



Do We Need the CBC?

A national survey of Canadians
on public service media



Centre for MEDIA,
TECHNOLOGY
and DEMOCRACY

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Contents

Key Insights	4
Introduction	5
<i>About the Survey</i>	5
Survey Results and Analysis	6
<i>The News We Use:</i>	
<i>Surveying the Media Landscape</i>	6
<i>The Trust Factor</i>	7
<i>Assessing the Value of the CBC/Radio-Canada</i>	8
<i>Facts about Funding</i>	10
Conclusion	11
Notes	12
Media Contact	13

Photos on the cover from Unsplash, with the exception of the following images from Flickr (CC 2.0): Truck PR (CBC news truck), Gerry (CBC Whitehorse), Glotman Simpson (CBC Vancouver), and Mikey G Ottawa (reporter being filmed).

Key Insights

- A significant majority (78%) of Canadians would like to see the CBC/Radio-Canada continue if it addresses its major criticisms.
- When asked what they would do with the CBC/Radio-Canada's budget, 57% of respondents would either increase (24%) or maintain (33%) funding.
- 47% of Conservative respondents would keep or increase the CBC/Radio-Canada's funding, while 40% would reduce or eliminate funding; 13% didn't have a stance on the issue. Absolute "defunders" include respondents across a range of political identities, with Conservatives somewhat more likely to be in the "defunding" camp. Only 11% of Canadians would defund the CBC/Radio-Canada.
- Social media was never the preferred source of news in the scenarios we studied. When emergencies like wildfires occur, people prefer to consult reliable local media for information (or national media, in other cases).
- When asked whether a large public service media organization like the CBC/Radio-Canada is still essential or relevant to Canadians in the digital age, given the rise of social media, 79% of respondents said it was either equally important or more important than before.
- When asked whether they could name a Canadian journalist they trusted, 33% of respondents said yes. Across the board, the journalist names they identified were from mainstream outlets like the CBC, Radio-Canada, and CTV, even when the journalists—such as longtime national news anchor Peter Mansbridge—were retired from their platform posts or no longer active.



Introduction

The Canadian media climate is characterized by powerful narratives. On the one hand, statistics and headlines speak to the “media crisis” and the decline of traditional media, while on the other, the future of the CBC/Radio-Canada is being debated. To what extent do these narratives genuinely reflect public sentiment? Do Canadians really want to “defund the CBC”? To better understand the media needs of Canadians and how well they are being met, we conducted a national survey. We sought additionally to clarify what role, if any, the CBC/Radio-Canada could and should play in meeting those needs.

In this report, we refer to the term “public service media,” which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines as “a unique service providing universal access to information and knowledge through quality and diverse content reflecting the needs, concerns and expectations of the various target audiences.”¹ We use the term “public service media” within the context of this definition. The CBC/Radio-Canada is Canada’s largest public service media outlet.

About the Survey

Data for this report includes nationally representative survey responses from 2055 Canadian adults conducted from August 28, 2024, to September 6, 2024, using a commercial survey panel provider. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is $\pm 2.16\%$, 19 times out of 20. Values shown are weighted means, weighed by gender, region, and age according to Statistics Canada.²

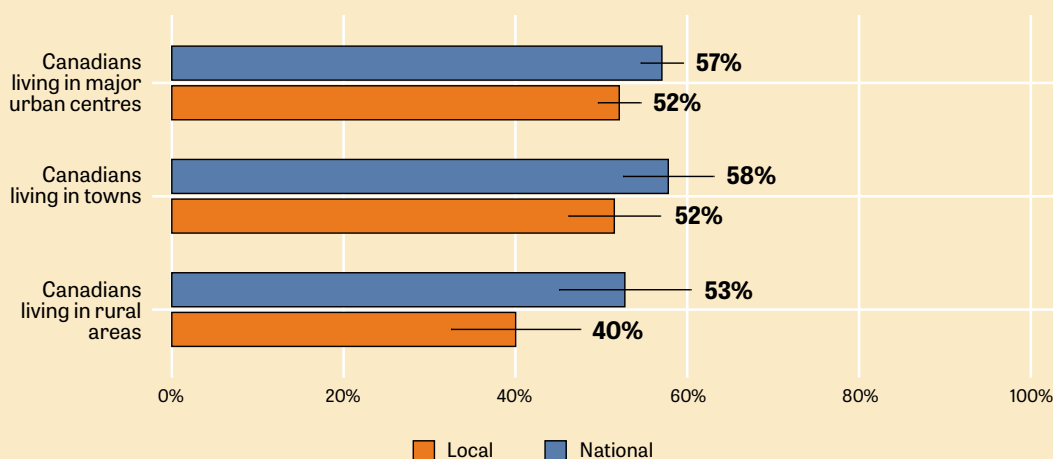
Survey Results and Analysis

The News We Use: Surveying the Media Landscape

To gauge the relevance of a wide range of potential challenges and factors in respondents' experiences with the media environment, we asked a series of general questions about the state of the media and a range of climatic factors that could be ascribed to it, such as revenue losses, political polarization, the decline of local journalism, insufficient coverage to important issues, loss of trust, and biased coverage. A distinctive response across demographics was the importance of local journalism.

