



Regional Distinctions

An Analysis of the Looking West 2004 Survey

Loleen Berdahl, Ph.D.
Director of Research

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BUILDING THE NEW WEST

In 2001, the Canada West Foundation published *Building the New West: A Framework for Regional Prosperity*, outlining five key priorities for ensuring long-term prosperity in western Canada. These five priorities are:

- The West must create the tools to attract, retain and build human capital;
- The West must continue economic diversification;
- The West must strengthen its transportation infrastructure;
- The West must promote the global competitiveness of its major cities; and
- The West must develop new ways of facilitating regional coordination.

Since 2001, Canada West has conducted research in each of these five priority areas. The Looking West surveys are intended to tap into the views and opinions of western Canadians on a number of issues relating to these five priority areas, as well as to probe attitudes toward other key policy topics. The purpose of the Looking West surveys is to inform the public, business and community leaders, and elected officials and public servants at all three levels of government about the views and perspectives of western Canadians.

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Executive Summary

The Canada West Foundation's Looking West surveys, conducted under Canada West's Building the New West project, are designed to provide valid and reliable data on western Canadian public opinion. The Looking West 2004 survey is the third of the series; previous Looking West surveys were conducted in 2001 and 2003.

Since 2001, the Looking West surveys have analyzed western Canadian attitudes toward federalism. The Looking West 2004 survey continues this tradition, with an additional feature: comparative data for Ontario on the survey questions relating to federalism, regional discontent, and institutional reform. The purpose of this comparison is to provide some context for western concerns: are these concerns unique to the West, or do they exist in other regions of the country? There are many similarities between Ontario and the western provinces, making comparisons between the two regions highly valuable.

Regional Distinctions presents an analysis of the Looking West 2004 federalism data. It should be noted that the survey also collected data in the four western provinces on a wide variety of policy issues, including policy priorities, the economy, the labour market, urban issues, and Canada-US relations. These data will be presented in a second report, to be released in spring 2004.

Key findings include:

- Western discontent is lower than in previous years, but the change, where it does exist, has been slight. In most cases, a familiar pattern is seen in the West: Saskatchewan and British Columbia express the highest levels of discontent, Manitoba expresses the lowest levels of discontent, and Alberta takes up the middle position. There are some exceptions to this pattern, but it generally holds true, and has done so since 2001.
- Although many commentators argue that British Columbia is distinct or unique in the West, when it comes to attitudes toward the federal government, it is Manitoba rather than BC that stands somewhat apart due to its lower levels of discontent.
- Ontario respondents express significantly greater satisfaction with the federal government than do western Canadians. While western Canadians feel that their provinces are getting the short shrift in Canada's federal system, Ontarians are quite content that Ontario is treated well within Canadian federalism.
- Both Ontario and western Canadian respondents see western Canada as a distinct region. In addition, both western Canadians and Ontarians feel the federal government should make an effort to reduce western alienation, but are skeptical about the ability of the Martin government to make significant, lasting reductions in western alienation.
- While the majority of western Canadians feel that the rest of Canada does not care about the West, Ontario respondents disagree strongly with this perception.
- Ontarians share western Canadians' interest in Senate reform. Ontarians, like western Canadians, feel the Senate should be equal and elected – and would support reforming the Senate even if it required constitutional change.
- In each province, a plurality would like to see increased provincial power in the future.
- On many questions, respondents under 30 express lower levels of dissatisfaction with government and lower levels of regional discontent.

Introduction

The year 2004 is a year of considerable political and policy flux for Canada. The country has a new Prime Minister and a new Official Opposition party. A federalist government is now in office in Quebec. Many of the key policy issues – including health care, the economy, national security, infrastructure, and the urban agenda – will require a strong degree of intergovernmental cooperation for success. And the federal government is seeking to implement a series of democratic reforms.

At the cusp of this new political era, one challenge that Canadians and their governments will need to understand and address is regional discontent, including western alienation. History has demonstrated that Canada is a country that is both enriched and strained by its regional differences. Canada's political leaders have the responsibility to listen to and understand regional voices, and to take these voices into consideration when making policy decisions.

One tool for increasing understanding is public opinion. Unlike stakeholder consultations or public meetings, which may produce results that are unrepresentative of the population as a whole, survey research has the advantage of random sampling – thus ensuring a wider range of voices are heard. Public opinion research allows us to take a “snapshot” of public attitudes. In this way, it can help us to better understand the opinions and attitudes of a wide range of people.

The Canada West Foundation's Looking West surveys, conducted under Canada West's Building the New West Project, are designed to provide valid and reliable data on western Canadian public opinion. The Looking West 2004 survey is the third of the series; previous Looking West surveys were conducted in 2001 and 2003. Unlike many other surveys, which often lump provinces together (thus obscuring important differences between the provinces) and/or have provincial sample sizes that do not allow for meaningful analysis of opinion in a single province, the Looking West surveys use large provincial samples to allow for statistically significant analyses of each of the four western provinces (including urban-rural analyses). Indeed, the Looking West survey is unique in its large sample size. In addition, the Looking West surveys replicate a number of survey questions over the years, allowing for an analysis of attitudinal trends over time.

Since 2001, the Looking West surveys have analyzed public attitudes toward federalism. While these data have been illuminating, demonstrating ongoing western discontent across BC and the Prairies, the data have been limited in that the analysis could not assess whether the West was unique in its attitudes toward the federal government. To address this limitation, the Looking West 2004 survey has an additional feature: comparative data for Ontario on the survey questions relating to federalism, regional discontent, and institutional reform. The purpose of this comparison is to provide some context for western concerns: are these concerns unique to the West, or do they exist in other regions of the country?

Why Ontario? Ideally, the Looking West surveys would include samples for all Canadian provinces and territories. However, due to our commitment to maintaining large sample sizes, expanding the survey across Canada would be prohibitively expensive – well beyond the means of a relatively small non-profit organization like the Canada West Foundation. For this reason, it was necessary to limit the survey expansion to one province. The selection of Ontario over the remaining five provinces is simple: Ontario is home to the plurality of Canadians and is a province with strong economic, demographic and political linkages to the West. There are many similarities between Ontario and the western provinces, making comparisons between the two regions highly valuable.

Regional Distinctions presents an analysis of the Looking West 2004 federalism data. It should be noted that the survey also collected data in the four western provinces on a wide variety of policy issues, including policy priorities, the economy, the labour market, urban issues, and Canada-US relations. These data will be presented in a second report, to be released in spring 2004.

