.edelman.ca/trust-barometer/2023-edelman-trust-barometer>).

<sup>a</sup> While these reports were released in the spring of the following year and in some cases labeled as data from the following year, field work was done in November of the previous years.

<sup>b</sup> Estimated by adding trust for four institutions and dividing by four, whereas other aggregates were provided by Edelman. The actual aggregate based on their data could be slightly different but was not reported.

## Appendix B: CanTrust’s Recent Messenger Trust

**Table 3:** *Messenger Trust Since January 2020*

Year	Medical doctors	Scientists	Friends & family	Educators	Journalists	Bankers	Religious / spiritual leaders	Business executives	Politicians	Bloggers / influencers	Celebrities
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Question: “On a scale of 1 to 7, please indicate how much you are willing to trust each the following CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE for RELIABLE INFORMATION. 1 means you ‘trust very little’ and 7 means you ‘trust a lot’ [5-7 reported as a percentage].”

2020 January	76	70	78	65	43	41	34	29	12	17	15
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Question: “When you think about recent events, how much do you trust each of these people or groups of people to do the right thing for Canada, Canadians and our society in general?”

2020 May	87	82	N/A <sup>a</sup>	59	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
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Question: “On a scale of 1 to 7, please indicate how much you are willing to trust each the following CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE for RELIABLE INFORMATION. 1 means you ‘trust very little’ and 7 means you ‘trust a lot’ [5-7 reported].”

2021	81	77	64	63	49	36	27	24	18	17	14
2022	78	75	65	63	44	35	27	27	22	19	14
2023	73	69	68	60	46	40	29	29	22	17	15

*Note.* Adapted from “Proof CanTrust Index 2020 Results and Insights,” by Proof Strategies, 2020, pp. 4, 47 ([https://proofagency.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2020-Proof-Inc.-CanTrust-Index-Results-Report\\_May-1.pdf](https://proofagency.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2020-Proof-Inc.-CanTrust-Index-Results-Report_May-1.pdf)); and “2023 Results Report Proof Strategies CanTrust Index,” by Proof Strategies, 2023, p. 49 (<https://proofagency.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Proof-Strategies-CanTrust-Index-2023.pdf>).

<sup>a</sup> N/A indicates that data was not provided by the source.

## Appendix C: CanTrust's Recent Institutional Trust

**Table 4:** Responses to the question “Thinking again about Canada, to what extent are you willing to trust the following organizational categories to be competent and effective and to do the right thing?” [7-point scale, 5-7 = trust %]

Survey Data	Aggregate	Business (small & med)	Business (large)	Government	NGOs	News Media
Jan 2017	43	41	27	39	53	50
Jan 2018	45	45	28	41	56	51
Jan 2019	39	36	20	36	49	40
Jan 2020	38	38	26	33	49	44
Jan 2021	37	41	27	32	48	38
Jan 2022	34	39	27	22	47	35

*Note.* Adapted from “2023 Results Report Proof Strategies CanTrust Index,” by Proof Strategies, 2023, pp. 11, 17 (<https://proofagency.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Proof-Strategies-CanTrust-Index-2023.pdf>).



