

Six-in-ten Canadians want greater latitude and more reasons to fire delinquent Senators

Two-thirds say Senators involved in highly publicized scandals should face expulsion

April 19, 2017 – As the Canadian Senate [considers invoking](#) an obscure section of the constitution to permanently expel Senator Don Meredith for a sex scandal, a new poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds a majority of Canadians favour expanding the list of reasons for which Senators can be removed from office.

The Red Chamber has long been a lightning rod for debate about its efficacy, with the latest sparks flying over Meredith's alleged abuse of power by entering a sexual relationship with a teenager and the dismissive comments of another Senator, Lynne Beyak, about the Indian Residential School system.

Overall, this poll finds Canadians feeling positively about the Trudeau government's recent changes to the Senate appointment process, but most believe additional Senate reform is necessary.

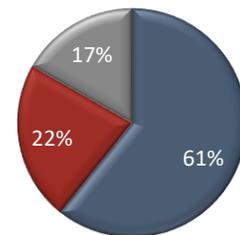
Moreover, more than two-in-three say the issue of further reforming or abolishing the Senate is serious enough to merit re-opening Canada's constitutional debate.

Key Findings:

- More than three-in-five Canadians (61%) say the current list of reasons for which a Senator can be removed from office is too limited, nearly three times as many as say it's "about right" (22%)
- Most Canadians (53%) think the new process for selecting Senators (in which members of the public apply for appointment to the upper chamber) is better than the old system of patronage appointments, but just 26 per cent say it will improve the quality of Senators themselves
- The percentage of Canadians saying the Senate should be abolished has fallen to 31 per cent, down from 50 per cent at the height of the expenses scandal in Nov. 2013

The constitution outlines only 5 reasons for which a Senator can be permanently expelled from the Senate. Would you say:

- There should be other reasons Senators can get fired
- This current list of reasons is about right
- Don't know/Can't say



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 7 – 10, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,508 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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PART 1: Firing Senators

This year has marked a return to an all-too-familiar trend for Canadians: turmoil in the Senate, not related to fierce argument over legislation, but to acrimony over the words and actions of sitting members. The Senate Ethics Officer Lyse Ricard released a report in March finding Ontario Senator Don Meredith had broken two sections of the Senate ethics code. Meredith, a 52-year-old married pastor, began a relationship with a 16-year-old girl in 2013. The relationship continued until 2015 when it became public knowledge – he was subsequently removed from the Conservative Senate caucus, but remains a paid senator.

Meredith was investigated by Ottawa police, who cleared him of any legal wrong-doing, but his future in the Senate remains murky. Ricard noted in his report that Meredith has failed to uphold the “highest standards of dignity to the position of Senator” and that he had used his position improperly. The embattled Senator has taken a leave of absence but has refused calls from his colleagues [to resign](#).

The Senate may very well suspend Meredith or withhold his pay – each of which can be accomplished by passing a motion to do so – but ousting a senator permanently remains a difficult task. There are five reasons noted in the constitution that are grounds for permanently expelling a Senator from the Red Chamber. It can be done if the Senator:

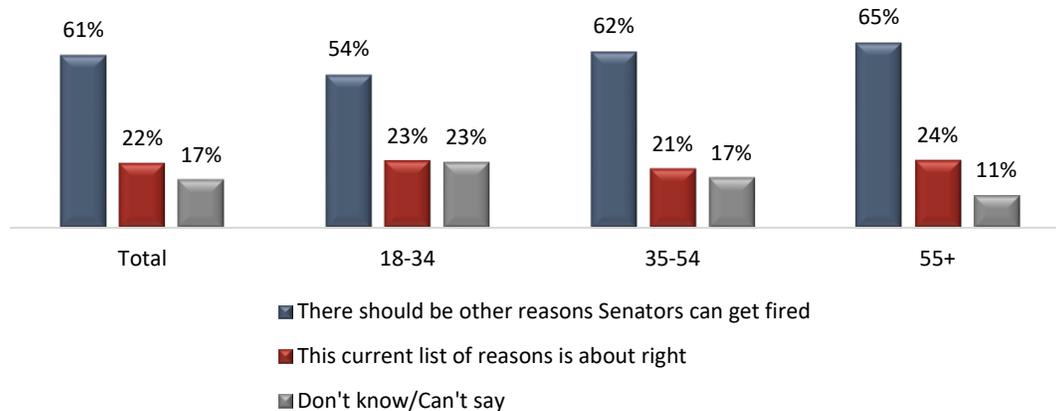
- Is absent for more than two consecutive parliamentary sessions
- Has allegiance or adherence to a foreign power
- Is bankrupt
- Is convicted of treason or a felony
- Does not meet property ownership qualifications

