

Aboriginal governance

Local community leadership

Most believe Aboriginal leaders do as good a job or better in comparison with local government leaders in their province. One in four is critical of Aboriginal leadership, primarily because of perceptions of mismanagement of funds, corruption or lack of proper qualifications.

In recent years, a proliferation of news stories has put the functioning and management of Aboriginal communities increasingly under the microscope. Issues of poor housing conditions, water contamination, and mismanagement of funds appeared in tandem with stories of successful Aboriginal businesses and economic development projects, sending mixed messages about the effectiveness of Aboriginal governments. In 2011, the federal government passed the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, which requires bands to make public their audited consolidated financial statements, including the salaries of chief and council.

When non-Aboriginal Canadians are asked to compare the leadership of Aboriginal governments to local governments

in their province, a majority believe that Aboriginal leaders do as good a job (54%) if not better (7%) than local government leaders in their province. One-quarter (24%) say Aboriginal leaders do a worse job, with another 14 percent unable to offer a clear response to the question.

Views on the relative performance of Aboriginal leaders vary depending on where one lives. Prairie residents, and particularly those in Manitoba are the most critical of Aboriginal leadership (42% say they do a worse job), while Quebecers (16%) are least likely to share this view.

Among population groups, negative perceptions of Aboriginal leadership are most evident among men (32% versus 17% of women), Canadians 45 and older, university graduates and high income earners.

Critical views of Aboriginal leaders are closely tied to the belief that Aboriginal peoples have a sense of entitlement to support from government and Canadian taxpayers.

Effectiveness of Aboriginal leaders compared to local government leaders in your province



Q.34

In terms of governing, do you think that Aboriginal leaders as a whole do a better job, a worse job, or about the same job as leaders of local governments in your [province/territory]?

Why Aboriginal leaders do a better job. Canadians who believe that Aboriginal leaders do a better job than other local government leaders are most likely to say (when asked unprompted) that this is because Aboriginal leaders are more knowledgeable or more familiar with their local issues (34% of this group), and that they care more - or have more at stake in - their local communities (24%).

Others respond by saying Aboriginal leaders are doing more with less (9%), receive more support from their communities (9%), and are generally better able to represent their communities than a non-Aboriginal government (8%). Some in this group believe that Aboriginal governments are less interested in profit (4%) and less corrupt than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (4%), and are better able to focus because they are working in smaller areas (4%).

Why Aboriginal leaders do a worse job. Canadians who believe Aboriginal leaders do a worse job than other local leaders say this is mostly about management issues. By far, the most common reason for citing poor leadership is mismanagement of funds (41%). Others cite the belief that Aboriginal governments are plagued by corruption and greed (16%), that leaders are overpaid (15%), and that they rely too much on support from taxpayers and government handouts (6%).

Others say Aboriginal leaders do a worse job because they are poorly suited to the job. One in five (19%) expresses the belief that Aboriginal leaders are poorly educated or otherwise unqualified for leadership, while smaller numbers highlight issues with accountability to constituents (5%), and even substance abuse (2%). One in ten explains this critical judgement of Aboriginal leadership as based on what he or she has seen or heard in the media (4%), or based on personal experience (6%).

Strengthening Aboriginal representation in the federal government

Canadians endorse new measures to strengthen Aboriginal representation in the federal government, including guaranteed seats in the federal cabinet and at First Ministers meetings, as well as a new Aboriginal parliamentary committee to review laws from an Aboriginal perspective.

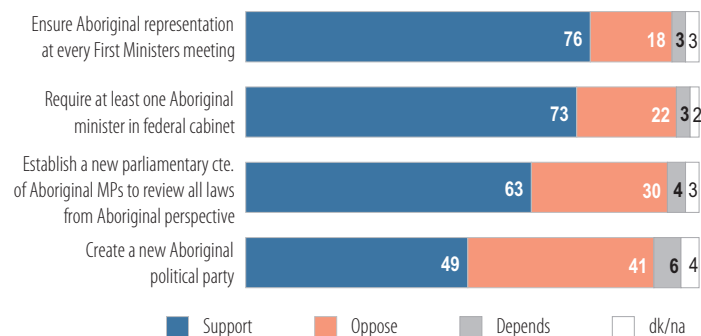
The recent federal election resulted in a record number of 10 Aboriginal candidates winning seats in Parliament, with two appointed to the federal cabinet. At the same time, there are no specific requirements or measures in place to ensure that Aboriginal peoples are formally represented in any of the major institutions of the federal government (e.g., Parliament, Supreme Court). Would it make a difference if there were mandated Aboriginal appointments in positions of authority?

The non-Aboriginal Canadian public is very supportive in principle of strengthening Aboriginal representation in the government’s major institutions. Strong majorities would support requirements that there be an Aboriginal

representative at every meeting of the country’s First Ministers (76%), of requiring at least one Aboriginal Minister in the federal cabinet (73%), and establishing a new parliamentary committee composed of Aboriginal MPs from all parties to review all laws from an Aboriginal perspective (63%). By comparison, just half (49%) support the creation of an Aboriginal political party, versus 41 percent who oppose this idea.

Support for all four policy options varies consistently across regions and population groups. They are most popular in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, and to a lesser extent in Ontario. More than three-quarters (77%) of residents of the Territories are in favour of requiring Aboriginal representation at First Ministers’ meetings; however, they are the only regional population that is more likely to oppose than support the other three proposed policies. Younger Canadians (18-29) are more supportive than others of all proposals to strengthen Aboriginal representation, as are women and people born outside Canada.

Support for strengthening Aboriginal representation in federal institutions



Q.38

Currently there are no specific requirements or measures to ensure that Aboriginal Peoples are fully represented in the institutions of federal government. Would you support or oppose each of the following ways in which this representation might be strengthened?