## Appendix D: 2023 Trust Indexes' Institutional Trust

**Table 5:** *Institutional Trust Comparison*

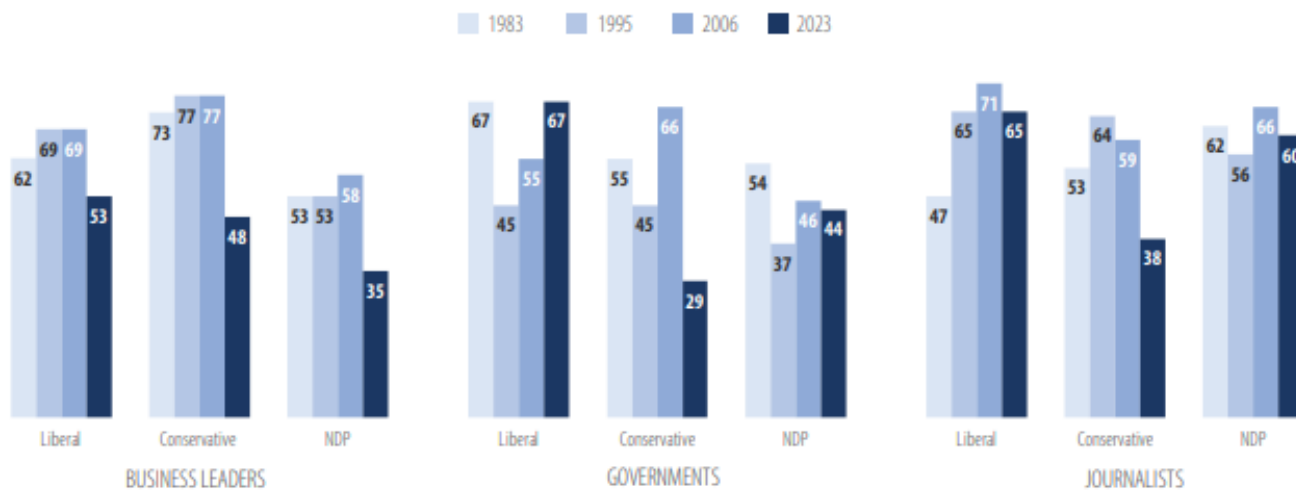
Source	Question	Business	Media	NGOs	Governments
<i>Edelman Trust Barometer 2023</i>	“For each one, please indicate how much you trust that institution to do what is right.” [9-point scale, 6 to 9 = trust %]	52%  My employer: 75%	50%	53%	51%
<i>Confidence in Leaders 2023</i>	“In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence, or no confidence at all in each of the following?” [a lot + some = trust %]	Business leaders: 42%	Journalists: 50%	NA	43%  Political leaders: 33%
<i>Proof Strategies CanTrust Index 2023</i>	“Thinking again about Canada, to what extent are you willing to trust the following organizational categories to be competent and effective and to do the right thing?” [7-point scale, 5-7 = trust %]	Small and medium: 42%  Large: 28%  My boss/CEO: 36%/37%/46%/48% (Gen Z/Mill/Gen X/Boomers)	News media: 43%	50%	37%  Prime Minister: 32%  Provincial Premiers: 32%

*Note.* Adapted from “2023 Edelman Trust Barometer Canada Report,” by Edelman, 2023, p. 4, (<https://www.edelman.ca/trust-barometer/2023-edelman-trust-barometer>); “Confidence in Leaders,” by Environics, 2023, p. 2 ([https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/cot\\_cover-confidence-in-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=da13c4dc\\_0](https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/cot_cover-confidence-in-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=da13c4dc_0)); and “2023 Results Report Proof Strategies CanTrust Index,” by Proof Strategies, 2023, pp. 17, 32 (<https://proofagency.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Proof-Strategies-CanTrust-Index-2023.pdf>).

## Appendix E: Environics Trust by Political Affiliation

**Figure 1:** “Confidence in business leaders, governments and journalists” by political affiliation

1983 – 2023 A lot or some confidence, by federal party support



Q.CONF1A ,B & E

In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?

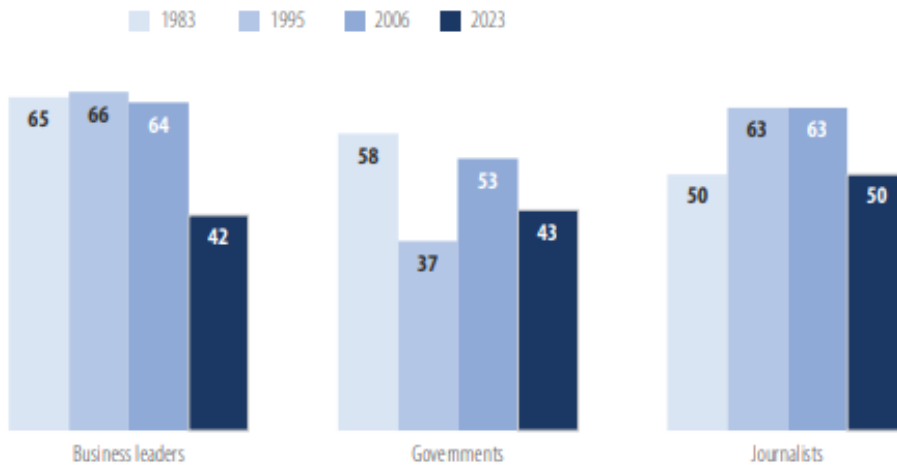
Source for 1983-2006: Environics Focus Canada

Note. From “Confidence in Leaders,” by Environics, 2023, p. 12,

([https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/cot\\_cover-confidence-in-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=da13c4dc\\_0](https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/cot_cover-confidence-in-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=da13c4dc_0)).

