

**Beyond Salt Lake City:
Canadian Opinion on the Role and Priorities of the Federal Government
on Sports in Canada
in the Aftermath of the Winter Olympics**

**Analysis of a national public opinion poll
Conducted for the Association for Canadian Studies
by Environics**

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This poll & analysis has been conducted in support of a national initiative promoting the creation of a research network on sport in Canada – an initiative of the Association for Canadian Studies, L'Institut d'Études canadiennes and Le Centre de recherche sur le sport dans la société canadienne at the University of Ottawa.

Highlights:

- The objectives of Sports Canada are generally supported by the Canadian population, but priorities vary.
- Increasing access to sports for targeted under-represented groups such as women, lower income groups, people with disabilities and aboriginal athletes and investing in sports infrastructure are objectives that receive the most support from Canadians throughout the country
- With respect to party preference the Liberals, NDP and the Bloc Québécois voters are more inclined to prioritize the widening of access to traditionally underrepresented groups than are the Alliance and the Conservative party supporters. With respect for sports infrastructure it is Liberal and NDP electors that are most favorable to greater federal support.
- There is a considerable age gap when it comes to the reaction to international sports events – youth are far more enthusiastic about hosting games than are seniors.
- There are few differences in opinion amongst Canadians when considering level of education, income or the size of the community in which they reside.

Beyond Salt Lake City: Canadian Opinion on the Role and Priorities of the Federal Government on Sports in Canada in the Aftermath of the Winter Olympics

Analysis by Jack Jedwab

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Field dates for the Environics Poll were March 7 to 24, 2002. 2,014 adult Canadians were interviewed. When speaking nationally, these results are accurate to within +/-2.2 percent at a 95 percent level of confidence.

The 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City were amongst the most widely watched sports events in Canada's history. In the first week of the Games there appeared to be much concern over the performance of Canada's Olympic athletes. But capped off by the victories in men's and women's hockey and the performance of Canadian skaters, the outcome appeared to meet the expectations for the country's athletes. Those responsible for the sports program returned to Canada with much enthusiasm about future prospects for the national sports program and its principal objectives.

As Sports Minister De Villers declared, "all Canadians recall the brilliant successes achieved by our athletes at the 2002 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Salt Lake City. To reach that peak of excellence, these women and men who today are our pride needed training and support to develop their talent. That is part of the mandate of Sport Canada, which encourages our athletes to excel and to represent our country on the international stage."

It is further noted that: "...sport is more than just performance. It is also a source of pleasure, personal satisfaction and good physical condition...so we want every Canadian to be able to have access to the many benefits of sport."

A branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage, Sport Canada, promotes the development of the Canadian sport system and aims to strengthen the unique contribution that sport makes to Canadian society. Amongst the strategic directions of Sports Canada are support for high performance athletes and coaches: enhancing the ability of Canadian athletes to excel at the highest international levels through fair and ethical means and the increase in access and equity in sport for targeted under-represented groups.

The Association for Canadian Studies–Environics survey confirms that these objectives are generally supported by the Canadian population as it indicates that there are few individuals that favour reductions in federal government support in these and other areas. As will be observed the poll reveals important differences in emphasis and prioritization amongst Canadians with respect to the objectives set out for sports in the country.

Sports and Federal Government Objectives

The ACS-Environics poll confirms that increasing access to sports for targeted under-represented groups such as women, lower income groups, people with disabilities and aboriginal athletes and investing in sports infrastructure are objectives that receive the most support from Canadians throughout the country. Only in Western Canada is there some variation in the level of support for increasing federal support for these two objectives, but conversely it does not result in higher rates of respondents calling for decreasing support.

Should federal government support be reduced, increased or kept at current levels for each of the following objectives?....

Increasing access to sports for targeted under-represented groups such as women, lower income groups, people with disabilities and aboriginal athletes

	Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
Reduced	4	3	2	3	8
Increased	65	66	72	64	59
Kept at current levels	28	26	23	30	31
DK/NA	3	4	4	3	3

Investing in Canada's sports infrastructure, from playgrounds to local arenas

	Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
Reduced	4	3	5	3	5
Increased	65	71	60	72	59
Kept at current levels	28	24	32	22	32
DK/NA	3	2	3	2	4

Canada hosting more international sporting events

	Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
Reduced	9	9	8	9	10
Increased	49	49	54	50	45
Kept at current levels	38	38	35	38	41
DK/NA	3	3	4	4	3

Focus on high-performance Canadian athletes who have a chance to win medals and competitions

	Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
Reduced	7	5	5	8	10
Increased	50	57	52	52	42
Kept at current levels	40	36	38	38	43
DK/NA	3	3	2	2	4

Increasing the number of Canadians competing in international sporting events

	Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
Reduced	6	5	6	6	7
Increased	52	46	59	54	46
Kept at current levels	39	45	33	38	42
DK/NA	3	4	3	3	4

Regional Comparisons

Respondents from Western Canada consistently show somewhat lower support for each objective. Support for increased access to under-represented groups is highest in Quebec (72%). Support for increased investment in infrastructure is highest in Atlantic Canada (71%) and Ontario (72%).

