



# Western Directions

An Analysis of the Looking West 2004 Survey

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**BUILDING** THE NEW WEST REPORT #33

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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 four western provinces face a variety of policy challenges and opportunities in the years ahead. Myriad issues – from health care, education and the environment to the economy, infrastructure and the urban agenda – compete for political attention and funding dollars. The Looking West 2004 survey examined a variety of policy issues to help western Canadians and their governments better understand the opinions and attitudes of a wide range of people.

Western Directions presents an analysis of the Looking West 2004 policy attitudes data. It should be noted that the survey also collected data in the four western provinces and Ontario on a variety of federalism issues, including treatment by the federal government, Senate reform, separatism, and western alienation. These data are presented in *Regional Distinctions: An Analysis of the Looking West 2004 Survey* (Calgary: Canada West Foundation), released in March 2004.

Key findings include:

- While almost three-quarters of westerners feel that improving the health care system is a high priority, it is not the only policy issue that western Canadians see as important. Ensuring skilled labour, reducing poverty, and protecting the environment were all ranked as high priorities by almost two-thirds of westerners.
- When asked about the future of their provinces, western Canadians are divided between optimism and expectations of the status quo. BC respondents are the most optimistic, while Saskatchewan respondents are the most pessimistic.
- Westerners have greater confidence in their provincial government's policies to help their provincial economies than they do in the federal government's policies.
- Westerners feel that Canada should pursue stronger economic ties with the United States and should make every effort to keep the Canada-US border open to Canadian trade. Almost nine in ten westerners feel that the Canada-US relationship has deteriorated in recent years; causes cited for this deterioration are divided between trade disputes, the Iraq war, and a poor personal relationship between former Prime Minister Chretien and President Bush.
- The majority of western Canadians feel their local government has too little revenue to meet its current responsibilities. In the event that their local government needed additional revenues, six in ten prefer increased local taxes over reduced local services. Westerners continue to prefer property taxes to the idea of a local sales tax.
- Westerners do not have overwhelmingly positive opinions about how governments are handling environmental stewardship, but clearly see the provincial government in a better light than the federal government.

## Introduction

The four western provinces face a variety of policy challenges and opportunities in the years ahead. Myriad issues – from health care, education and the environment to the economy, infrastructure and the urban agenda – compete for political attention and funding dollars. The Looking West 2004 survey examined a variety of policy issues to help western Canadians and their governments better understand the opinions and attitudes of a wide range of people.

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 analysis 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.

*Western Directions* presents an analysis of the Looking West 2004 policy attitudes data. It should be noted that the survey also collected data in the four western provinces and Ontario on a variety of federalism issues, including treatment by the federal government, Senate reform, separatism, and western alienation. These data are presented in *Regional Distinctions: An Analysis of the Looking West 2004 Survey* (Calgary: Canada West Foundation), released in March 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. Ontario residents were not asked the policy attitude questions. 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%
<b>Western Canada</b>	<b>3,200</b>	<b>1.73%</b>
Ontario	800	3.46%

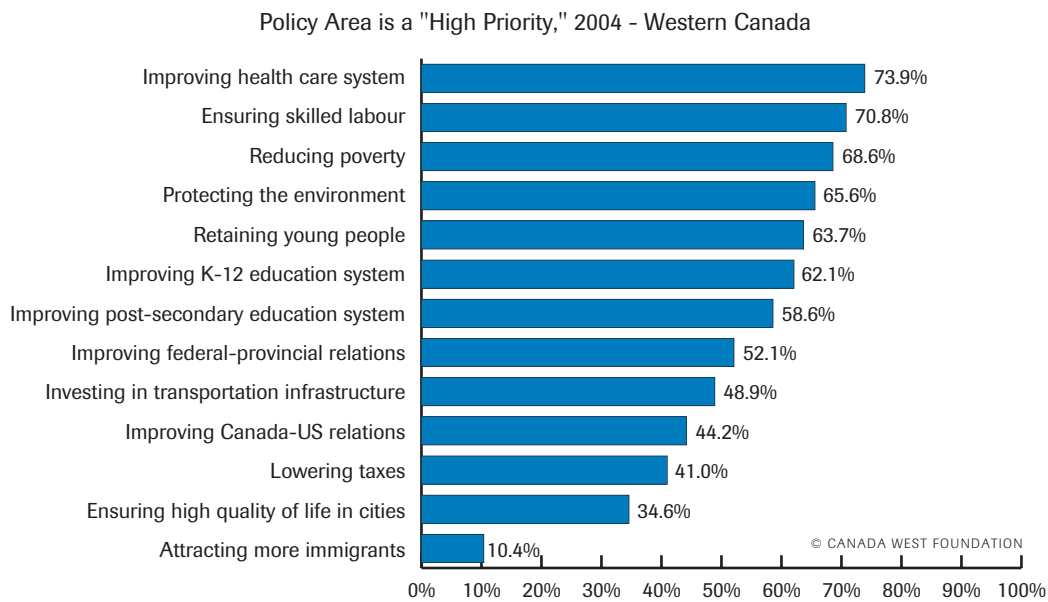
In the presentation of aggregate western Canadian regional data, a weighting adjustment factor was applied to match each province’s sample weight to its portion of the regional population 18 years of age and over. The Ontario data were not subjected to a weighting factor. Because non-responses (“don’t 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).

**Policy Priorities**

The Looking West 2004 survey asked respondents, “Thinking about what governments can do to ensure the future prosperity and quality of life in [province], would you rate the priority of the following as a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority?” Thirteen policy fields were explored: lowering taxes; improving [province]’s health care system; improving [province]’s Kindergarten – Grade 12 education system; improving [province]’s post-secondary education system, which includes universities, colleges, technical schools and trades training; investing in [province]’s transportation infrastructure, such as roads, railways, airports and urban transportation systems (“ports” were added for BC respondents); attracting more immigrants to [province]; protecting the environment; retaining [province]’s young people; reducing poverty; improving Canada-US relations; improving the relationship between [province] and the federal government; ensuring [province] has the skilled labour it needs for the years ahead; and ensuring a high quality of life in [province]’s large cities.” (Question order was rotated by Western Opinion Research to avoid biases related to placement in the list.)

figure 1



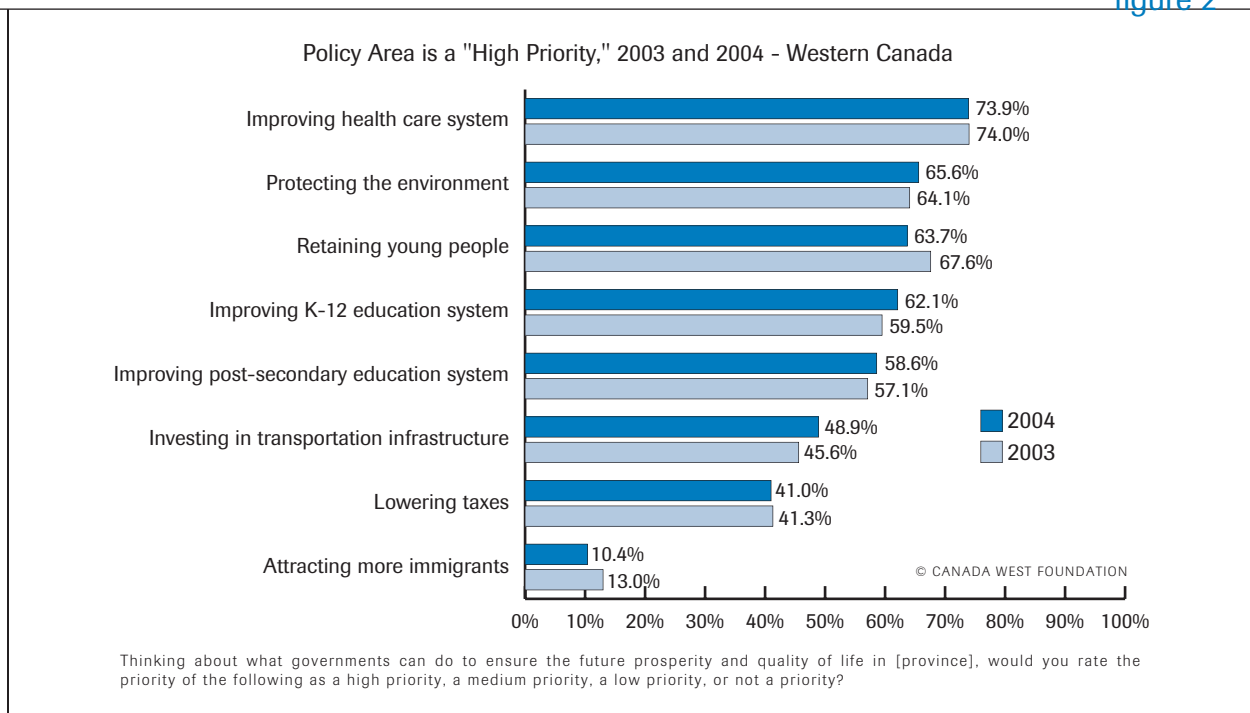
Thinking about what governments can do to ensure the future prosperity and quality of life in [province], would you rate the priority of the following as a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority?