Methodology

Looking West 2004 is a random sample telephone survey of western Canadians and Ontarians 18 years of age or older. On behalf of the Canada West Foundation, Western Opinion Research administered the survey between January 7 and February 5, 2004 out of their Winnipeg, Manitoba call centre. It should be noted that the survey data collection was completed prior to the sponsorship scandal, which has been reported widely in the media as negatively influencing attitudes toward the federal government.

To allow for statistically significant analyses of each province, as well as the West as a whole, a relatively large sample was used. A total of 4,000 residents were interviewed by telephone across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. The provincial breakdown is as follows:

PROVINCE	TOTAL N	MARGIN OF ERROR +/-95 times out of 100
British Columbia	800	3.46%
Alberta	800	3.46%
Saskatchewan	800	3.46%
Manitoba	800	3.46%
Western Canada	3,200	1.73%
Ontario	800	3.46%

In the presentation of aggregate western Canadian regional data, a weighting adjustment factor was applied to match each province's sample weight to its portion of the regional population 18 years of age and over. The Ontario data were not subjected to a weighting factor. Because non-responses ("don't know/refused") are not reported in the tables or text, the displayed figures will not always add up to 100%.

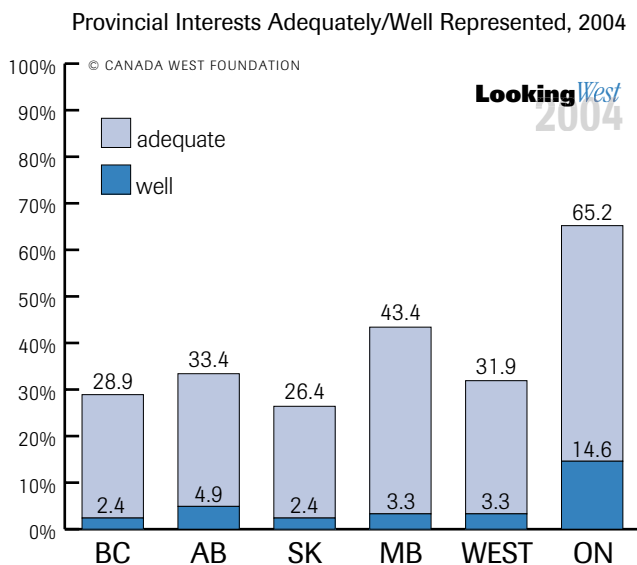
Some survey questions replicate questions asked in the Looking West 2001 and/or Looking West 2003 surveys. For a complete overview of those surveys, please see Loleen Berdahl, *Looking West: A Survey of Western Canadians* (Calgary: Canada West Foundation, 2001) and Loleen Berdahl, *Looking West 2003: A Survey of Western Canadians* (Calgary: Canada West Foundation, 2003).

Ontario satisfied with federalism; West dissatisfied, but attitudes improving

There are sharp regional differences found in perceptions of how provinces are treated in Canadian federalism. Respondents were asked, “When you think about how issues and concerns are handled by the federal government in Ottawa, do you feel that the interests of [province] are well-represented, adequately represented, poorly represented, or very poorly represented at the federal level?” Ontario respondents are by and large content with how their province’s interests are represented, with almost two-thirds stating they are well or adequately represented. This is a sharp difference from the three most western provinces, in which less than one third choose a positive response. Of the four western provinces, Manitoba is the most satisfied with the representation of its interests, but here too a majority (52.6%) states that the province’s interests are either poorly or very poorly represented. Overall, there is a 33 percentage point gap between Ontario and the West – a significant difference.

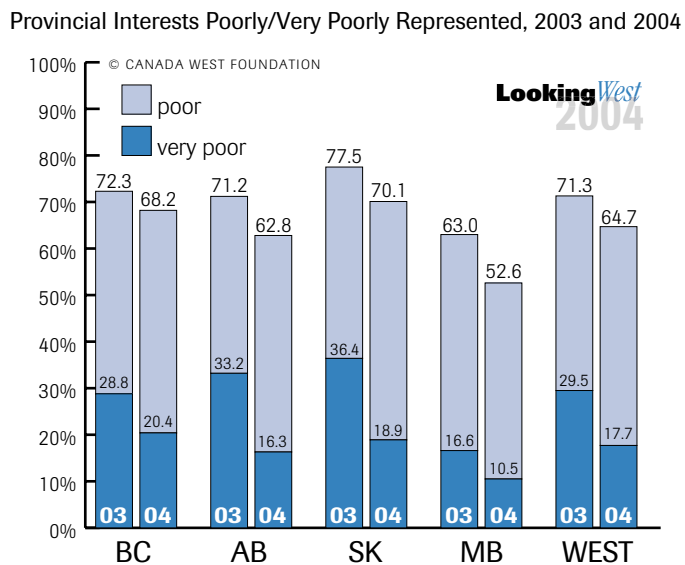
While almost two-thirds of western Canadians feel that their province’s interests are poorly or very poorly represented at the federal level, it is noteworthy that these attitudes are in fact improving considerably. When the same question was asked in the Looking West 2003 survey, over 70% of respondents in BC, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and over 60% in Manitoba stated their province was poorly or very poorly represented. In contrast, in 2004, only Saskatchewan broke the 70% threshold, and in Manitoba the majority is very small. The number selecting poor or very poor fell considerably in all four western provinces and, by extension, for the West as a whole.

figure 1



When you think about how issues and concerns are handled by the federal government in Ottawa, do you feel that the interests of [province] are well-represented, adequately represented, poorly represented, or very poorly represented at the federal level?

figure 2



When you think about how issues and concerns are handled by the federal government in Ottawa, do you feel that the interests of [province] are well-represented, adequately represented, poorly represented, or very poorly represented at the federal level?

Respondents were also asked, “In your opinion, is [province] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada?” (This survey question was replicated from the Looking West 2001 and 2003 surveys and from surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.) On this question, the gap between Ontario and the West is particularly sharp. Over seven in ten Ontario respondents state that their province is treated with the respect it deserves. In contrast, only four in ten western Canadians feel their province is treated with adequate respect. In all four western provinces the plurality of respondents states their province is not treated with the appropriate level of respect. Saskatchewan particularly stands out on this question, with less than three in ten selecting the positive response. Manitoba respondents are fairly equally divided between the yes and no responses.