## Appendix F: Environics Long-Term Trust

**Figure 2:** “Confidence in business leaders, governments and journalists: 1983-2023”



Q.CONFIA, B & E

*In general, in Canada today, would you say you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following?*

Source for 1983-2006: Environics Focus Canada

Note. From “Confidence in Leaders,” by Environics, 2023, p. 10,

([https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/cot\\_cover-confidence-in-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=da13c4dc\\_0](https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/cot_cover-confidence-in-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=da13c4dc_0)).

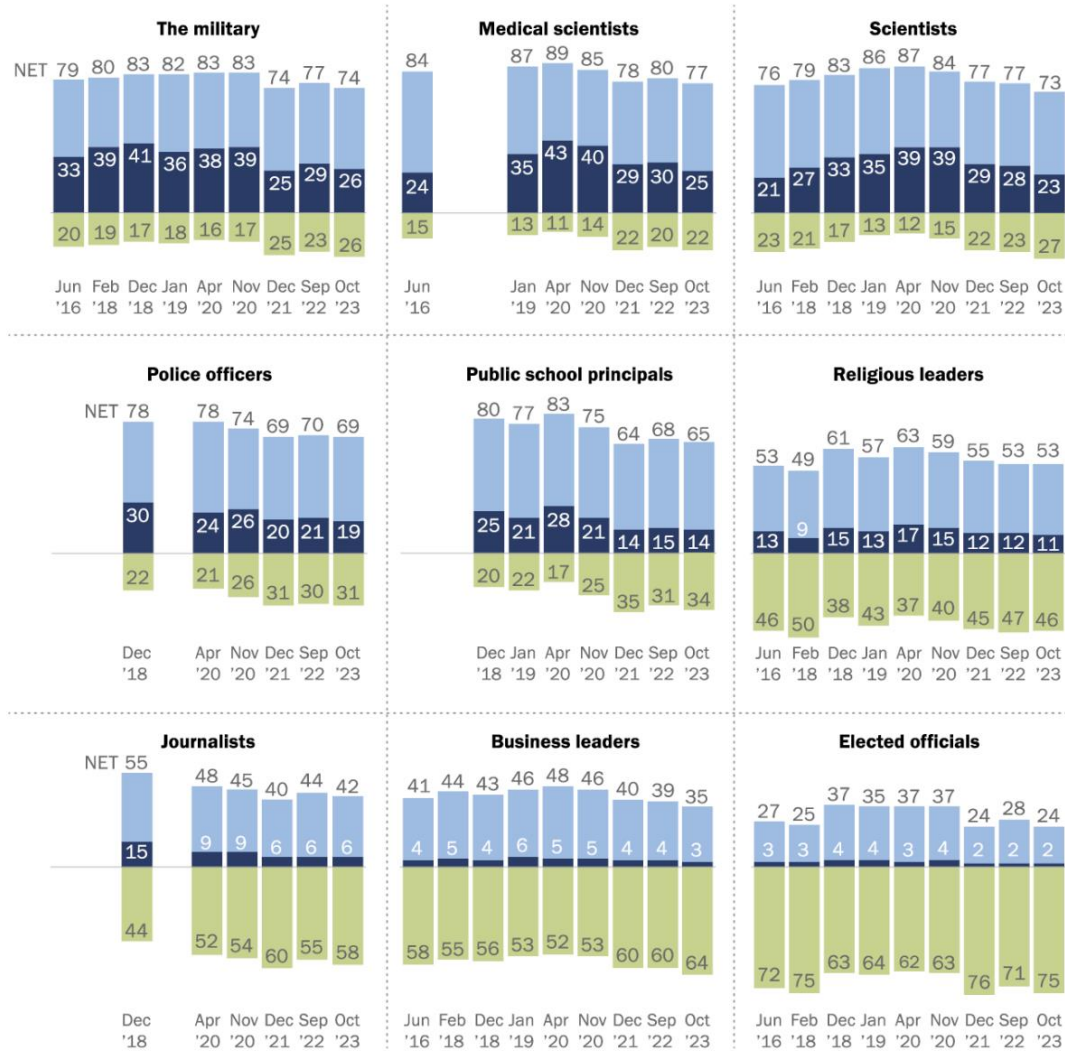
## Appendix G: American Trust in Various Groups