How satisfied are you with local and national news coverage?

Percentage reporting "Somewhat satisfied" or "Satisfied"



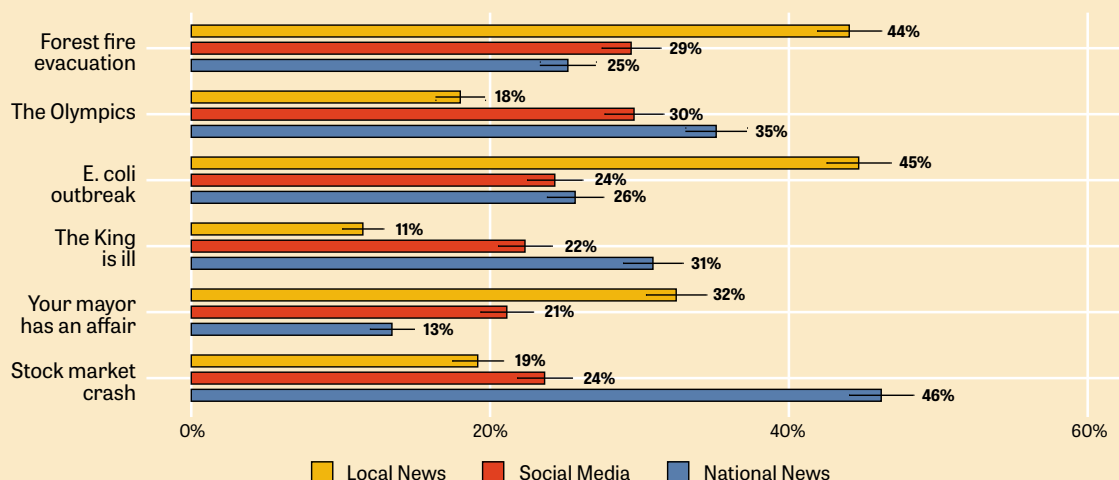
Respondents' answers varied according to the relative population density of their locations in Canada. Overall, people living in rural areas reported to be less satisfied with all news coverage, and respondents in all areas reported to be underserved by their local news coverage.³

Hypothesizing that, as media consumption patterns continue to shift from traditional channels (broadcast television and radio, print media) to digital, and that the industry itself and pundits may not be the best experts on audiences' actual needs, we asked respondents whether they felt served by their media options and what sources they would consult to find out more information about a series of specific scenarios.

A local media outlet was the preferred news resource in cases of time-sensitive yet plausible scenarios. Despite the rising number of people, especially young people, who access news online,⁴ social media was not the preferred source of news in any scenario.⁵

For each scenario, where would you go to learn more?

Percentage selecting each news source (selecting all that apply)



The Trust Factor

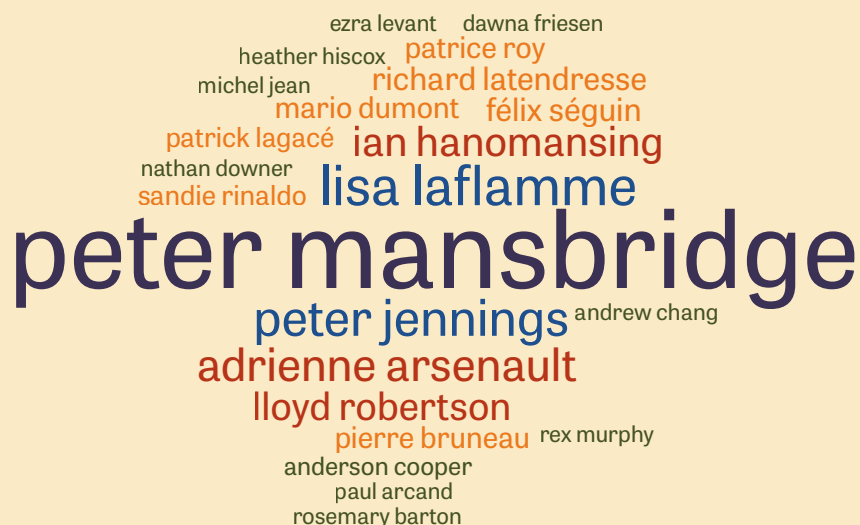
One argument for the dissolution of public service media has been that today's more open, democratic media environment leaves audiences satisfied with more options, including free content, than the traditional journalism climate. One of the conditions we looked for was whether the current media climate makes public media services like the CBC/Radio-Canada more or less valued.