Again, longitudinal analysis provides a more fulsome picture of western Canada. While a plurality in each western province states their province is not treated with sufficient respect, it is worth noting that the numbers in each province dropped between 2003 and 2004: attitudes are improving. In British Columbia, the percentage of negative responses has trended down with each survey year, while Alberta and Saskatchewan each have their lowest percentage recorded on this question in 2004. For the West as a whole, the 2004 numbers are considerably lower than in both 2001 and 2003.

figure 3

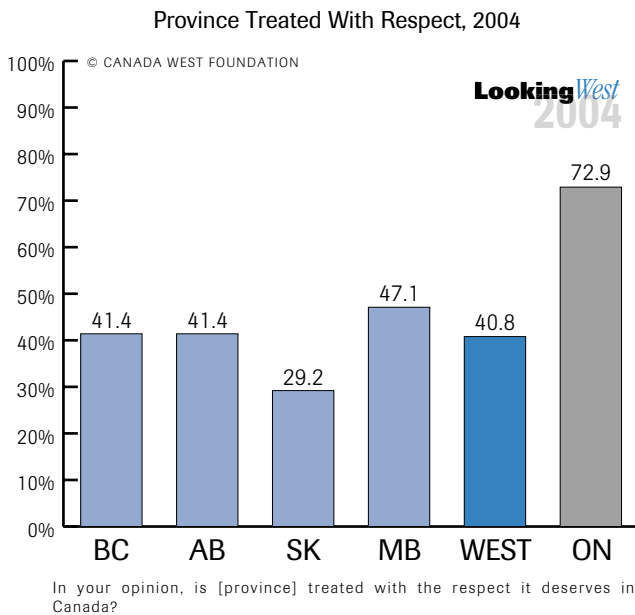
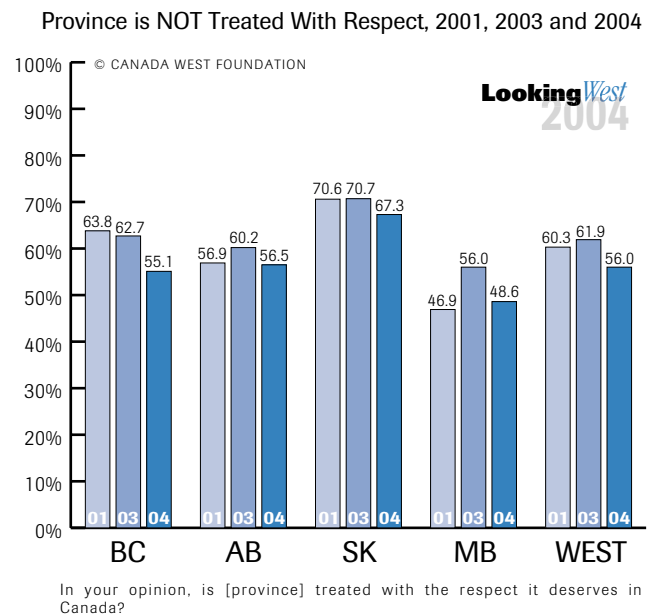


figure 4



One argument that is frequently voiced about the federal government is that it does not distribute its resources fairly or properly throughout Canada. To assess attitudes in this respect, respondents were asked: “Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and on transfers to the provinces, do you think [province] receives more than its fair share, less than its fair share, or about its fair share?” (This survey question was replicated from the Looking West 2001 and 2003 surveys and from surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.) On this question, Ontario again stands out as the most satisfied, with a near majority (49.5%) stating the province receives about its fair share. In addition, Ontario is the only province to have over 2% of respondents state that the province receives more than its fair share, with 6.2% of Ontario respondents choosing this response. However, while Ontario is clearly the most satisfied, it is closely followed by Manitoba (44.4%) and, surprisingly, Alberta (40.3%). As with previous Looking West surveys, British Columbia and Saskatchewan continue to stand out as the least satisfied with the federal status quo. That said, it should be noted that the plurality in each of the four western provinces states their province receives *less* than its fair share; Ontario was the only province in which the plurality states their province receives about its fair share. For the West as a whole, only one third of western Canadians feel their province receives its fair share.

Looking at western provincial attitudes over time, some consistent patterns are seen. In each year (2001, 2003, 2004), British Columbia respondents are the most likely to report that their province receives less than its fair share, followed by Saskatchewan. In each year, Manitoba respondents are the least likely to select this option, and Alberta respondents typically hover between the relatively dissatisfied BC and Saskatchewan respondents and the relatively satisfied Manitoba respondents. In 2004, BC and Saskatchewan selections of “less than its fair share” are at an all time high, while Alberta and Manitoba drop slightly below the 2003 numbers. For the West as a whole, dissatisfaction expressed on this question in 2004 is higher than for 2001 and 2003.

figure 5

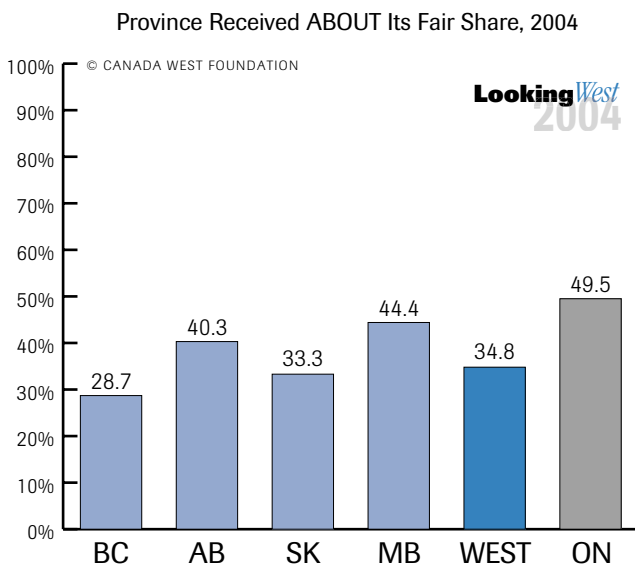
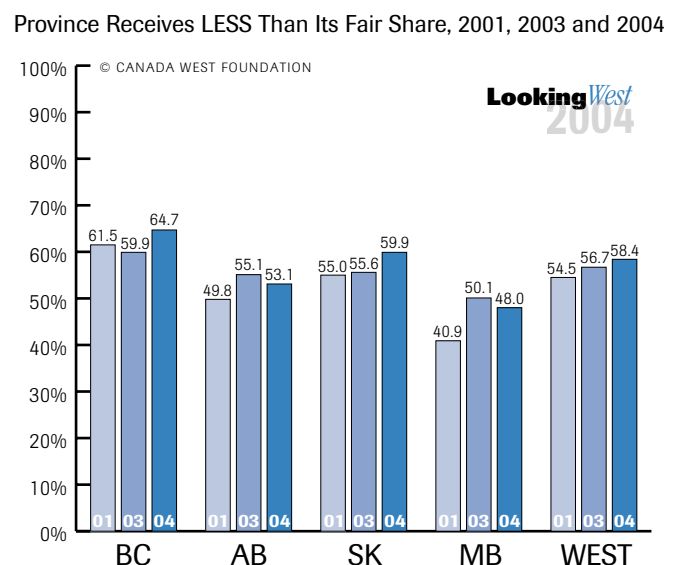


figure 6



Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and on transfers to the provinces, do you think [province] receives: more than its fair share; less than its fair share; about its fair share.