Increasing Federal Government Support for...

	Canada	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
Incr. Access to under-rep. grps	65	66	72	64	59
Invest in infrastructure	65	71	60	72	59
Hosting int'l events	49	48	54	50	45
Focus on medal winners	50	57	53	52	42
Incr. No. of Canadians in int'l sports events	52	46	59	54	46

Socio-Cultural Characteristics

As to **gender**, whereas there is a similar response rate when it comes to improving access for underrepresented groups, elsewhere the male respondents are more inclined to favour increased government support in various elements of the sports program. Indeed men have the highest response rate to endorsing greater federal support for the sports infrastructure.

Increasing Federal Government Support for...

	Male	Female
Incr. Access to under-rep. grps	64	65
Invest in infrastructure	69	62
Hosting int'l events	54	46
Focus on medal winners	53	47
Incr. no. of Canadians in int'l sports events	56	49

There are also differences in opinion on the basis of the **age** of the population. Generally, younger respondents are more favorable to increased federal support for sports with the exception of the focus on medal winners which gains greater sympathy from those over 60 years of age (the overall percentage is not high relative to other aspects of the sports program). There is a considerable gap when it comes to the reaction to international sports events where youth are far more enthusiastic about hosting games than are seniors.

Increasing Federal Government Support for...

	18-29	60 or more
Incr. Access to under-rep. grps	70	60
Invest in infrastructure	68	60
Hosting int'l events	62	42
Focus on medal winners	47	49
Incr. no. of Canadians in int'l sports events	56	52

As regards **union membership**, while once again there is agreement on increased access between public and private sector workers, elsewhere it is the private side that is more sympathetic to federal action on sports. Investing in sports infrastructure is something to which the private sector is especially favorable.

Union Member: Private and Public Sector
Increasing Federal Government Support for...

	Private	Public
Incr. Access to under-rep. grps	69	67
Invest in infrastructure	74	68
Hosting int'l events	61	50
Focus on medal winners	57	47
Incr. no. of Canadians in int'l sports events	59	53

It is worth noting that as regards such issues as **income** and **level of education** than are not considerable difference of opinion amongst Canadians when it comes to sports issues.

Community Size

There are few differences in opinion amongst Canadians when considering the size of the community in which they reside. In the larger cities the idea of hosting international sports events is more popular than in the smaller centres. However even in this regard there are noteworthy differences between Montrealers with some 57% agree that the federal government should increase support for hosting more international sports events and Toronto and Vancouver where that view is shared by 54% and 44% of respondents respectively. Indeed Vancouver is the only city of the three where the combined percentage of respondents that prefer maintaining federal support (42%) or reducing it (10%) exceeds those who desire that it be increased (44%).

Increasing Federal Government Support for...

	1 million plus	100k to 1 million	5k to 100k	Less than 5k
Incr. Access to under-rep. grps	66	65	65	61
Invest in infrastructure	66	65	63	66
Hosting int'l events	53	47	49	46
Focus on medal winners	50	52	51	47
Incr. no. of Canadians in int'l sports events	56	51	51	48

Party Preference

With respect to party preference the Liberals, NDP and the Bloc Québécois voters are more inclined to prioritize the widening of access to traditionally underrepresented groups than are the Alliance and the Conservative party supporters. With respect for sports infrastructure it is Liberal and NDP electors that are most favorable to greater federal support. As regards hosting sports events, an emphasis on medal winners and increasing the number of competitors there are fewer differences on the basis of party preference (though it is worth noting that Bloc Québécois supporters disproportionately support hosting international sports events).

Increasing Federal Government Support for...

	Liberal	Conservative	NDP	Alliance	Bloc
Incr. Access to under-rep. grps	71	59	75	52	69
Invest in infrastructure	71	68	75	58	57
Hosting int'l events	53	39	55	50	61
Focus on medal winners	56	46	47	47	53
Incr. no. of Canadians in int'l sports events	57	46	56	50	54

Conclusion

The objectives of Sports Canada are generally supported by the Canadian population. What must be noted is the time frame for the poll – March 7 to 24, 2002 – a very short time after the completion of a successful Olympic Games for Canada. As we move further away from the emotion of Salt Lake City, will support for increased funding to medal winners decrease? Increase? Will the focus shift from the international arena to local infrastructure and access? Future surveys of the Canadian population, conducted at various points along the 2-4 year Olympic cycle, will offer further information as to their priorities in the world of sports.