It must be stressed that there is no presumption that only the 13 policy fields probed are of importance to western Canada. However, the issues included provide an interesting snapshot of the variety of issues that are seen as important to western Canadian life – and of the issues that are seen to be of lesser importance. One caveat in reading the data: respondents were not asked to rank the 13 against each other, but rather to rate each individual policy area as a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority. The policy issues are then ranked in the analysis stage based on the percentage of respondents indicating a policy area is a high priority.

Health care is a leading policy topic in political discussions, public debates and in the media, and it is no surprise that improving the health care system is a top priority for western Canadians. Almost three-quarters of western Canadians state that improving the health care system is a high priority. However, while health care is a top priority, it is not the only policy issue that western Canadians see as important. Looking at the West as a whole, there are a number of findings that are of particular interest (see Figure 1):

- Lowering taxes does not make it into the top ten priorities.
- Ensuring skilled labour is clearly a high priority across the West, but there is less support for some of the steps that might be taken to address labour supply. While western Canadians see retaining young people as a top strategy, there is less support for improving the post-secondary education system, and very few western Canadians see attracting more immigrants as a high priority.
- Almost two-thirds of western Canadians state that reducing poverty is a high priority, an interesting finding given that the Looking West 2003 survey found that less than one-third of western Canadians felt that increasing funding for social services was a high priority.

figure 2



- Neither improving the province’s Kindergarten–Grade 12 education system or improving [province]’s post-secondary education system are in the top five priorities.
- While there have been growing political and business concerns about improving Canada–US relations, a greater number of western Canadians feel that improving federal–provincial relations is a high priority to future prosperity and quality of life.
- Despite ongoing debates about the importance of large cities to provincial economies and quality of life, urban issues appear to remain somewhat on the policy backburner, as only one-third of western Canadians state ensuring a high quality of life in the large cities is a high priority.
- Almost two-thirds of western Canadians rank “protecting the environment” as a high priority.

Eight of the thirteen policy areas – health care, environment, young people, K-12 education, post-secondary education, transportation infrastructure, lowering taxes, and immigration – were included in the Looking West 2003 survey (Figure 2). The stability between the 2003 and 2004 figures is remarkable. The largest shifts are only in the magnitude of three to four percentage points. Such modest shifts in opinion across two separate surveys a full year apart indicate that western Canadians are consistent in their policy priorities.

figure 3

High Priority by Province, 2004			
	<b>BC</b>		<b>AB</b>
Improving health care system	76.3%	Improving health care system	70.5%
Ensuring skilled labour	72.0%	Ensuring skilled labour	69.7%
Reducing poverty	70.0%	Protecting the environment	67.4%
Protecting the environment	65.5%	Improving K-12 education system	67.0%
Improving K-12 education system	63.9%	Reducing poverty	66.9%
Retaining young people	61.1%	Improving post-secondary education system	61.6%
Improving post-secondary education system	59.2%	Retaining young people	58.4%
Improving federal-provincial relations	52.2%	Improving federal-provincial relations	52.7%
Investing in transportation infrastructure	50.7%	Improving Canada-US relations	49.7%
Lowering taxes	39.9%	Lowering taxes	40.9%
Improving Canada-US relations	39.3%	Investing in transportation infrastructure	40.3%
Ensuring high quality of life in cities	34.4%	Ensuring high quality of life in cities	34.0%
Attracting more immigrants	8.5%	Attracting more immigrants	8.3%
	<b>SK</b>		<b>MB</b>
Retaining young people	79.5%	Improving health care system	75.8%
Ensuring skilled labour	72.6%	Retaining young people	73.6%
Improving health care system	71.7%	Reducing poverty	70.3%
Reducing poverty	66.2%	Ensuring skilled labour	67.9%
Protecting the environment	63.8%	Protecting the environment	62.9%
Investing in transportation infrastructure	58.1%	Investing in transportation infrastructure	56.7%
Improving federal-provincial relations	57.5%	Improving post-secondary education system	53.4%
Improving post-secondary education system	53.1%	Improving K-12 education system	51.8%
Improving K-12 education system	51.0%	Improving federal-provincial relations	45.3%
Improving Canada-US relations	47.8%	Improving Canada-US relations	44.4%
Lowering taxes	43.8%	Lowering taxes	42.6%
Ensuring high quality of life in cities	31.6%	Ensuring high quality of life in cities	39.3%
Attracting more immigrants	17.1%	Attracting more immigrants	17.3%

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Looking at specific provinces, some differences do emerge (Figure 3). Saskatchewan stands out as the only province in which improving health care is not in the first position – both retaining young people and ensuring sufficient skilled labour have higher percentages of respondents rating them as high priorities. However, the actual percentage of respondents rating health care as a high priority in Saskatchewan is similar to that of the other three provinces. Saskatchewan and Manitoba stand apart from BC and Alberta due to the high percentage of respondents stating that retaining the province’s young people is a high priority.

That said, there is considerable consistency in the relative positioning of the different policy areas. In all four provinces, health care, skilled labour, poverty and the environment are among the top five priorities. In all four provinces, immigration, urban quality of life, lowering taxes, and Canada-US relations are among the bottom five priorities. And, in all four provinces, K-12 education, post-secondary education, infrastructure and federal-provincial relations are among the middle-ranking priorities. As was found in the Looking West 2003 survey, despite the many political, policy and economic differences between the four western provinces, in terms of policy priorities western Canadians are more similar than they are different.

The full responses for each policy area for the West as a whole are presented in Figure 4.

figure 4

Policy Priorities 2004 - Western Canada				
	<i>high</i>	<i>med.</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>not a priority</i>
Improving the health care system	73.9%	20.1%	4.5%	1.4%
Ensuring skilled labour	70.8%	23.0%	4.6%	1.1%
Reducing poverty	68.6%	23.1%	6.2%	1.6%
Protecting the environment	65.6%	27.6%	5.8%	0.8%
Retaining young people	63.7%	24.8%	8.2%	1.7%
Improving K-12 education system	62.1%	27.7%	7.1%	2.0%
Improving post-secondary education system	58.6%	31.7%	7.6%	1.4%
Improving federal-provincial relations	52.1%	37.0%	8.3%	2.1%
Investing in transportation infrastructure	48.9%	41.5%	8.3%	1.4%
Improving Canada-US relations	44.2%	34.8%	15.9%	4.5%
Lowering taxes	41.0%	37.4%	16.5%	4.8%
Ensuring high quality of life in cities	34.6%	44.5%	15.2%	4.3%
Attracting more immigrants	10.4%	34.8%	41.2%	12.7%

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NOTE: Due to non-responses, numbers may not total to 100.

Thinking about what governments can do to ensure the future prosperity and quality of life in [province], would you rate the priority of the following as a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority?