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Plurality in all provinces favour more power for provinces

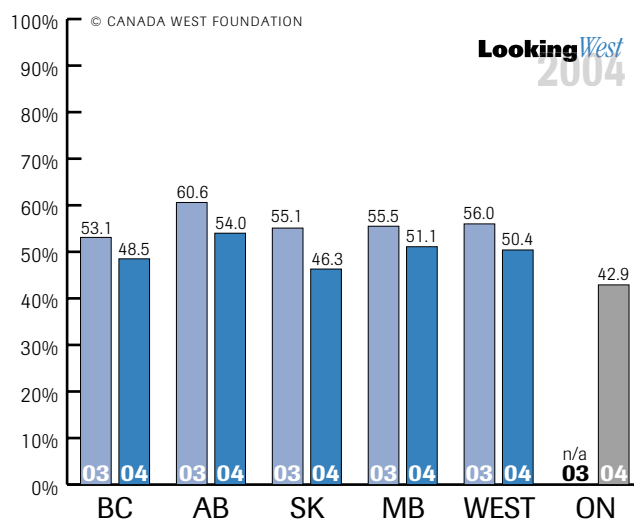
The Looking West 2004 survey examined feelings towards decentralization by exploring opinions about the ideal balance of power in the future. Respondents were asked: “Under the Canadian federal system, the government of Canada has responsibility for some services and programs and the provincial governments have responsibility for others. In the future, should the government of Canada have more power, the government of [province] have more power, or should things stay as they are?” (This survey question was replicated from Looking West 2003, and from surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.)

Western Canadian respondents indicate greater support for decentralization than do those in Ontario: 50.4% of western Canadians feel that their provincial government should have more power in the future, compared to only 42.9% of Ontarians. However, it should be noted that the plurality in all five provinces favors more power for the provincial governments, with the majority in Alberta and Manitoba supporting this position. Compared with the West, Ontario respondents are more supportive of increasing the federal government’s power, but support is low: only 15.4% of Ontario respondents feel that the federal government should have more power in the future. In the West, BC respondents are the most supportive of increasing federal power (13.6%), and Manitoba respondents are the least supportive (8.1%). Saskatchewan and Alberta support is 9.1% and 10.4% respectively.

It is interesting to note, however, that support for decentralization dropped in each of the western provinces between 2003 and 2004: while in 2003, a majority in each western province favoured greater decentralization, in 2004 only two western provinces has a majority of respondents take this position. The drop is sharpest in Saskatchewan, followed by Alberta.

figure 7

Provincial Government Should Have More Power, 2003 and 2004



Under the Canadian federal system, the government of Canada has responsibility for some services and programs and the provincial governments have responsibility for others. In the future, should the government of Canada have more power, the government of [province] have more power, or should things stay as they are?

Ontario, West support Senate reform—even with constitutional change

Senate reform has been a hot political topic in western Canada since the 1980s. However, critics have often argued that Senate reform is exclusively a “western” issue, and that Canadians outside the West are not interested in reform. Further, critics of Senate reform have argued that support for Senate reform is dependent on reform not requiring constitutional change; they suggest that the public is not willing to consider Senate reform if it necessitates opening up Canada’s constitution.

To explore these issues, the Looking West 2004 survey asked western and Ontario respondents two questions. First, respondents were asked their level of agreement with the statement, “Canada should replace the existing Senate with an elected Senate with equal representation from each province.” Those respondents who strongly or somewhat agreed with the first statement were asked a follow-up question: “Would you support reforming the existing Senate if it required changing Canada’s constitution?”

The results are surprising. In the West, six in ten respondents strongly agree with replacing the existing Senate with an equal, elected Senate, and eight in ten either strongly or somewhat agree. This in itself was not surprising; rather, the unexpected finding is the high support in Ontario for an equal, elected Senate. A plurality of Ontario respondents (44.6%) strongly agree with replacing the Senate with an equal, elected Senate, and over seven in ten either strongly or somewhat agree. Less than 10% of Ontario respondents strongly disagree. Clearly, despite the arguments by commentators and critics, Ontarians are not on a different page from western Canadians when it comes to Senate reform. Indeed, the variation in Ontario and western Canadian attitudes is one of degree, rather than of kind.

The Looking West 2004 data also demonstrate that the general public is not as adverse to constitutional change as political commentators generally assert. The respondents who agree that the Senate should be reformed to be equal and elected were asked if they would support Senate reform if it required constitutional change. For the vast majority of respondents, their support for Senate reform remains strong. This is true across all five provinces, although western Canadian respondents indicate higher support than Ontario respondents (67.3% and 59.9% respectively). To summarize, the data demonstrate that a clear majority of western Canadians and many Ontarians not only support Senate reform but are undaunted by the possibility of “opening up” the Constitution.

figure 8

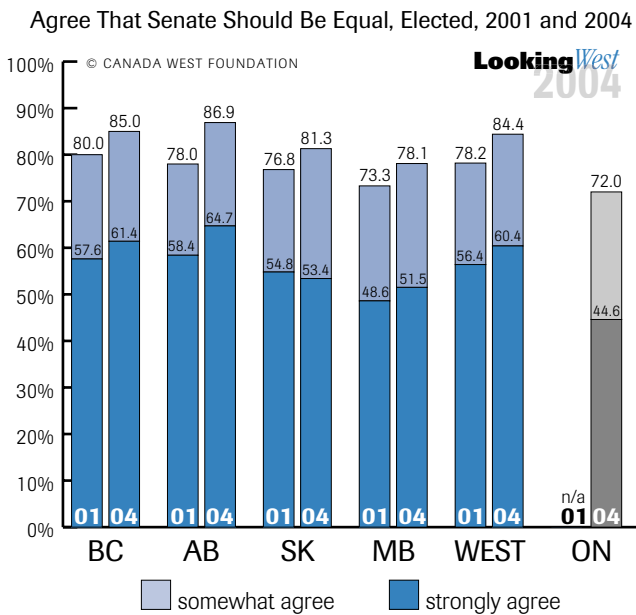
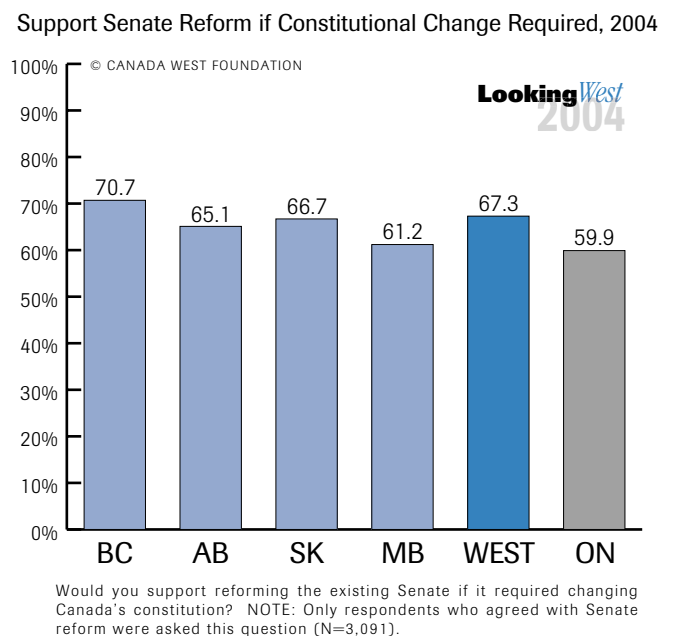