For their part, the majority of Canadians would like to see this list of reasons a senator can be fired expanded, as seen in the following graph:

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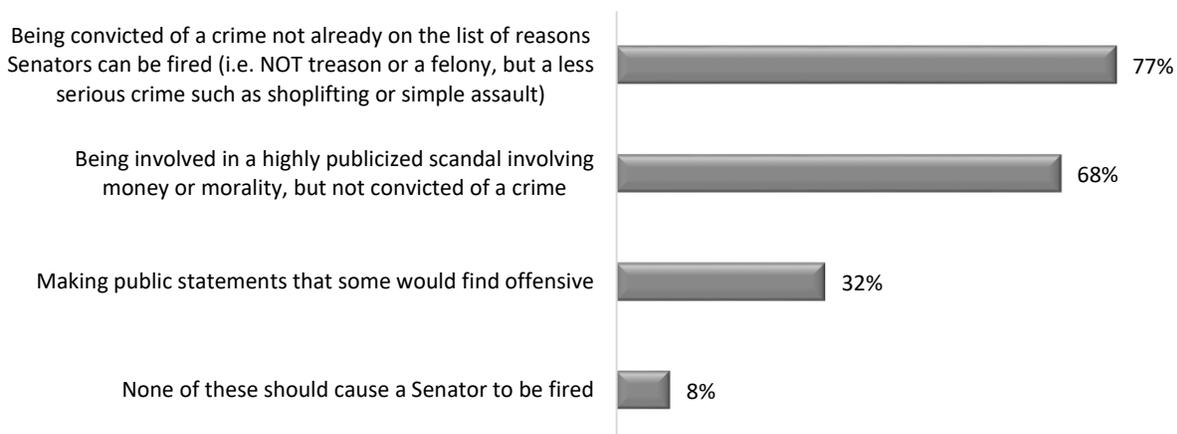
The constitution outlines only 5 reasons for which a Senator can be permanently expelled from the Senate. Would you say:



Support for the Senate’s power to expel members for more reasons than the constitution allows today grows or shrinks based on the circumstances involved. For example, being involved in a highly-publicized scandal involving money or morality, even if not convicted of a crime, is seen to be cause for expulsion among two-thirds of Canadians. Both the Meredith case and recent spending controversies would fall under these criteria.

Furthermore, under the current rules, if a Senator is convicted of a crime other than treason or a felony, (shoplifting or assault, for example) they would not be subject to expulsion. Three-in-four Canadians (77%) would like to see that changed.

Which of the following situations, if any, should be cause for permanently expelling a Senator?



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The fate of another beleaguered senator, who has also faced [calls for resignation](#), would be different if left up to Canadians.

Senator Lynn Beyak outraged many in March when she addressed the Senate and suggested that the “good deeds” in the residential school system “go unacknowledged for the most part.” Considering that seven-in-ten Canadians agree with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s characterization of residential schools as [“cultural genocide.”](#) the outrage was not surprising.