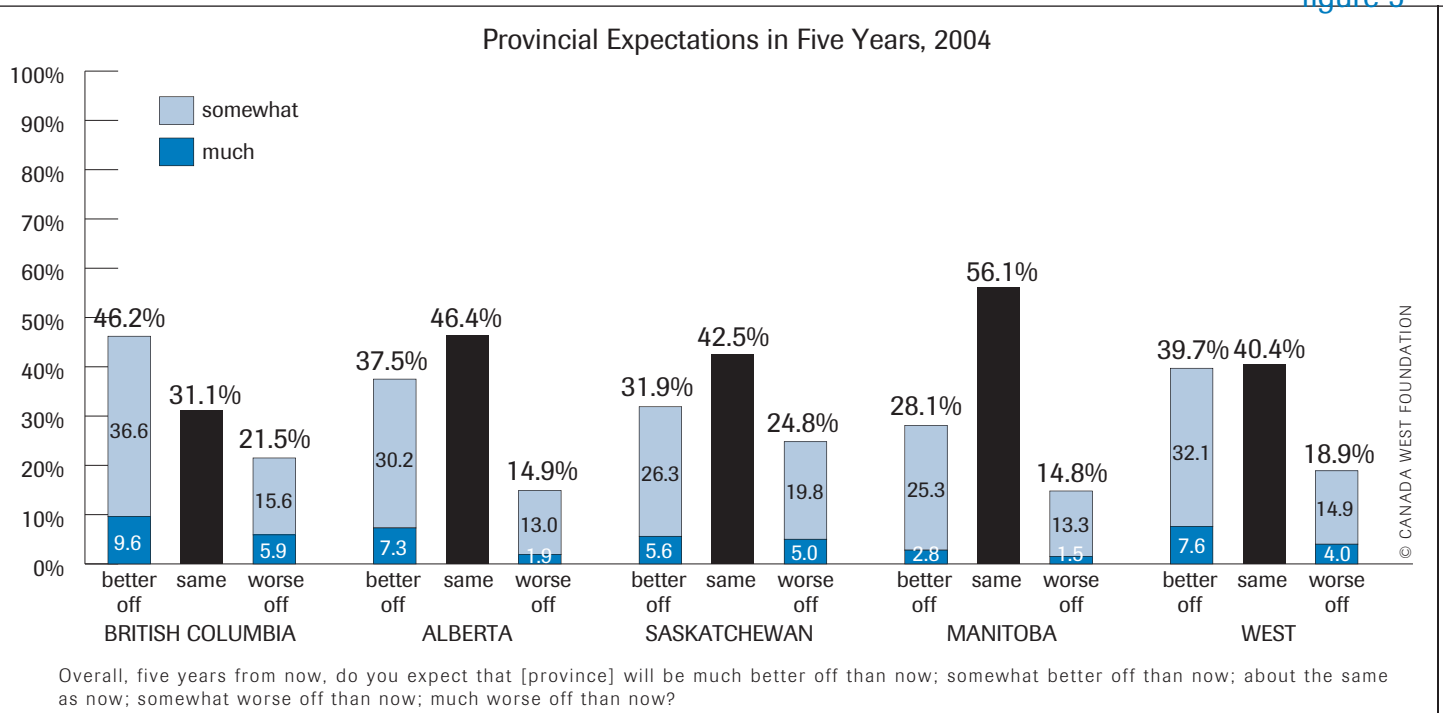


### Economic Expectations

Since 2001, the Looking West surveys have explored the extent to which western Canadians feel optimistic about their province's economic and social outlook: are western Canadians generally optimistic or pessimistic about the near future of their province? To assess this, western Canadians were asked, "Overall, five years from now, do you expect that [province] will be much better off than now; somewhat better off than now; about the same as now; somewhat worse off than now; much worse off than now?"

Western Canadians are divided between optimism (39.7% expect their province to be better off) and expectations of the status quo (40.4% expect the province to remain about the same as it is now). Less than two in ten (18.9%) expect their province to be worse off. However, the regional variations on this question are notable. British Columbia respondents stand out with considerably higher levels of optimism, and at the same time with a relatively high percentage of pessimists – an interesting dichotomy. Manitoba respondents are the least likely to expect improvement in the next five years, and the most likely to expect the status quo. Saskatchewan respondents are the most pessimistic, with one in four (24.8%) expecting the province to be worse off in five years. Alberta is the province that most closely mirrors the western Canadian average.

figure 5

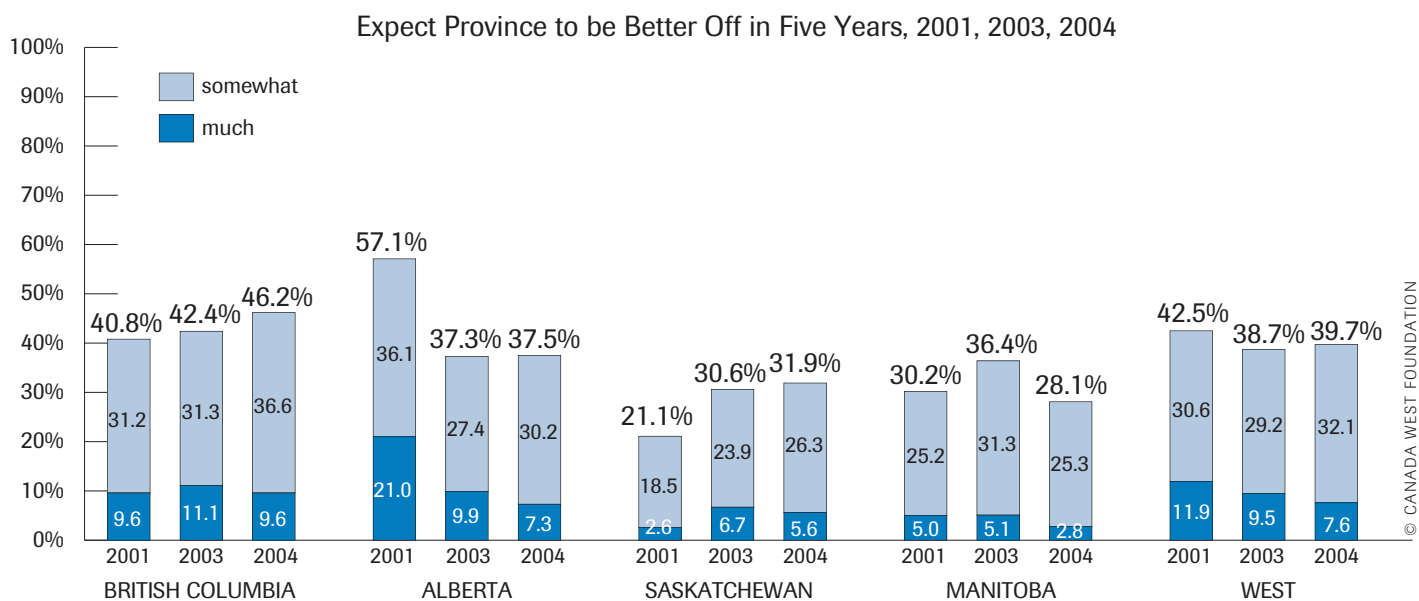


How have provincial expectations changed since 2001? For the West as a whole, expectations have remained relatively consistent, with approximately four in ten westerners in each year expecting their province to be better off in five years. But again, the provincial variations demonstrate greater diversity. In BC, optimism levels have been consistently rising, with 2004 levels five percentage points higher than 2001 levels. In Alberta, optimism levels dropped considerably – a full 20 percentage points – between 2001 and 2003, but held constant between 2003 and 2004. Saskatchewan has experienced the opposite pattern: optimism levels were very low in 2001, jumped nine percentage points in 2003, and have witnessed a very modest increase in 2004. Finally, Manitoba is the only province to have its lowest optimism levels in 2004; while 2003 showed an increase over 2001 in the percentage of respondents expecting Manitoba to be better off, expectations have dropped off.

The Looking West 2004 survey also asked two questions specific to the provincial economies. First, respondents were asked, “How confident are you that the [province] government’s policies will help the [province] economy over the next five years? Very confident; somewhat confident; not very confident; not at all confident.” Second, respondents were asked, “How confident are you that the federal government’s policies will help the [province] economy over the next five years? Very confident; somewhat confident; not very confident; not at all confident.”