figure 9

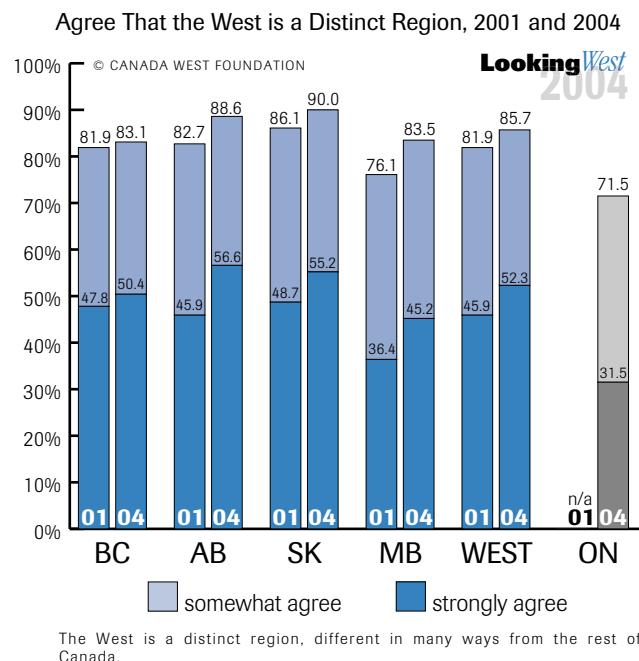


Western Canadians, Ontarians see West as distinct region

The Looking West 2004 survey asked respondents their level of agreement with the statement, “The West is a distinct region, different in many ways from the rest of Canada.” In all four western provinces, there is a high level of agreement with this statement, with agreement being highest in Saskatchewan and Alberta. While Ontario respondents are less likely than western Canadians to agree – less than one third of Ontario respondents strongly agree, compared to a majority of western Canadians – there is still a relatively high level of agreement, with seven in ten Ontario respondents seeing the West as distinct region.

This survey question was replicated from the Looking West 2001 survey, and the variations between the 2001 and 2003 surveys are interesting. In all four western provinces, the percentage of respondents agreeing that the West is a distinct region has increased since 2001. Both Alberta and Saskatchewan continue to stand out in their high level of agreement, but BC and Manitoba are not far behind. In the case of British Columbia, the increase in the number of respondents agreeing is very modest, while in the case of Manitoba there is a seven percentage point increase. Indeed, the gap on this question between Manitoba and British Columbia has closed. It is interesting to note the high level of agreement in British Columbia, given that BC analysts often argue that the West should be thought of as containing two regions: Prairies and Pacific.

figure 10

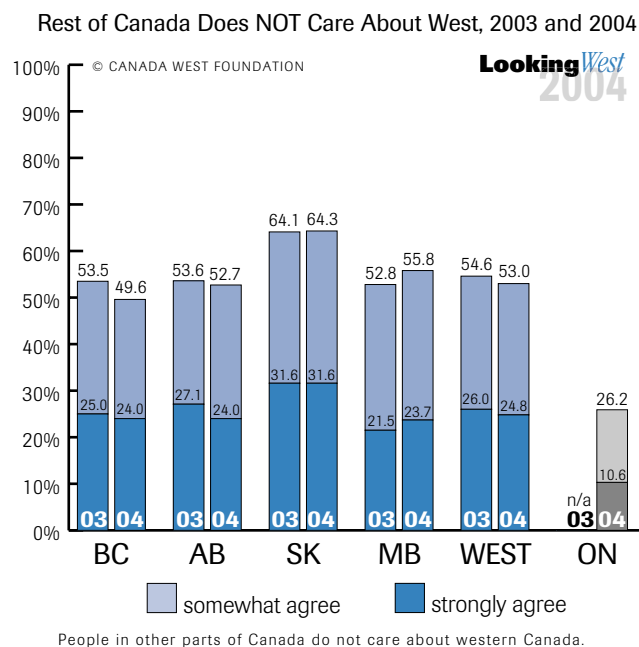


Western Canadians feel rest of Canada doesn't care about West; Ontarians disagree strongly

While western Canadians and Ontarians may share a similar perception of the West's distinctiveness, there is strong disagreement when it comes to whether western Canada is valued or appreciated by the rest of Canada. Looking West 2004 respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, "People in other parts of Canada do not care about western Canada." In the West, a majority (53%) of respondents agree that the rest of Canada does not care about the West. In Ontario, however, there was a high level of disagreement with the statement: 71.1% disagree, with over four in ten (41.8%) strongly disagreeing. This strong contrast in positions is striking.