Within this context, we explored the state of trust in media, which has globally reached a record low of 40%.⁶ Canada, a country where citizens have traditionally placed relatively high levels of trust in media outlets, is no exception.

We asked respondents if they could think of a Canadian journalist they trusted; 33% said yes. We then asked those respondents if they could name the journalist.

Across the board, the names of journalists from mainstream outlets like the CBC, Radio-Canada, and CTV stood out, even when the journalists were retired or no longer active.

One of our survey questions was whether a large public service media organization like the CBC/Radio-Canada is still essential or relevant to Canadians in the digital age. When asked about the importance of public service media given the rise of social media, 79% of respondents said it was either equally or more important than before.



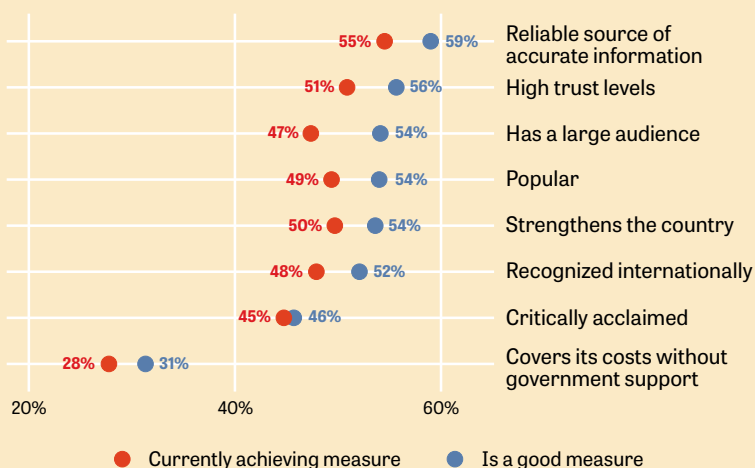
A significant majority (80.4%) of respondents agreed that “It is important for there to be commonly-known media organizations which most Canadians see as reliable and trusted”—the highest point of commonality across respondents in the survey.

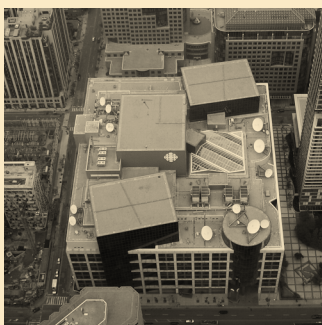
Assessing the Value of the CBC/Radio-Canada

We asked respondents to define success for the CBC/Radio-Canada, both in terms of how success could and should be measured, and their actual assessment of the organization’s success.

Measuring Success for the CBC/Radio-Canada

Percentage reporting “Somewhat agree” or “Strongly agree”