The data indicate that, overall, western Canadians have greater confidence in their provincial government’s policies to help their province’s economy than they do in the federal government’s policies. Leading the pack in confidence is Alberta: almost eight in ten Alberta respondents are confident that provincial policies will help the economy over the next five years. This confidence level is significantly higher than all of the other western provinces. Manitoba respondents also have considerable confidence in their provincial government’s policies, with two-thirds stating that they are very or somewhat confident that the province’s policies

figure 6



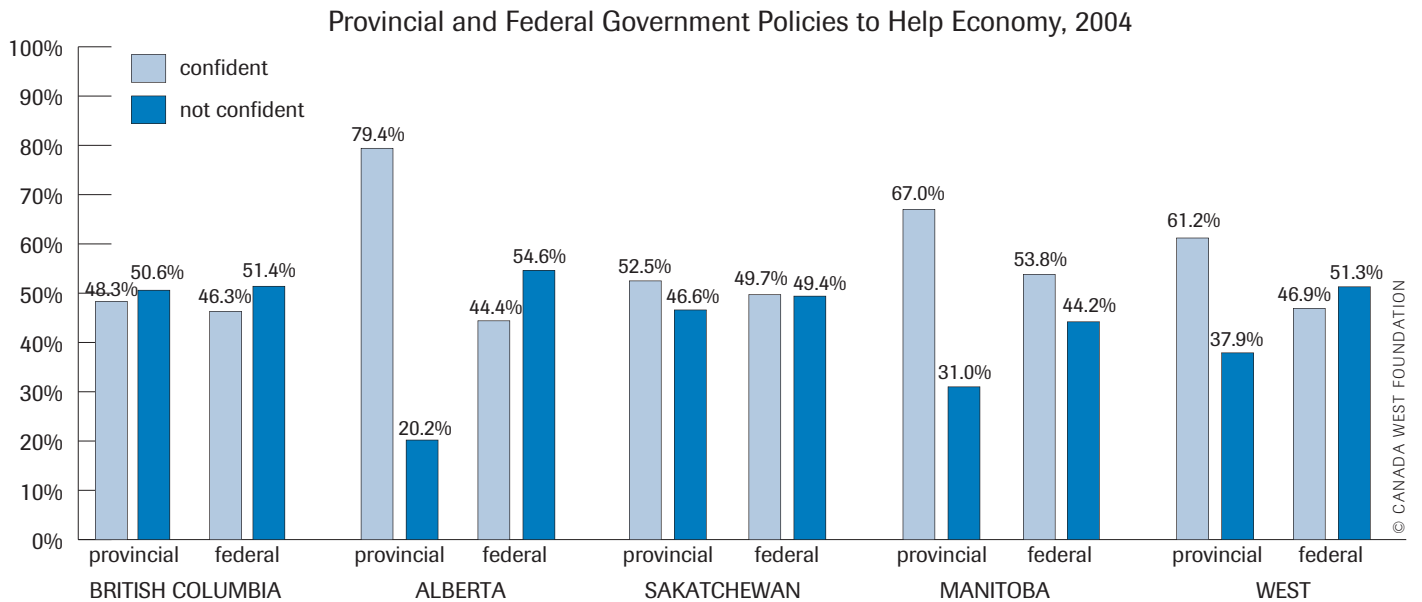
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Overall, five years from now, do you expect that [province] will be much better off than now; somewhat better off than now; about the same as now; somewhat worse off than now; much worse off than now?

will help Manitoba's economy over the next five years. Saskatchewan respondents are more divided between confidence and a lack of confidence, with a slim majority stating that they are very or somewhat confident that the Saskatchewan government's policies will help the economy. BC respondents are as divided as the Saskatchewan respondents, but in BC the very slim majority expresses a lack of confidence. Overall, for the West as a whole, western Canadians are more likely than not to be confident in their provincial government's policies.

The same cannot be said for the federal government: a slim majority of western Canadians indicate that they lack confidence in the ability of federal policies to help their province's economy. In all provinces, respondents are near-equally divided between expressing confidence or a lack of confidence.

figure 7



**BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**BC government**

very confident	10.6%
somewhat confident	37.7%
not very confident	31.0%
not at all confident	19.6%

**federal government**

very confident	4.5%
somewhat confident	41.8%
not very confident	38.9%
not at all confident	12.5%

**ALBERTA**

**AB government**

very confident	24.6%
somewhat confident	54.8%
not very confident	15.6%
not at all confident	4.6%

**federal government**

very confident	3.6%
somewhat confident	40.8%
not very confident	41.9%
not at all confident	12.7%

**SAKATCHEWAN**

**SK government**

very confident	7.4%
somewhat confident	45.1%
not very confident	31.6%
not at all confident	15.0%

**federal government**

very confident	3.3%
somewhat confident	46.4%
not very confident	39.6%
not at all confident	9.8%

**MANITOBA**

**MB government**

very confident	6.3%
somewhat confident	60.7%
not very confident	23.4%
not at all confident	7.6%

**federal government**

very confident	2.5%
somewhat confident	51.3%
not very confident	36.3%
not at all confident	7.9%

**WEST**

**prov. government**

very confident	14.3%
somewhat confident	46.9%
not very confident	25.1%
not at all confident	12.8%

**federal government**

very confident	3.8%
somewhat confident	43.1%
not very confident	39.6%
not at all confident	11.7%

How confident are you that the [province] government's policies will help the [province] economy over the next five years? Very confident; somewhat confident; not very confident; not at all confident. How confident are you that the federal government's policies will help the [province] economy over the next five years? Very confident; somewhat confident; not very confident; not at all confident.

### Canada-US Relations

The Looking West 2004 policy priorities data demonstrate over four in ten (44.2%) westerners feel that improving Canada-US relations is a high priority for long-term provincial prosperity and quality of life, while one-third (34.8%) feels it is a medium priority. Two in ten feel it is either a low priority (15.9%) or not a priority (4.5%).

To further probe attitudes about the Canada-US relationship, Looking West 2004 survey respondents were asked two questions specific to trade and the economy. First, westerners were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Canada should pursue closer economic ties with the United States.” Westerners are quite positive in their response to this: seven in ten agree that stronger ties should be pursued, with one-third strongly agreeing. However, there is a notable gap between the three prairie provinces – in which almost three-quarters of respondents agree – and BC, in which less than two-thirds agree.

Respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Canada should make every effort to keep the Canada-US border open to Canadian trade.” On this point, westerners are emphatic: 94.6% agree, with seven in ten agreeing strongly. Respondents from the prairie provinces are slightly more likely than respondents from BC to strongly agree.

figure 8

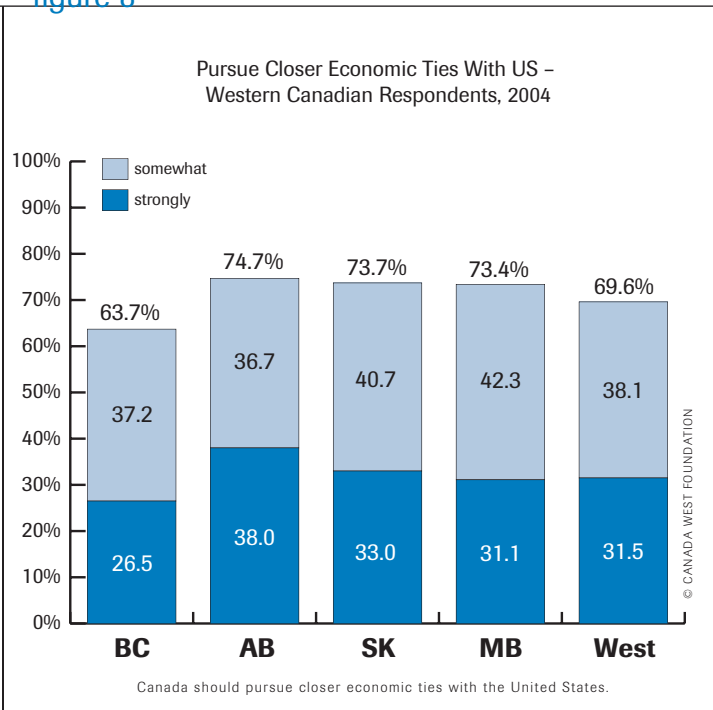
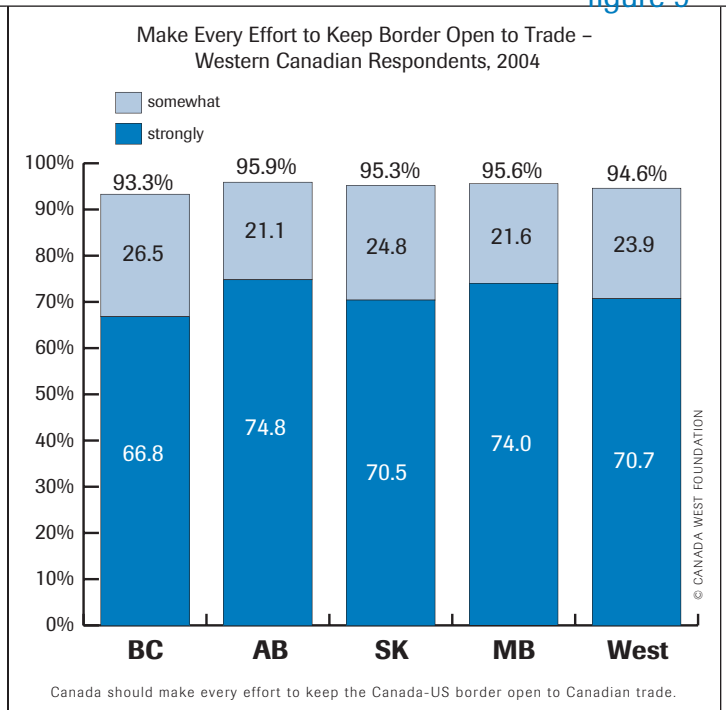


figure 9



Respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Canada should make every effort to keep the Canada-US border open to Canadian trade.” On this point, westerners are emphatic: 94.6% agree, with seven in ten agreeing strongly. Respondents from the prairie provinces are slightly more likely than respondents from BC to strongly agree.