Western Canadian attitudes on this question have shifted somewhat since 2003, although not in a clear pattern. Alberta and Saskatchewan attitudes remain relatively constant, with Saskatchewan respondents a full ten percentage points higher than Alberta respondents. In contrast, BC respondents are less likely to agree in 2004 than in 2003, with the reverse pattern occurring in Manitoba. One interesting note on this survey question: while most survey questions find greater discontent in BC than in Manitoba, with Alberta falling between the two, on this question Manitoba respondents express a greater level of discontent than do BC or Alberta respondents

figure 11



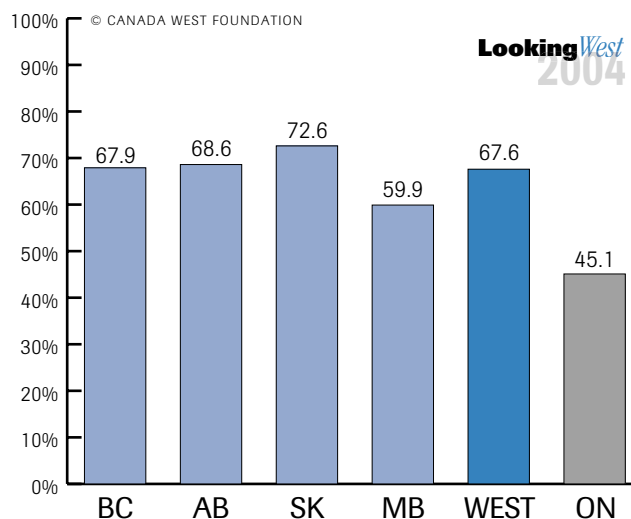
Westerners, Ontarians feel western alienation must be addressed, dubious that Martin government will have lasting impact

There have been ongoing political debates, stretching back over decades, about western regional discontent, or western alienation. The Looking West 2004 survey asked respondents directly about western alienation (defined to the respondents as “western Canadian discontent with the federal government”). The survey asked, “Which of the following three statements best reflects your opinion: the federal government should make a greater effort to address western alienation; the federal government should maintain its present efforts to address western alienation; or the federal government already pays too much attention to western alienation?”

Among the western Canadian provinces, there is a strong response that the federal government should make a greater effort to address western alienation. Saskatchewan respondents (72.6%) are the most likely to select this response, followed closely by Alberta (68.6%) and BC (67.9%) respondents. Manitoba respondents are considerably less likely to select this option, but still do so by a solid majority (59.9%). Ontario respondents, on the other hand, are divided between the federal government making a greater effort (45.1%) and maintaining its present efforts (41.0%). Of the five provinces, Ontario respondents are the most likely to state that the federal government already pays too much attention to western alienation, but at 7.6% this represents a very small minority position. (Four percent of western Canadians selected this position.) Overall, there is a significant gap between western Canada and Ontario on this question, with western Canadians clearly seeing western alienation as a problem that requires greater federal effort to address. That said, it is important to note that the plurality of Ontario respondents also hold this position, indicating that western alienation is seen by many outside the West as a national issue or problem. These responses suggest that federal efforts to reduce western alienation may not carry the risk of “losing votes back East.”

figure 12

Federal Government Should Make Greater Effort for Western Alienation, 2004



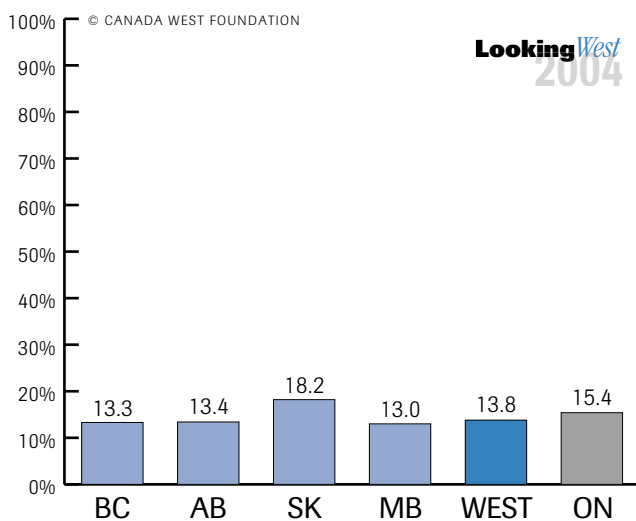
There has been a lot of talk in recent years about western alienation – that is, western Canadian discontent with the federal government. Which of the following three statements best reflects your opinion? The federal government should make a greater effort to address western alienation; The federal government should maintain its present efforts to address western alienation; The federal government already pays too much attention to western alienation.

While the plurality in each of the five provinces (and the majority in the four western provinces) feel that the federal government should make a greater effort to address western alienation, there is considerable doubt that Prime Minister Paul Martin's government will have long-term success in addressing regional discontent. The Looking West 2004 survey asked respondents: "Prime Minister Paul Martin has stated publicly that he is committed to reducing western alienation. Which of the following three statements best reflects your opinion? Paul Martin's government will make a significant, lasting reduction in western alienation; Paul Martin's government will reduce western alienation in the short term, but discontent will return in the long-term; or Paul Martin's government will not reduce western alienation in the short or long-term." (Readers are reminded that the survey data collection was completed just prior to the sponsorship scandal.)

The responses indicate that western Canadians and Ontarians alike lack confidence in the Martin government's ability to significantly reduce alienation. In all provinces but British Columbia, the plurality states that the Martin government will reduce western alienation in the short-term, with discontent returning in the long-term. In BC, the plurality (39.9%) states that the Martin government would not reduce western alienation in the short or long-term. The provincial variations on this question are modest; the consensus position is one of relatively low expectations for the Martin government in addressing western alienation.

figure 13

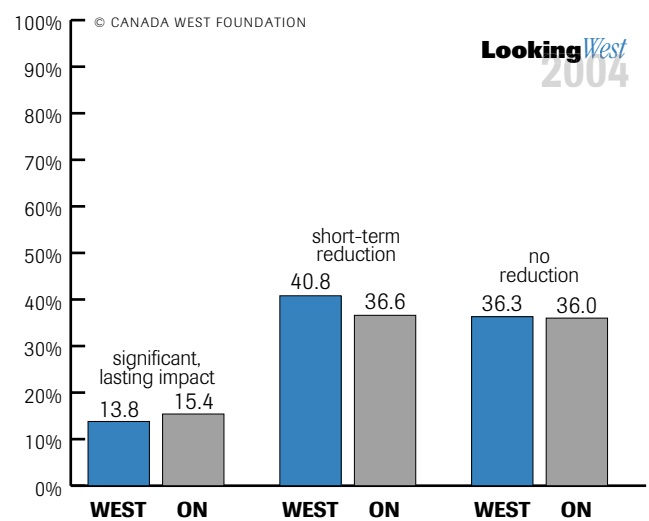
Martin Government to Create Significant, Lasting Reduction in Western Alienation, 2004



Prime Minister Paul Martin has stated publicly that he is committed to reducing western alienation. Which of the following three statements best reflects your opinion? Paul Martin's government will make a significant, lasting reduction in western alienation; Paul Martin's government will reduce western alienation in the short term, but discontent will return in the long-term; Paul Martin's government will not reduce western alienation in the short or long-term.

figure 14

Anticipated Martin Government Impact on Western Alienation, 2004



Prime Minister Paul Martin has stated publicly that he is committed to reducing western alienation. Which of the following three statements best reflects your opinion? Paul Martin's government will make a significant, lasting reduction in western alienation; Paul Martin's government will reduce western alienation in the short term, but discontent will return in the long-term; Paul Martin's government will not reduce western alienation in the short or long-term.