**Figure 3: American Trust Levels in Various Groups 2016-2023**

**Majorities of Americans say they have at least a fair amount of confidence in scientists, but ratings have fallen since early in the coronavirus outbreak**

% of U.S. adults who have \_\_\_ of confidence in the following groups to act in the best interests of the public

● A great deal ● A fair amount ● Not too much/No confidence at all



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.  
 "Americans' Trust in Scientists, Positive Views of Science Continue to Decline"

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Note. From "Americans' Trust in Scientists, Positive Views of Science Continue to Decline," by B. Kennedy and A. Tyson, 2023, *Pew Research Center Science & Society*, p. 2

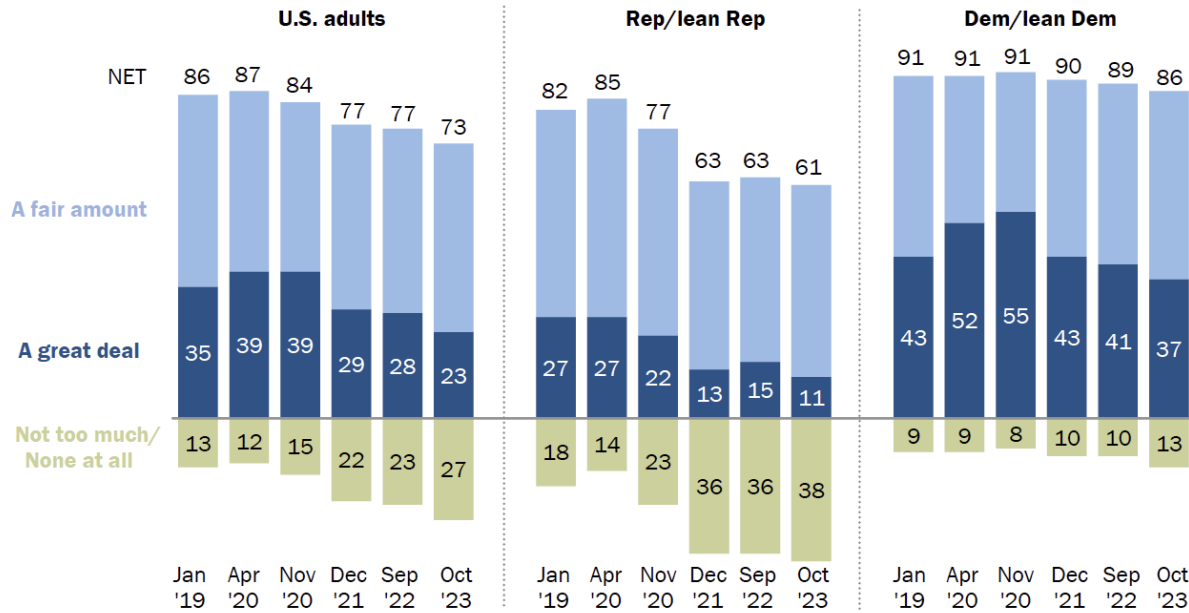
(<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/11/14/americans-trust-in-scientists-positive-views-of-science-continue-to-decline/>).



**Figure 4: American Trust Levels in Scientists by Political Affiliation 2019-2023**

**Declining levels of public trust in scientists**

% of U.S. adults who have \_\_\_ of confidence in **scientists** to act in the best interests of the public



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct 1, 2023.  
 "Americans' Trust in Scientists, Positive Views of Science Continue to Decline"

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Note. From "Americans' Trust in Scientists, Positive Views of Science Continue to Decline," by B.

Kennedy and A. Tyson, 2023, *Pew Research Center Science & Society*, p. 1

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/11/14/americans-trust-in-scientists-positive-views-of-science-continue-to-decline/>).

## Appendix H: Canadian AI Opinions

**Figure 5:** *Canadians’ Agreement and Disagreement Levels About Artificial Intelligence*

CTC1098. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about AI tools?