Respondents who agreed (strongly or somewhat) that the Canada-US relationship has deteriorated were asked a follow-up question: “Of the following reasons, which do you feel has most significantly contributed to a deterioration in Canada-US relations over the past few years? Canada-US trade disputes, such as softwood lumber and beef exports; differing positions on the Iraq war; poor personal relationship between Prime Minister Chretien and President Bush; anti-American comments by Canadian politicians.” Westerners are clearly divided on the cause of deterioration; while trade disputes is the cause cited by four in ten, one-quarter blame differing positions on the Iraq war and over one-quarter blame the poor personal relationship between former Prime Minister Chretien and President Bush. Only 5% blame anti-American comments by Canadian politicians.

In BC, a slim majority of respondents (50.1%) put the blame on trade disputes. In the three other western provinces, no response option received majority support. The plurality in Alberta (33.9%) and Manitoba (31.5%) blamed the Chretien-Bush relationship, and the plurality in Saskatchewan (36.1%) blamed trade disputes. But it must be stressed that in all provinces, there is a diversity of opinion about the cause of deterioration.

figure 10

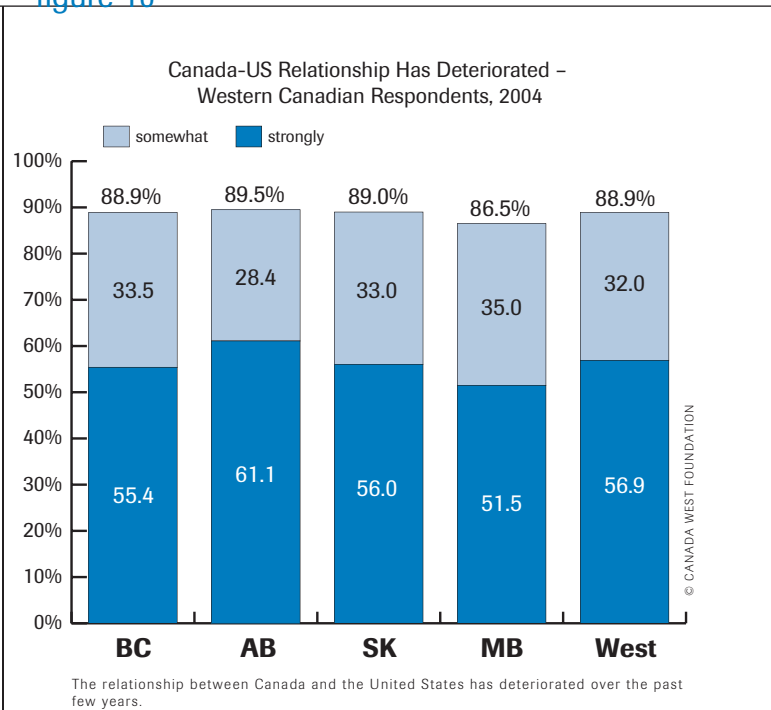
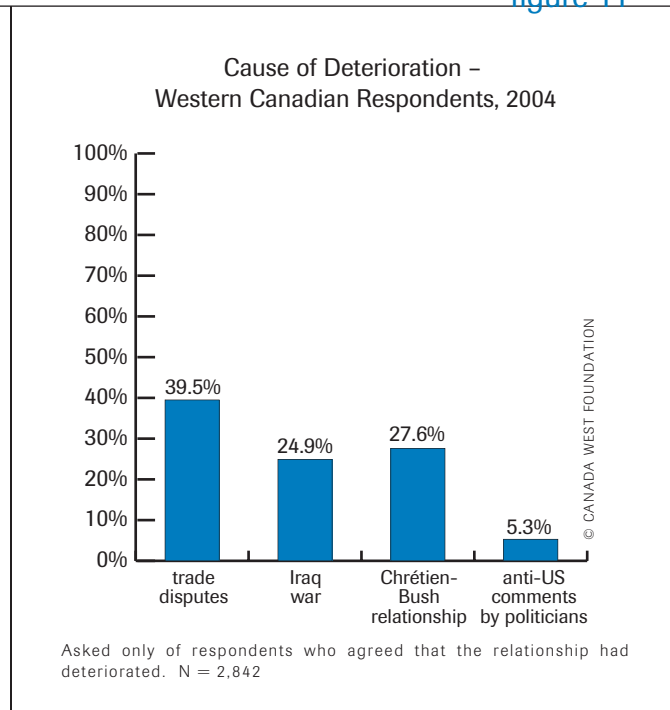


figure 11



### Urban Finance

Looking West 2004 survey respondents were asked three questions about municipal government finance. In the survey, municipal government was described as “your local city, town or rural district government.”

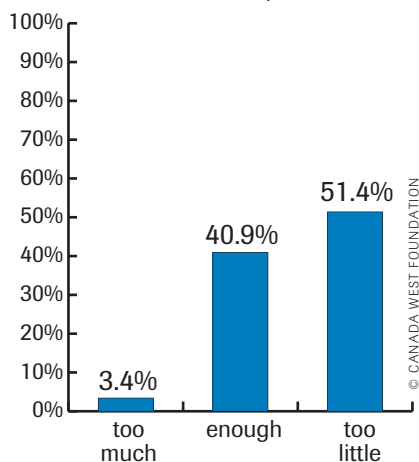
First, respondents were asked, “Do you feel that your local government has enough, too much, or too little revenue to fulfill its current responsibilities?” This question was replicated from the Looking West 2003 survey.

The majority of western Canadians feels that their local government has too little revenue; this holds for all provinces except Alberta, in which the plurality feels their local government has insufficient revenue. Less than 5% of western Canadians feel their local government has too much revenue; this holds for all provinces. There are some variations with urban size, with respondents in medium-sized cities and rural areas/small towns more likely to state that their local government has insufficient revenue. The exception to this pattern is Manitoba, in which six in ten (60.3%) Winnipeggers report that their city lacks sufficient revenue – a variation that in all likelihood relates to the widespread public discussions about urban finance issues in fall 2003.

It is interesting to note the rising numbers of western Canadians who feel their local government’s revenues are insufficient. In 2003, this was the position of the majority in only two of the four provinces; by 2004, this had jumped to the majority position of three of the four western provinces, and of the region as a whole. In British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the number of respondents stating that their local government has insufficient financial resources rose by six to seven percentage points - a considerable jump. In contrast, Alberta respondents were quite consistent in their position between 2003 and 2004.

figure 12

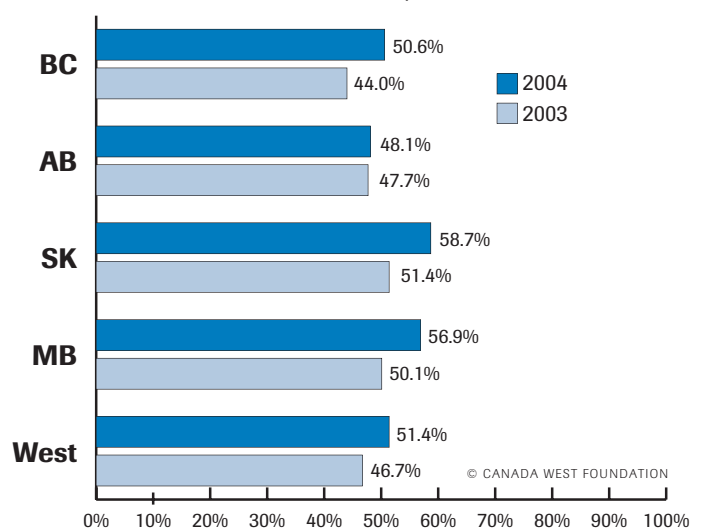
Local Government Revenue to Fulfill Responsibilities - Western Canadian Respondents, 2004



Do you feel that your local government has enough, too much, or too little revenue to fulfill its current responsibilities?

figure 13

Local Government Has Too Little Revenue 2003 and 2004 - Western Canadian Respondents



Do you feel that your local government has enough, too much, or too little revenue to fulfill its current responsibilities?