Western Canadians, Ontarians do not see economic advantages to separatism

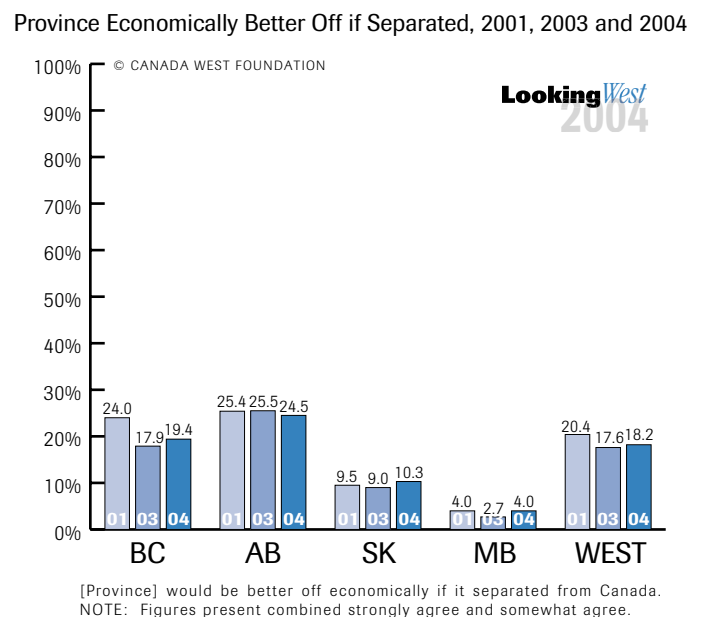
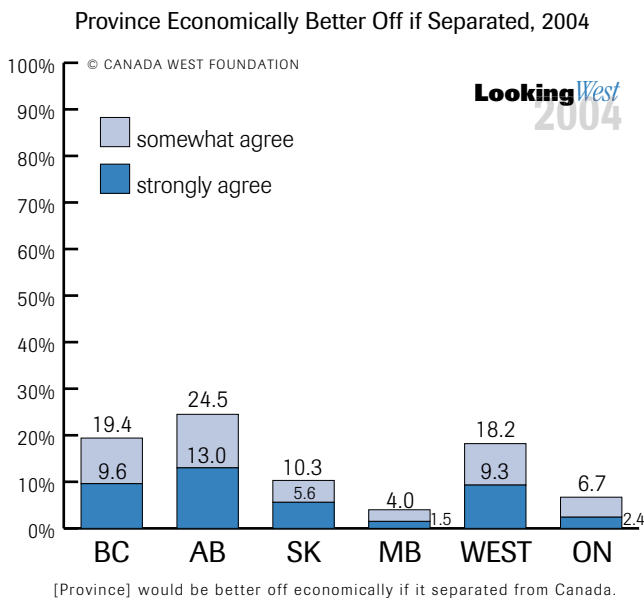
Does discontent with federalism imply support for separatism? Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: “[Province] would be better off economically if it separated from Canada.” (This question was replicated from Looking West 2001 and 2003.) It must be stressed that this is not a hard-line separatism question; by looking at economic implications alone, it fails to tap social and emotional ties to belonging to Canada. However, the question does give an understanding of respondents’ beliefs about the economic implications of belonging to Canada.

The data clearly suggest that there is no immediate worry of a separatist threat west of Quebec: in no province do over a quarter of respondents state that their province would be better off economically if it separated from Canada. On this question, however, it is important to note the gap between Ontario and Alberta – Canada’s two remaining “have” provinces. While almost one in four Alberta respondents agree, in Ontario less than 7% of respondents agree. This gap is considerable given the economic strength of both provinces. It is also noteworthy that BC has a significantly higher proportion of respondents agreeing than does Ontario; indeed, even Saskatchewan’s numbers are higher than those of Ontario. Of the five provinces, only Manitoba has a lower percentage of respondents agreeing than Ontario.

Looking at the western provinces over time, it appears that attitudes are relatively consistent with those reported in 2003. The exception is Manitoba, whose 2004 numbers rose to match the 2001 numbers. However, Manitoba continues to be the province least supportive of the idea that the province would be better off economically if separated.

figure 15

figure 16



The West as a Region

Is western Canada a region? Is there really a single “West”, or are there two western regions – the Prairies and the Pacific? Or is it best to think of each of the four western provinces individually? There is no doubt that the four western provinces have significant economic and political differences. While all are to a large degree economically dependent on natural resources (Manitoba less so than the other three provinces), the western provinces differ in their key industries. In addition, the four provinces have demonstrated unique political cultures and histories. However, when it comes to attitudes toward the federal government, there is no doubt that the West hangs together as a region:

- Over 60% in each western province indicate that their province’s interests are poorly or very poorly represented at the federal level;
- The plurality in each western province indicate that their province is not treated with the respect it deserves in Canada;
- The plurality in each western province states that their province does not receive its fair share of federal spending and transfer money;
- The plurality in each western province states that their provincial government should have more power in the future;
- Over three-quarters of respondents in each western province agree that the Senate should be equal and elected;
- Over 80% in each western province agree that the West is a distinct region, different in many ways from the rest of Canada;
- The majority in each western province agrees that the rest of Canada does not care about western Canada;
- The plurality in each western province states that the federal government should make a greater effort to address western alienation; and
- The majority in each western province indicates that they feel that Paul Martin’s government will reduce western alienation in the short-term, but discontent will return in the long-term.

Many commentators argue that British Columbia is distinct or unique in the West. However, when it comes to attitudes toward the federal government, it is Manitoba rather than BC that stands somewhat apart. Manitoba is the only western province to have less than 70% of respondents state that it is poorly or very poorly represented; less than a majority state that the province is not treated with the respect it deserves and that the province receives less than its fair share of federal transfer money and program spending; and less than 80% of respondents agree that the Senate should be equal and elected. Manitoba respondents are also the least inclined to agree that their province would benefit economically by separating. In short, as was found in the Looking West 2001 and 2003 surveys, while Manitoba respondents express discontent, it is somewhat lower than that found in the other three western provinces.

In most cases, a familiar pattern is seen in the West: Saskatchewan and British Columbia express the highest levels of discontent, Manitoba expresses the lowest levels of discontent, and Alberta takes up the middle position. There are some exceptions to this pattern, but it generally holds true, and has done so since 2001.