Beyak has been removed from the Senate’s committee on Aboriginal Peoples, but only one-in-three Canadians would agree with her being expelled from the Senate completely, with Quebec and Atlantic Canada taking a slightly harder line:

Which of the following situations, if any, should be cause for permanently expelling a Senator?
"Making public statements that some would find offensive"

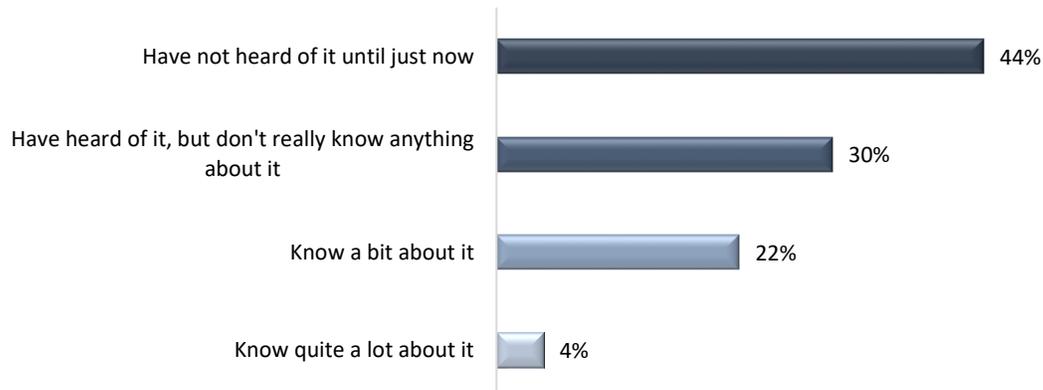


PART 2: Support for new appointment process

Current events aside, the Senate has a long history of scandals. From more recent [expense scandals](#) involving Patrick Brazeau, Pamela Wallin and Mike Duffy, to the 1998 revelation that Liberal Senator Andrew Thompson ([the Siesta Senator](#)) had been living in Mexico, only attending work in the Senate 47 times in 14 years, to the [1976 bribery case](#) of Louis Giguere involving then-NHL-President Clarence Campbell, Canadians have [long held concerns](#) about the quality and accountability of their unelected representatives.

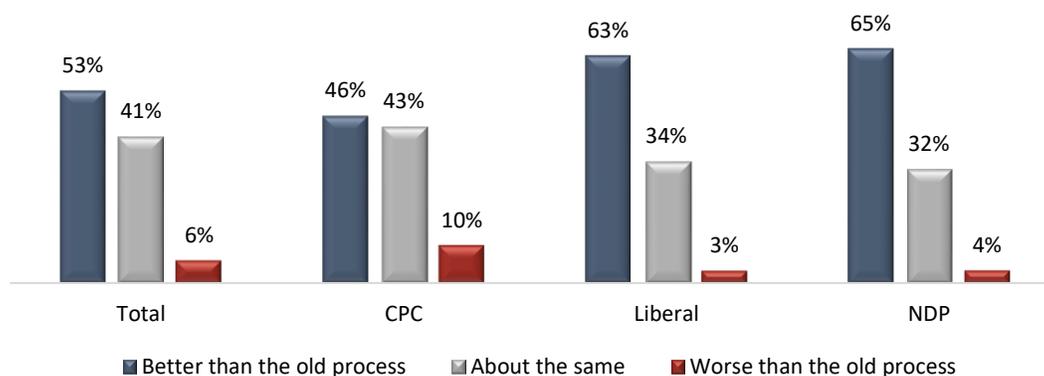
That doesn’t necessarily mean they’re paying attention to changes. Asked about recent alterations to the Senate appointment process, just one-in-four (26%) say they know anything about them:

Last year, the federal government set up a new way to select Senators to replace the old system. How familiar are you with this new Senate appointment process?



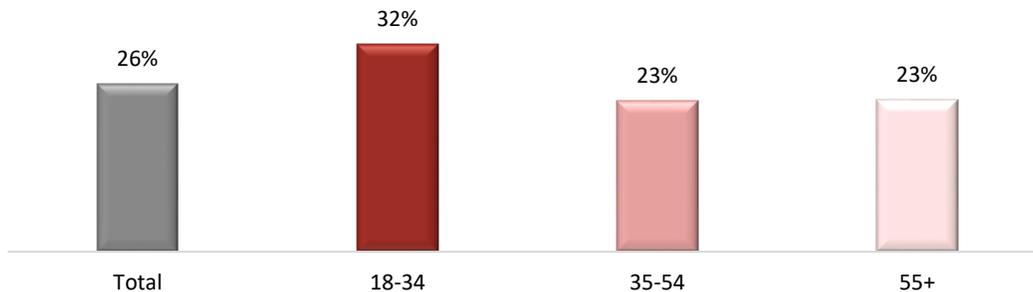
That said, people tend to see these changes - that allow any property-owning Canadian to apply for appointment to the Senate - as a positive move (53% do). The highest support comes from past NDP voters, where two-in-three say the new process is an improvement. Past Conservative Party supporters are split, though slightly more say they too agree that the process is better:

Would you say the new process it is better or worse than the old process, in which the Prime Minister and his office appointed their own choices to the Senate?