Looking West 2004 respondents were also asked, "Municipal governments typically provide services like police, fire, water treatment, transit, recreation, and building and maintaining roads and other local infrastructure. If your local government were faced with the choice of either increasing its revenues by raising taxes or decreasing expenditures by cutting services, which would you prefer? Raise local taxes in order to increase revenues; cut local services in order to reduce expenditures."

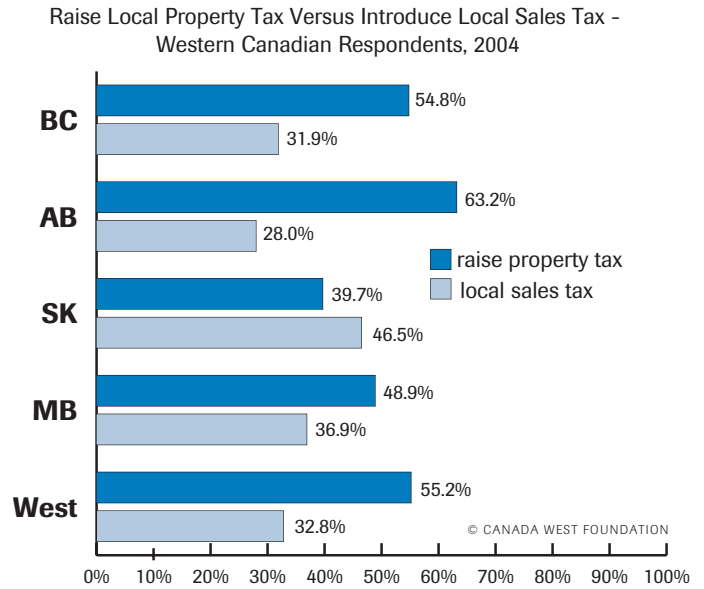
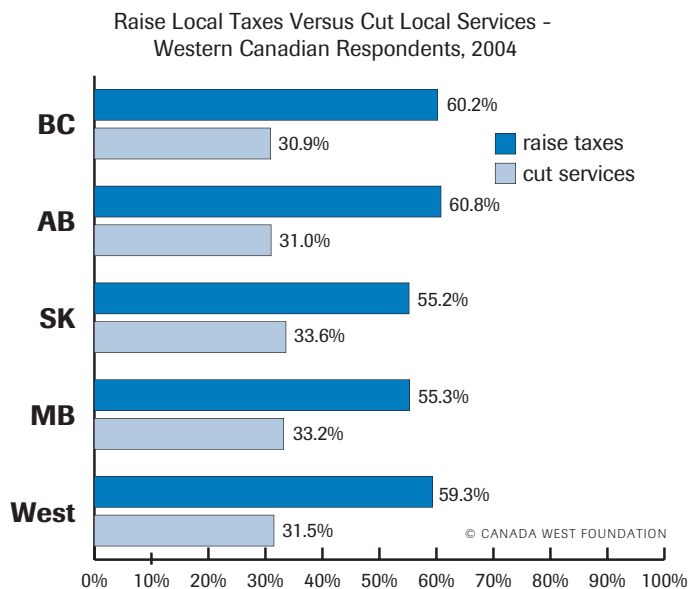
Western Canadians prefer the idea of higher local taxes over the idea of reduced local services by a factor of two-to-one. Saskatchewan and Manitoba respondents are somewhat less willing to consider raising taxes and somewhat more willing to consider cutting services, but the differences are modest. The variations in responses by urban size are not significant for the West as a whole.

The last urban finance question looked at tax increases. Respondents were asked, "Imagine that your local government must increase its tax revenues. Which of the following two options would you prefer? Significantly decrease local property tax levels and introduce a local sales tax; significantly increase local property tax levels and do not introduce a local sales tax."

For the West as a whole, the majority (55.2%) prefers the idea of raising local property tax levels, while only one-third (32.8%) favours significantly decreasing local property tax levels and introducing a local sales tax. This pattern is seen in all of the individual provinces except one: in Saskatchewan, the plurality (46.5%) favours the sales tax option. Alberta stands out as the province least likely to support the idea of a local sales tax (28.0%), reflecting a long-standing provincial attitude toward sales taxes in general. The urban size variations on this question are modest.

figure 14

figure 15



Municipal governments typically provide services like police, fire, water treatment, transit, recreation, and building and maintaining roads and other local infrastructure. If your local government were faced with the choice of either increasing its revenues by raising taxes or decreasing expenditures by cutting services, which would you prefer? Raise local taxes in order to increase revenues; cut local services in order to reduce expenditures.

Imagine that your local government must increase its tax revenues. Which of the following two options would you prefer? Significantly decrease local property tax levels and introduce a local sales tax; significantly increase local property tax levels and do not introduce a local sales tax.

## Environment

The Looking West 2004 policy priorities data demonstrate almost two-thirds (65.6%) of westerners feel that protecting the environment is a high priority for long-term provincial prosperity and quality of life, while almost three in ten (27.6%) feel it is a medium priority. Less than one in ten feels it is either a low priority (5.8%) or not a priority (0.8%).

To further probe attitudes about the environment, Looking West 2004 survey respondents were asked two questions specific to environmental stewardship, defined to respondents as “the long-term management of our land, water and other natural resources.” First, respondents were asked, “How would you rate the [province] government’s performance in the area of environmental stewardship? Very good; good; adequate; poor; very poor.” Second, respondents were asked, “How would you rate the federal government’s performance in the area of environmental stewardship? Very good; good; adequate; poor; very poor.”

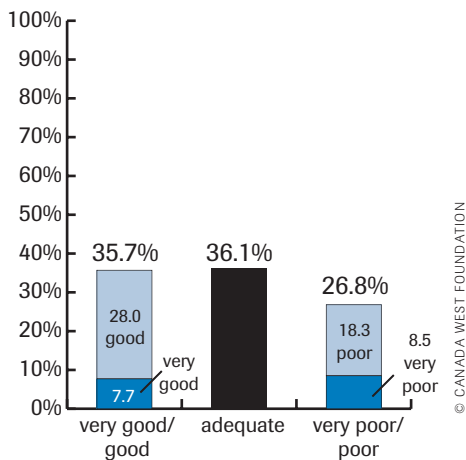
Westerners do not have overwhelmingly positive opinions about how governments are handling environmental stewardship, but clearly see the provincial government in a better light. Just over one-third (35.7%) rates their provincial government’s performance as good or very good, while over one-quarter (26.8%) rates it as poor or very poor. The plurality (36.1%) states that their provincial government’s performance is adequate.

The federal government fares worse, with less than one-quarter (24.0%) rating its performance on environmental stewardship as good or very good, and close to three in ten (29.1%) rating it as poor or very poor. The plurality (44.0%) rates the federal government’s performance as adequate. There is almost a twelve percentage point gap between the number of westerners who rate the provincial government’s performance as good or very good and the number who rate the federal government’s performance as good or very good.

figure 16

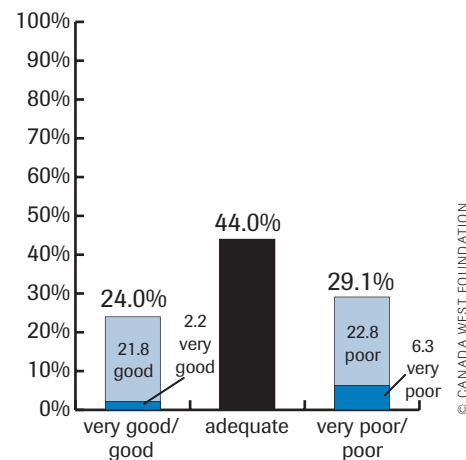
figure 17

Provincial Government Environmental Stewardship - Western Respondents, 2004



How would you rate the [province] government’s performance in the area of environmental stewardship? Very good; good; adequate; poor; very poor.