Overall, are western Canadians expressing more or less discontent in 2004 than in previous years? On this front, the survey data are mixed: while the number of western Canadians stating that their province is not treated with respect and that their province is poorly or very poorly represented at the federal level is lower in 2004 than in previous years, the number stating their province does not receive its fair share is higher in 2004 than in previous years. Western Canadian support for greater decentralization is down somewhat, while support for Senate reform is up. Perceptions of the West as a distinct region remain relatively constant, as do perceptions that the rest of Canada does not care about the West. Overall, it can be argued that western discontent is somewhat lower than in previous years, but the change, where it does exist, has been slight.

Ontario and the West

Is discontent unique to western Canada, or do all Canadians feel dissatisfied with the federal government? While the Looking West 2004 survey is unable to comment on the attitudes of Atlantic Canadians, Quebeckers or northern Canadians, there is an interesting contrast that can be drawn between Ontario and the West.

Ontario respondents express significantly greater satisfaction with the federal government than do western Canadians. While the vast majority of western Canadians feel that their province's interests are poorly or very poorly represented in the federal government, Ontarians express considerable satisfaction on this front: close to two-thirds of respondents feel that Ontario's interests are well or adequately represented in the federal government. While only four in ten western Canadians feel their province gets the respect it deserves, almost three quarters of Ontarians feel that Ontario gets the respect its deserves in Canada. And while close to six in ten western Canadians feel their province does not get its fair share of federal spending and transfers, 56% of Ontarians feel that Ontario gets more than or about its fair share. Simply put, while western Canadians feel that their provinces are getting the short shrift in Canada's federal system, Ontarians are quite content that Ontario is treated well within Canadian federalism.

Ontarians and western Canadians also differ somewhat in their perceptions of western Canada. Both Ontario and western Canadian respondents see western Canada as a distinct region, different in many ways from the rest of Canada. However, western Canadians are more adamant on this position, with over half of western Canadians strongly agreeing. Ontario respondents are more cautious in their agreement, with the plurality only somewhat agreeing. A similar difference is seen in attitudes toward western alienation: while both western Canadians and Ontarians feel that the federal government should make an effort to reduce western alienation, two thirds of western Canadians feel the federal government should increase its efforts to do so, while Ontario respondents are split between increasing efforts and maintaining current efforts. Finally, while the majority of western Canadians feel that the rest of Canada does not care about the West, Ontario respondents disagree strongly with this perception.

However, it should be noted that Ontarians and western Canadians do share similar attitudes on a number of issues. First, and most surprisingly, Ontarians share western Canadians' interest in Senate reform. The Looking West 2004 data indicate that Senate reform is an issue that has support beyond western Canada. Ontarians, like their western Canadian neighbours, feel the Senate should be equal and elected – and many would support reforming the Senate even if it required constitutional change. Second, as in each western province, the plurality of Ontarians would like to see increased provincial power in the future. And third, like western Canadians, Ontarians feel that western alienation should be addressed, but are skeptical about the ability of the Martin government to make significant, lasting reductions in western alienation.

Under 30: A Distinct Age Cohort

As in previous Looking West surveys, the data were assessed for demographic differences. The analysis found that variations according to urban size, income, education and gender are relatively modest. (One exception is that women are much more likely than men to disagree that their province would be better off economically if separated from Canada.) However, important variations are found with age – and in particular, with the distinction between respondents under age 30 and all other age cohorts.


On many questions, respondents under 30 express lower levels of dissatisfaction with government and lower levels of regional discontent. In particular:

- In all provinces except Saskatchewan and BC, the majority of respondents under 30 states their province is adequately or well represented; for BC, the plurality states their province is adequately or well represented. For Saskatchewan, however, the majority of respondents under 30 states their province is poorly or very poorly represented.
- In Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario, the majority of respondents under 30 states their province receives about its fair share of federal transfers.
- In all provinces except Saskatchewan, the majority of under 30 respondents states their province is treated with respect.
- In all provinces except BC, the plurality of respondents under 30 states the division of responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments should remain as it is now.
- In all provinces, respondents under 30 are somewhat less likely to strongly agree that the Senate should be reformed and somewhat more likely to somewhat agree, bringing total agreement to over seven in ten in the western provinces and to over one in two in Ontario.
- In all provinces, respondents under 30 are less likely than respondents 30 and over to support opening the Constitution to reform the Senate; the proportions vary greatly between provinces, from a high of over six in ten BC respondents under 30 being willing to open the Constitution to a low of less than four in ten Ontario respondents under 30 being willing to open the Constitution.
- In all provinces, respondents under 30 are less likely to strongly agree that people in other parts of Canada do not care about the West.
- In all provinces, respondents under 30 are less likely to state that the federal government should make a greater effort to address western alienation. However, in BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan, majorities do choose this response.
- In BC, Saskatchewan and Ontario, respondents under 30 are more likely than other age categories to state that the Paul Martin government will not reduce western alienation in the short or long-term.

Respondents under 30 have similar opinions as other age groups on separatism and the West as a region.

Conclusion

It is hard to argue that western discontent has declined in a significant way since 2001; while there have been some modest changes, western Canadians continue to express relatively high levels of discontent. These attitudes appear even stronger when compared to the rather high levels of satisfaction found in Ontario.

For years, the Canada West Foundation has argued that western discontent is a challenge facing not only western Canada, but Canada as a whole. The Looking West 2004 data suggest that western Canadians and Ontarians alike may share this position. The task facing Canada's leaders – be they from the West or other regions, from government or from other sectors – is to find the ways to reduce western discontent and to more fully engage western Canadians in structures and processes of national decision-making. 

IDEAS CHANGE THE WORLD



2004 has the potential to be a year of great change in Canada: there will be a federal election, the future of our cities is a hot topic, Canada-US relations are evolving, and the nature of our democracy is being debated.

As Canadians talk about these issues, it is critical that the aspirations, perspectives, and **ideas** of western Canadians are heard.

Through its Western Cities, Building the New West and West in Canada Projects, the **CANADA WEST FOUNDATION** is actively working to generate ideas for positive change and to make sure that the views of western Canadians are an integral part of the national debates during this time of change.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Without ideas – and an organized effort to get them heard – change will not happen. This is what the Canada West Foundation does. But, we can't do it without your support. If you want to help ensure that western Canadian ideas are front and centre on the national stage, we invite you to become a FRIEND of the Canada West Foundation by making a donation. Please contact our Fund Development Officer Lison McCullough (403.264.9535 ext. 355 or toll free 1.888.825.5293 or mccullough@cwf.ca) for more information.



900, 1202 Centre Street South
Calgary, Alberta, CANADA • T2G 5A5
Ph: 403.264.9535 • Toll Free: 1.888.825.5293
Fax: 403.269.4776 • Email: cwf@cwf.ca



**#900, 1202 Centre Street South
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2G 5A5
Telephone: 403.264.9535**

www.cwf.ca