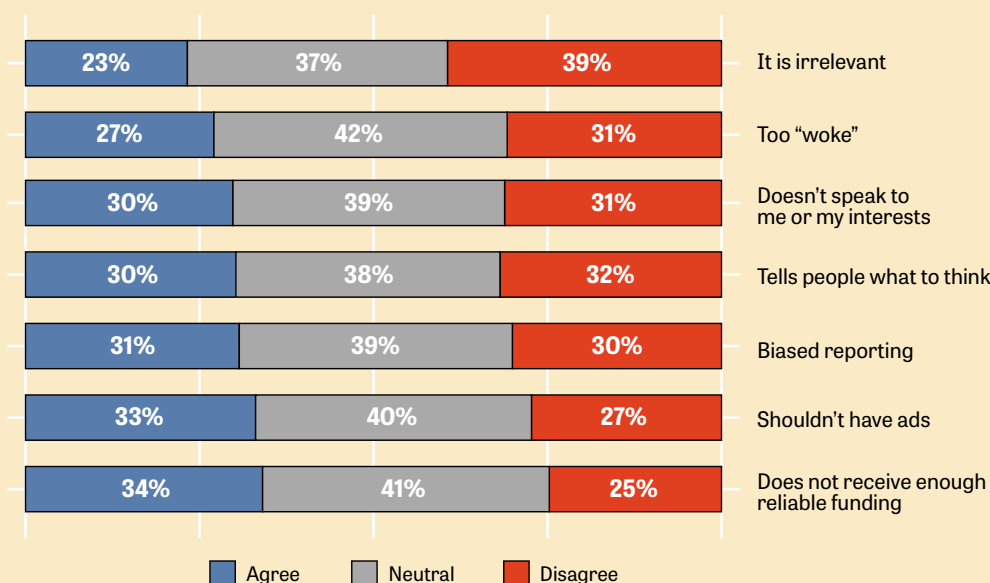




Respondents rated the importance of certain measures as being higher overall than their perception of the organization's actual performance. Asked to define success for the public media service in general, respondents identified the following as their top priorities: "is a reliable source of accurate information," has "high trust levels," and "has a large audience." Asked to assess how the CBC/Radio-Canada is performing specifically, respondents indicated that it "is a reliable source of accurate information," has "high trust levels," and "strengthens the country." Notably, respondents identified the CBC/Radio-Canada as "strengthening the country" even though they did not deem it to be as successful with the metrics "has a large audience" and "is critically acclaimed."

We then asked Canadians to respond to various criticisms that have been made about the CBC/Radio-Canada over the past year, either in media, online, or in our own interviews.

Do you agree or disagree with any of the following criticisms of the CBC/RC?



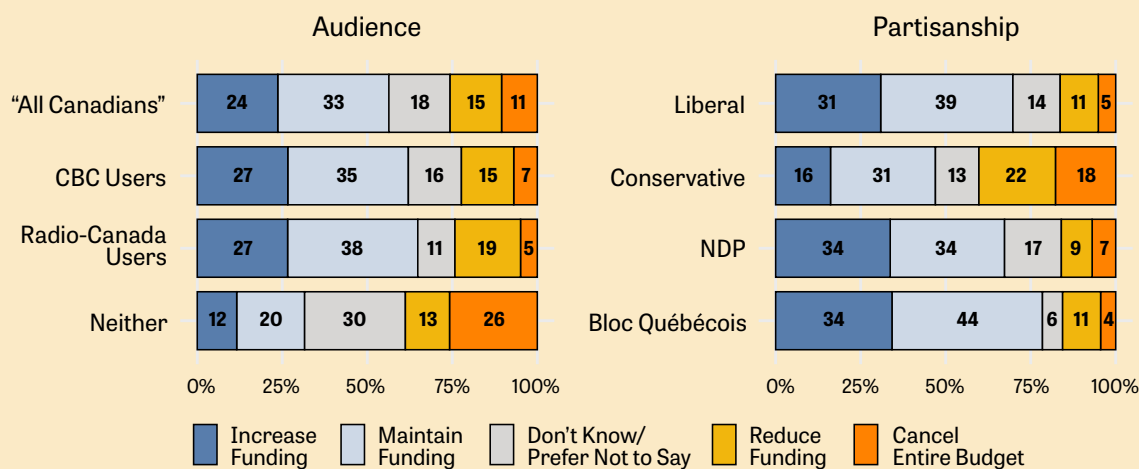
One quarter (24%) of Canadians agreed with the statement that the CBC/Radio-Canada is irrelevant, with 38% holding the reverse opinion that it is not irrelevant. Asked whether the CBC/Radio-Canada is “too woke,” 27% agreed and 30% disagreed. (Respondents were not supplied any additional definition of the word “woke.”) For each criticism, approximately 40% of respondents remained neutral, suggesting that a large number of people do not feel strongly about these criticisms in either direction.

Just over a third (34%) of Canadians agree with the statement that the CBC/Radio-Canada does not receive enough stable, reliable funding. Separately, when asked if they agreed with a range of specific policy proposals that have been presented over time for the CBC/Radio-Canada, 45% agreed with the proposal to establish a long-term funding guarantee for the public service media organization.

Facts about Funding

Political debate has brought attention to the question of funding for public service media over the past year, with a strong call to “defund” the CBC led by Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre. We asked respondents if they would increase, maintain, reduce, or cancel funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada.⁷

If you controlled the budget of the CBC/Radio-Canada, what would you do?



In a given month, % of Canadians who report using: CBC (70.7%), Radio-Canada (35.9%), Neither (20.2%). Party ID as a response to: "In federal politics, do you usually think of yourself as a:"



When asked what they would do with the CBC/Radio-Canada's budget, a majority of respondents would increase (24%) or maintain (33%) funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada, for a total of 57%.

A smaller group would reduce or cancel funding. Overall, 15% of respondents would reduce funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada, with Conservative partisans supporting funding reduction at around twice the levels of those identifying with other mainstream parties.

A further 11% percent of Canadians would opt to defund the CBC/Radio-Canada entirely. Respondents within this group reported a range of political identities, with a higher representation among Conservative partisans.