Federal Government Environmental Stewardship - Western Respondents, 2004

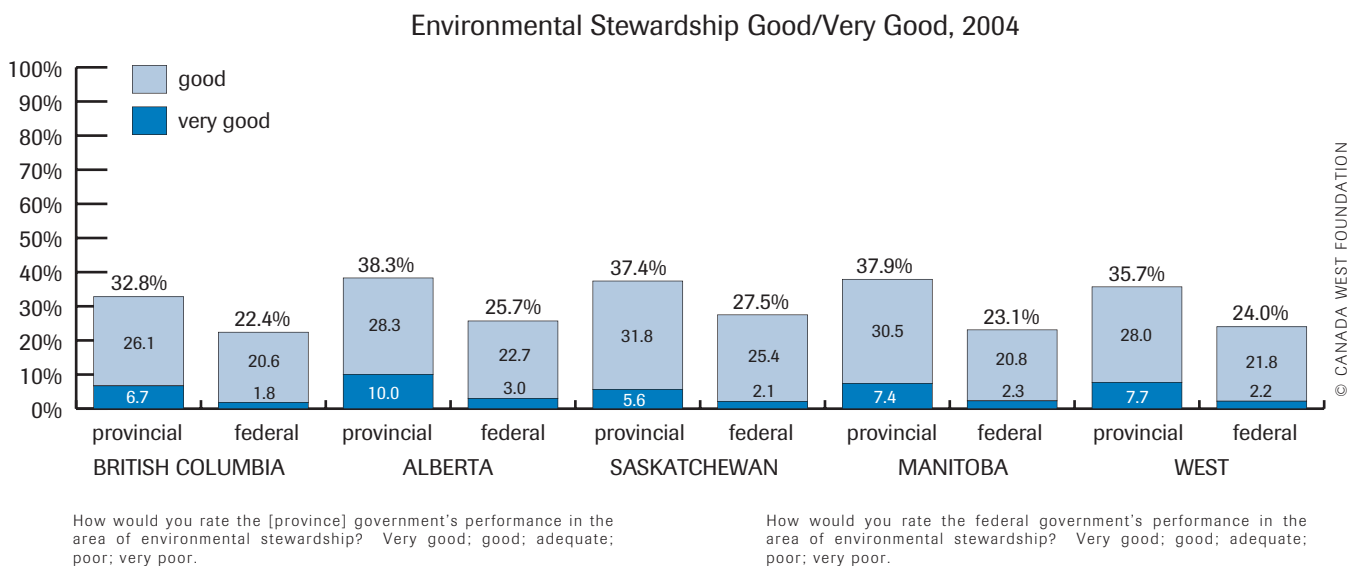


How would you rate the federal government’s performance in the area of environmental stewardship? Very good; good; adequate; poor; very poor.



Similar attitudes are seen across the western provinces individually. British Columbians are somewhat less likely than prairie respondents to rate their provincial government as good or very good in environmental stewardship. British Columbians and Manitobans are the least likely to rate the federal government's performance as good or very good, while Saskatchewan respondents are the most positive of the western provinces about the federal government's environmental performance.

figure 18



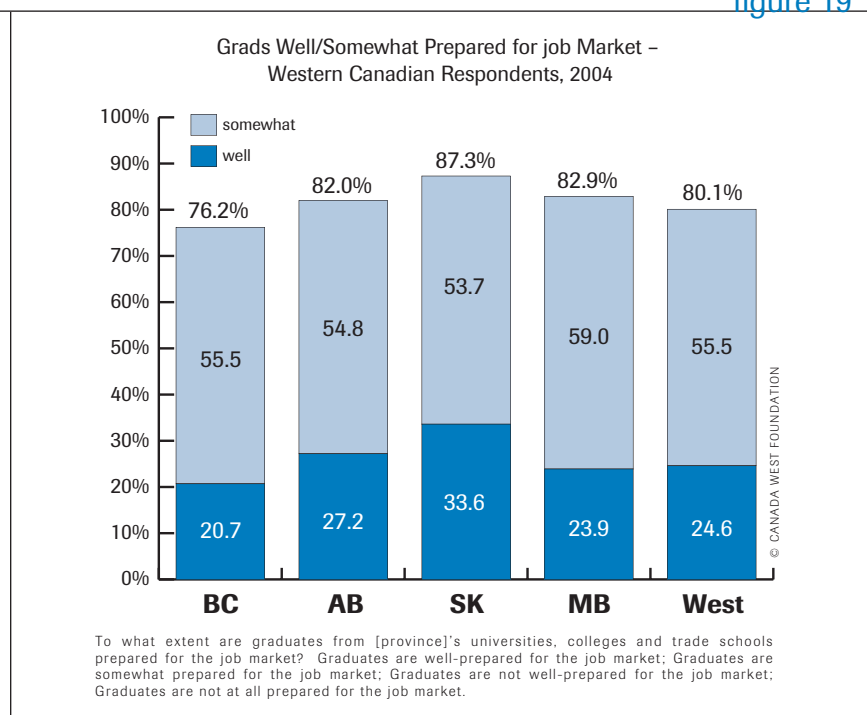
### Post-Secondary Education

Skilled labour is clearly a priority to western Canadians: seven in ten (70.8%) westerners feel ensuring skilled labour is a high priority for long-term provincial prosperity and quality of life, and another quarter (23.0%) state it is a medium priority. Only one in twenty states ensuring skilled labour is a low priority (4.6%) or not a priority (1.1%). Yet while skilled labour is widely seen as a high priority, there is somewhat lower support for improving post-secondary education: six in ten (58.6%) westerners feel it is a high priority, and three in ten (31.7%) feel it is a medium priority. Almost one in ten feels it is either a low priority (7.6%) or not a priority (1.4%).

One possible explanation for this gap is that westerners feel that their post-secondary system is doing a good enough job, and therefore needs little improvement. Looking West 2004 respondents were asked, “I would now like you to think about [province]’s job market and labour needs over the next five years. To what extent are graduates from [province]’s universities, colleges and trade schools prepared for the job market? Graduates are well-prepared for the job market; Graduates are somewhat prepared for the job market; Graduates are not well-prepared for the job market; Graduates are not at all prepared for the job market.”

One-quarter (24.6%) of westerners feel that post-secondary graduates are well-prepared for the job market, while the majority (55.5%) feels that graduates are only somewhat prepared. Less than two in ten feel that post-secondary graduates are either not well prepared (12.6%) or not at all prepared (3.2%). Saskatchewan respondents are the most positive about their post-secondary system, with one-third stating that graduates are well-prepared for the job market and almost nine in ten stating that graduates are either well or somewhat prepared. BC respondents are the least positive, with only two in ten stating their graduates are well-prepared and three-quarters stating their graduates are well or somewhat prepared.

figure 19

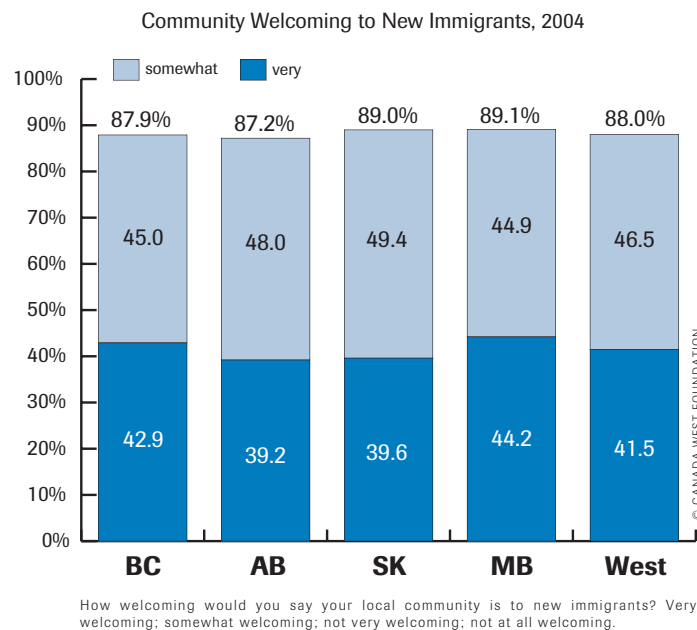


## Immigration

The Looking West 2004 policy priorities data demonstrate that western Canadians do not see immigration as key to the future of their provinces: only one in ten (10.4%) westerners feels that attracting more immigrants is a high priority for long-term provincial prosperity and quality of life, while one-third (34.8%) feels it is a medium priority. The majority feels immigration is either a low priority (41.2%) or not a priority (12.7%).