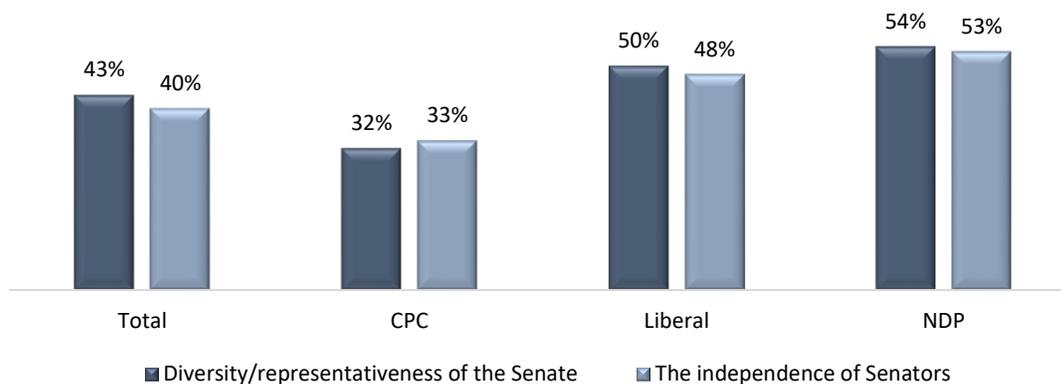
However, just one-in-four (26%) say they believe the quality of Senators will improve under the new selection process, with younger Canadians most likely to express this:

Percentage saying the quality of Senators will improve over the long term because of recent changes to the appointment process:



What more Canadians do expect is an increase in the amount of diversity and representation. The Senate has been accused of operating as an echo-chamber for the party in power for years, and four-in-ten Canadians expect new procedures to lead to more independent thought from Canada's underrepresented regions. This opinion hovers around a majority for both NDP and Liberal supporters:

Which of the following, if any, do you think will improve over the long term as a result of having this new process for selecting Senators?



Notably, two neighbours in the so-called “alienated” west, feel quite differently about the likelihood that the new process will lead to a more-representative Senate. B.C. is most confident, while Alberta is most skeptical:

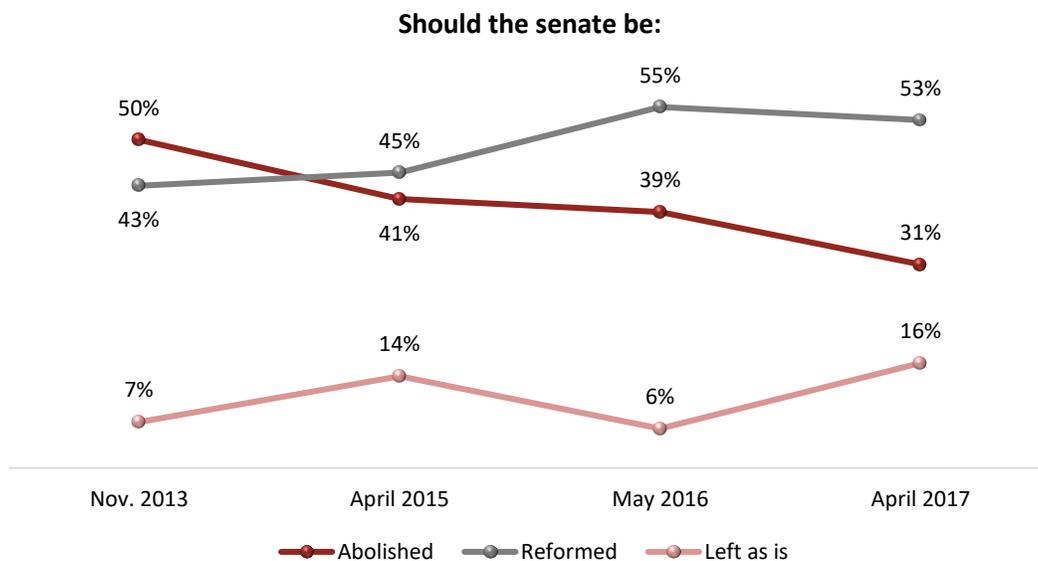
**Which of the following, if any, do you think will improve over the long term as a result of having this new process for selecting Senators?
Diversity/representativeness of the Senate**