Answers were most divided among Conservative respondents, with an approximately even split in recommendations (increase, maintain, don't know, or cancel funding.)

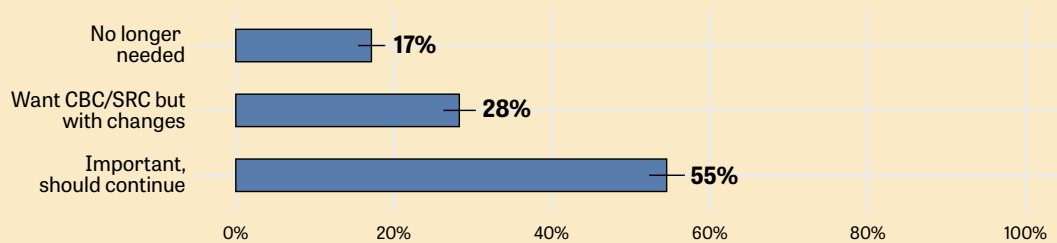
Conclusion

Our survey findings reflect that most Canadians are moderate in their views about the role and future of the CBC/Radio-Canada, with more agreement across the spectrum than the current political climate would suggest.

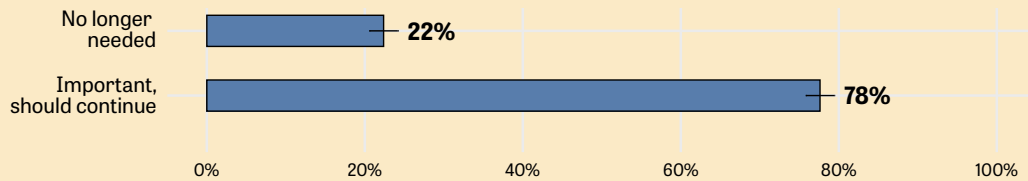
To anyone paying attention to media headlines or social media comment sections of the past year or two, it might seem easy to assume strong political polarization in Canada about funding for the CBC/Radio-Canada. A more accurate summary is that Canadians lean toward the preservation of the CBC/Radio-Canada—and a quarter would even increase funding.

Given the option of fixing the CBC/Radio-Canada, a substantial majority of Canadians (83%) support and desire the continued existence of the CBC/Radio-Canada. This is in alignment with other independent survey findings from earlier this year.⁸

Which is closer to your view of the CBC/Radio-Canada?



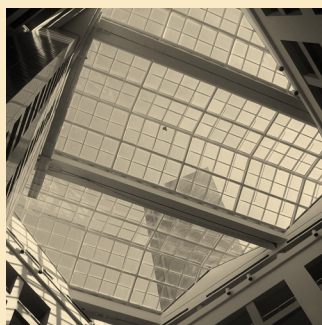
And if the CBC/Radio-Canada addressed its major criticisms, what is closer to your view?



Questions posed at beginning and end of survey section devoted toward opinions on the CBC/Radio-Canada

Overall, there is both considerable consensus across a range of demographics about the value of reliable media in the current media climate, as well as support and desire for trusted media organizations. High-quality local journalism is a priority. A significant majority see the CBC/Radio Canada as a worthwhile fixture in the contemporary Canadian media climate, a number that substantially increases if their major concerns about it are addressed.

- 1 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “[Public service broadcasting: a best practices sourcebook](#)” (2005)
- 2 Respondents were invited to take the survey in English or French. For consistency, survey questions used the inclusive term “CBC/Radio-Canada” unless otherwise specified.
- 3 Local journalism is one of the most dramatically affected areas of the media climate in the digital age. According to the [Local News Research Project](#), 525 local news outlets in Canada have closed since 2008, and the majority of job cuts are attributed to the closing of [local newspapers](#) and [broadcasting outlets](#).
- 4 According to the [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024](#), 72% of Canadians access news online, while only 53% reported TV as a source of news, and 14% reported to get their news from print sources.
- 5 These results coincide with Meta’s 2023 Canadian news ban, which led to a [90% decrease of views](#) of Canadian news on Facebook, for instance.
- 6 At the same time, news avoidance has risen to an average of four people in ten, according to the [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024](#).
- 7 We experimentally included a frame demonstrating the relative funding model for the BBC (which receives more than eight times the funding allocated to the CBC/Radio-Canada, per capita) before asking the respondents what they would do to the budget. We found no statistically significant difference in responses. This suggests funding preferences are resistant to relevant policy information.
- 8 This result replicates findings from a January 2024 survey conducted by [Spark Advocacy](#) that shows three in four Canadians want the CBC to continue, either as is or with changes.



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