Base: All respondents (n=1,539)

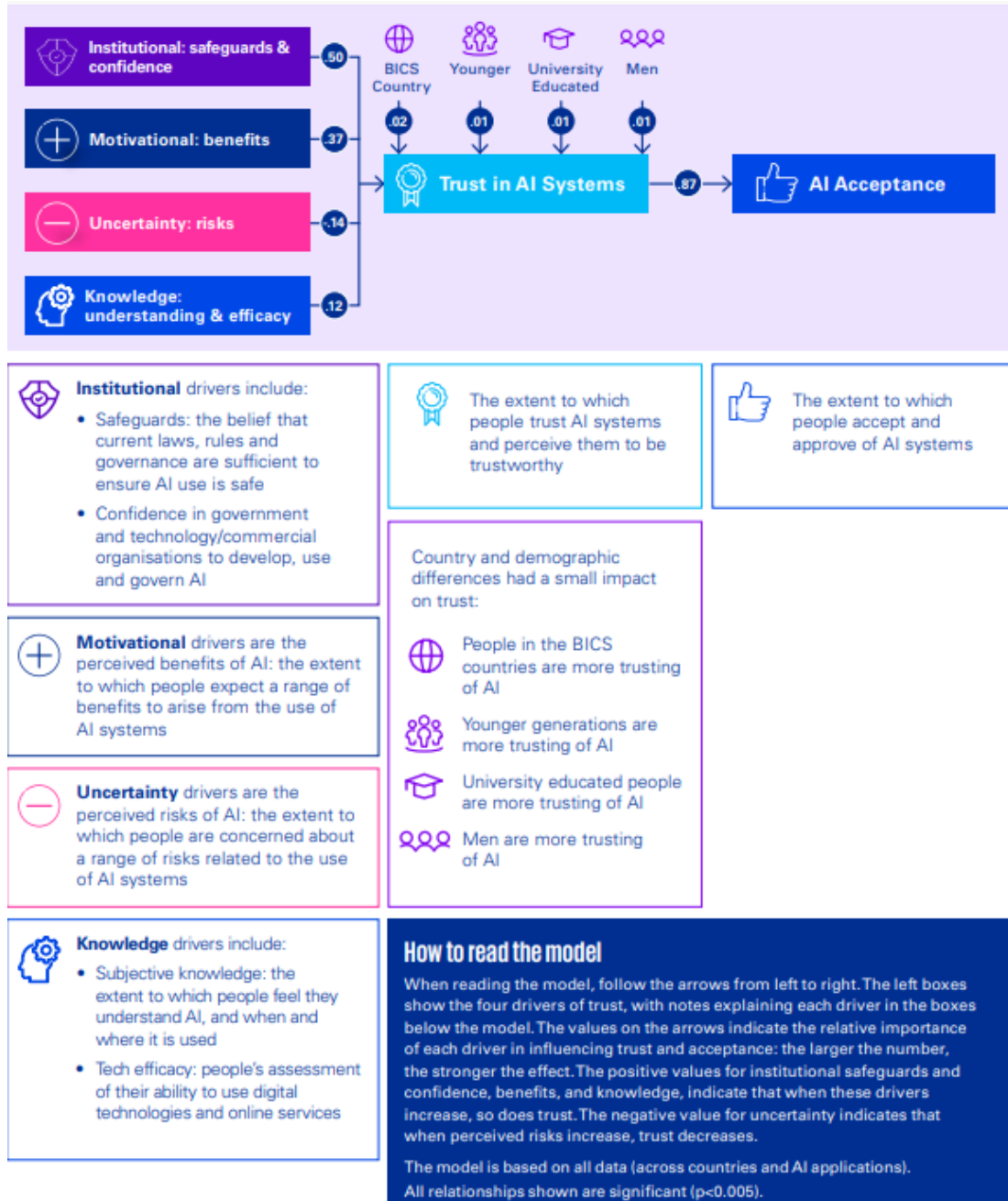


Note. From “Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools and Politics,” by Léger, 2023, p. 19

(<https://legermarketing.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Legers-North-American-Tracker-February-14th-2023.pdf>).

## Appendix I: Drivers of Trust in Artificial Intelligence Globally

**Figure 6: Model Exploring Trust in Artificial Intelligence**



Note. From “Trust in Artificial Intelligence: A global study,” by Gillespie, N., Lockey, S., Curtis, C., Pool, J., & Ali Akbari, 2023, p. 63 (<https://doi.org/10.14264/ood3c94>).



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