PART 3: More reforms desired

Most appear to agree that changes introduced by the federal government will be a stepping stone to a more effective Senate. They also find common ground on the idea that more should be done.

Indeed, only 16 per cent of Canadians say that at this point, the best path is to leave the Senate as is. A slim majority seek further reform (53%), while significantly fewer would like to see the Red Chamber abolished outright than they did a few years ago. The number of Canadians holding this position has dropped 19 points since November 2013, when Wallin, Brazeau and Duffy were all suspended as a part of an investigation into improper expenditures by each.



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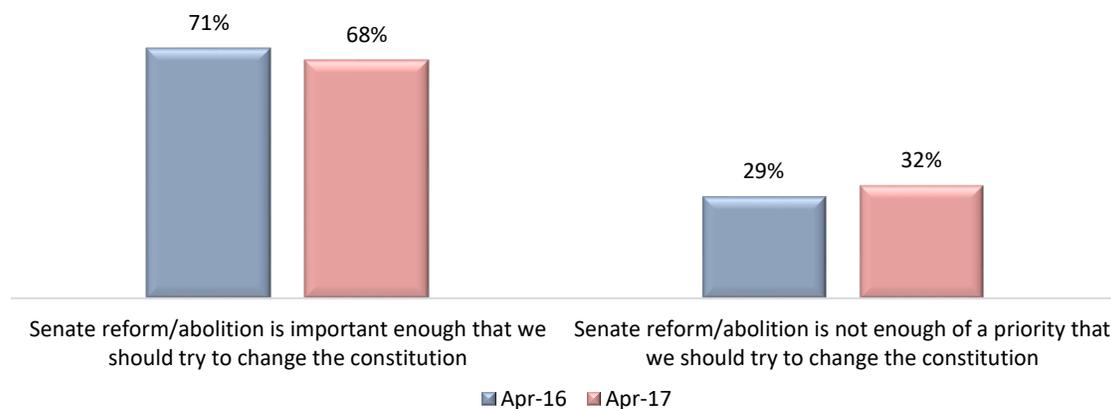
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Any significant changes to the Senate would require a constitutional amendment, requiring at minimum, the support of seven of the provincial legislatures, and the representation of 50 per cent of the population, the so-called “7+50 formula”.

Canada has not attempted to amend its constitution since the Charlottetown Accord – which included Senate reform among its proposed changes – was defeated a quarter-century ago.

Further, Senate abolition of the body would need “[unanimous consent](#)” – i.e., approval from all 10 provinces and from Parliament. Regardless most Canadians say Senate reform warrants opening up the constitution. As was the case [last year](#), seven-in-ten Canadians say that they support this action:

Which is closest to your point of view?



*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

There are three broad choices in terms of the future of the Canadian Senate. Overall which of the following would you say would be the best outcome? Would you say the Senate should be:

	November 2013 (1511)	April 2015 (1500)	May 2016 (1508)	April 2017 (1508)
Abolished	50%	41%	39%	31%
Reformed	43%	45%	55%	53%
Left as is	7%	14%	6%	16%

One of the difficulties of reforming/abolishing the Senate is that it requires changing the constitution, which requires the approval of at least 7 provinces representing 50 per cent of the population. Which is closest to your point of view:

	May 2016 (1508)	April 2017 (1508)
Senate reform/abolition is important enough that we should try to change the constitution	71%	68%
Senate reform/abolition is not enough of a priority that we should try to change the constitution	29%	32%