Yet despite this, westerners do view their communities as being welcoming environments. Looking West 2004 respondents were asked, “How welcoming would you say your local community is to new immigrants? Very welcoming; somewhat welcoming; not very welcoming; not at all welcoming.” Almost nine in ten westerners state that their community is either very welcoming (41.5%) or somewhat welcoming (46.5%). Less than one in ten states that their community is not very welcoming (6.8%) or not at all welcoming (1.6%). Responses are relatively consistent across the four western provinces, and across urban sizes. Responses are also consistent among respondents born in or born outside Canada, suggesting that westerners’ perceptions of their communities are accurate.

figure 20



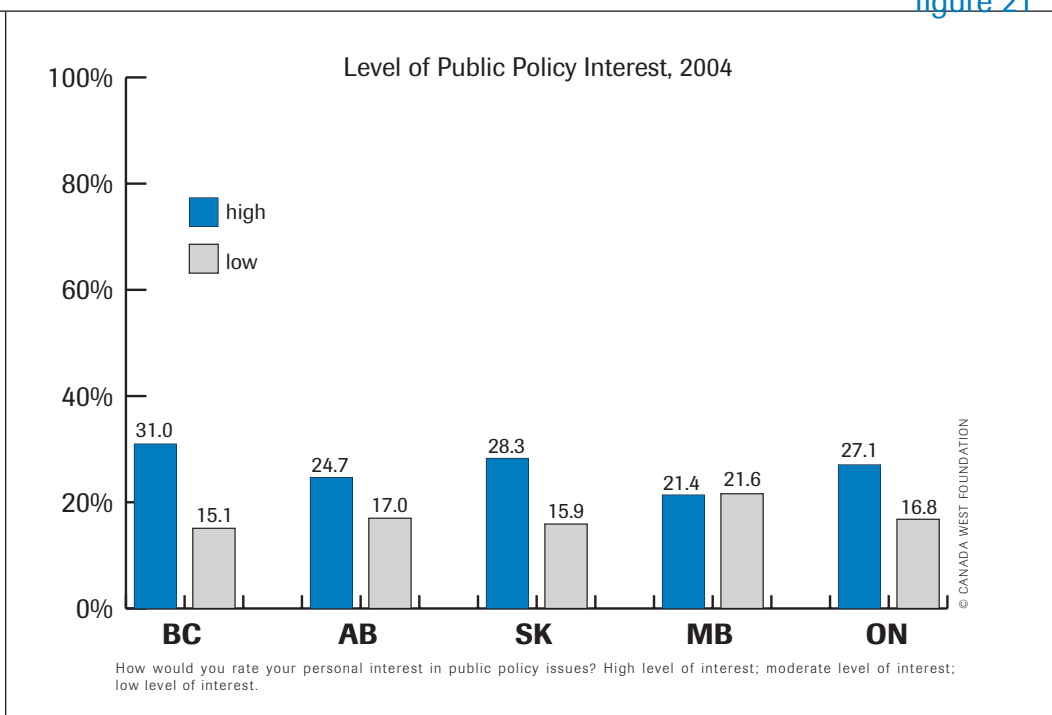
### Interest in Public Policy

The final question asked of Looking West 2004 respondents concerned policy interest. Respondents were asked, “How would you rate your personal interest in public policy issues? High level of interest; moderate level of interest; low level of interest.” This question was asked of the 3,200 western Canadian respondents, as well as 800 Ontario respondents.

The data reveal that public policy interest varies modestly by province, but varies considerably with a number of demographic variables. In terms of provincial variations, BC respondents report the greatest level of interest in public policy, with nearly one-third (31.0%) stating a high level of interest and only 15.1% stating a low level of interest. Saskatchewan and Ontario are next, with almost twice as many respondents reporting high interest than reporting low interest. Manitoba stands out as the only province in which an equal percentage reports low interest in public policy as reports a high level of interest. In all provinces, the majority indicates a moderate level of interest; BC has the lowest percentage reporting moderate interest (53.8%) and Alberta has the highest (58.0%). Variations by urban size are modest.

There were numerous demographic differences; indeed the only demographic variable that did not impact level of interest in public policy is whether one was or was not born in Canada. The largest gaps are seen in educational status: respondents with graduate degrees report the highest level of interest in public policy of all demographic cohorts, and are the only cohort in which the plurality reports a high (rather than a moderate) level of interest. The percentage of respondents reporting a high level of interest in public policy rises with educational attainment, from a low of 19.4% for those with less than a high school diploma to a high of 48.1% of those with graduate degrees – a difference of almost 30 percentage points. Conversely, the percentage of respondents reporting a low level of interest in public policy declines with educational attainment, from a high of 23.1% of those with less than a high school diploma to a low of 6.6% for those with graduate degrees.

figure 21



Significant differences are also seen with age category, with interest in public policy increasing with age. Almost one-third (31.0%) of respondents under the age of thirty report a low level of interest in public policy, while less than one in ten (6.6%) of respondents aged 70 and over reports low interest – a gap of almost 25 percentage points.

The differences by income category are also notable; again, linear patterns are seen, with the number of respondents reporting low interest declining as income rises and the number reporting high interest rising as income increases. Respondents in the highest income category (\$150,000 and over) report a particularly high level of interest in public policy at 42.4%.

Lastly, a gender gap is seen, with men more likely than women to report a high level of interest in public policy, and women more likely than men to report a low level of interest in public policy. This gap is modest compared to the age, education and income gaps.


Overall, the data demonstrate that older, wealthier and more highly-educated individuals report higher levels of interest in public policy, while younger, less wealthy and less educated individuals report lower levels of interest in public policy. The four cohorts in which a greater percentage reports low interest than reports high interest include: income under \$30,000; age under 30 years; less than high school diploma; and high school diploma.

figure 22

Level of Public Policy Interest, West and Ontario Combined, 2004

	Low	Moderate	High
Male	13.8%	54.1%	31.9%
Female	19.3%	57.2%	23.2%
<b>Difference between low and high</b>	<b>5.5</b>		<b>8.7</b>
Income under \$30,000	23.3%	55.1%	21.1%
Income \$30,000 – 69,999	16.0%	57.7%	26.1%
Income \$70,000 – 149,999	14.1%	53.5%	32.4%
Income \$150,000 and over	10.1%	47.5%	42.4%
<b>Difference between low and high</b>	<b>13.2</b>		<b>21.3</b>
Age under 30 years	31.0%	53.4%	15.4%
Age 30-49 years	18.2%	57.8%	23.8%
Age 50-69 years	10.5%	54.9%	34.6%
Age 70 years and over	6.6%	54.9%	37.1%
<b>Difference between low and high</b>	<b>24.4</b>		<b>21.7</b>
Less than high school education	23.1%	56.5%	19.4%
High school diploma	20.2%	59.7%	19.9%
Some university/college/technical school	19.0%	52.4%	28.4%
Completed college/trade/technical diploma/degree	18.0%	60.0%	21.8%
University bachelor's degree	10.9%	52.6%	36.5%
Graduate degree	6.6%	45.4%	48.1%
<b>Difference between low and high</b>	<b>16.5</b>		<b>28.7</b>
Born in Canada	17.0%	55.7%	27.2%
Born outside Canada	14.8%	56.5%	28.3%
<b>Difference between low and high</b>	<b>2.2</b>		<b>1.1</b>

## ***Conclusion***

As the Looking West 2004 data demonstrate, similar public policy attitudes are seen across the four western provinces. While there are differences – for example, Saskatchewan and Manitoba respondents place higher priority on retaining young people and attracting immigrants than do Alberta and British Columbia respondents – there are also striking similarities. These similarities are particularly notable given the unique economic, demographic and political characteristics of the four provinces. Such common public attitudes and priorities may present an opportunity for governments to work together to address common policy challenges in the years ahead. 

# 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. For more information, please visit our website ([www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca)) or contact our Director of Finance and Administration Lori Zarembo by phone (403.538.7347) or email ([zarembo@cwf.ca](mailto:zarembo@cwf.ca)).



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