

How long is too long? Most Canadians say elected officials should be subject to term limits

Two terms of four years is the most preferred option for all offices

April 17, 2019 – U.S. President Donald Trump will run for re-election next year, but as U.S. law stands today, he won't be eligible to run again in 2024.

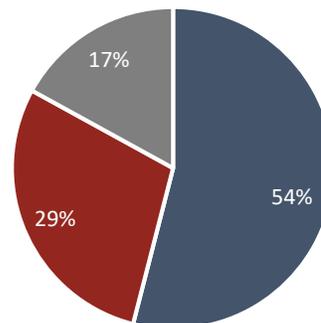
No such limitation exists in Canada. While Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is [far from a sure bet](#) for re-election later this year, nothing would prevent him from seeking as party leader and MP a hypothetical third mandate, or fourth, or fifth.

Nevertheless, [some Canadian officials](#) – including the late [former Alberta Premier Jim Prentice](#) – have argued for the introduction of term limits in Canada.

Now, a new public opinion poll from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute suggests that many Canadians would like to change this. More than half (54%) say term limits for elected politicians are necessary.

If term limits were imposed, a restriction of two four-year terms is the most popular. Nearly half of all respondents say people who are sworn in as prime ministers and provincial premiers should serve no longer than eight total years in those roles.

Do you think term limits are necessary or unnecessary? (All respondents)



- Term limits for elected politicians are necessary
- Term limits for elected politicians are unnecessary
- Not Sure

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 20 – 25, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 1,600 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.4 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.

More Key Findings:

- Canadians' belief that term limits are necessary cuts across several demographic lines. It outpaces the belief that they are unnecessary across all region-, gender- and age-groups
- Political partisanship does seem to affect perspectives, however, with those who would consider voting for the Conservative Party of Canada most likely to say term limits are necessary (63% do), while those considering the Liberal Party lean toward the view that such rules are unnecessary (46% say this, compared to 39% who say they are necessary)

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- If Canada were to ever adopt term limits, the public wouldn't necessarily want them to be permanent. More than half (54%) say a politician who has reached his or her term limit should be able to run again for the same term-limited position after taking some time off

About ARI

*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 foundation 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.*

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Most say term limits are necessary

Numerous arguments have been made in favour and against term limits in Canada's parliamentary system. This survey presented the following summaries of the opposing sides in this debate:

Some people say term limits for elected politicians are not necessary. They argue that having no term limits allows elected politicians to spend more time learning about their job, which creates better long-term connections between with them and their constituents.

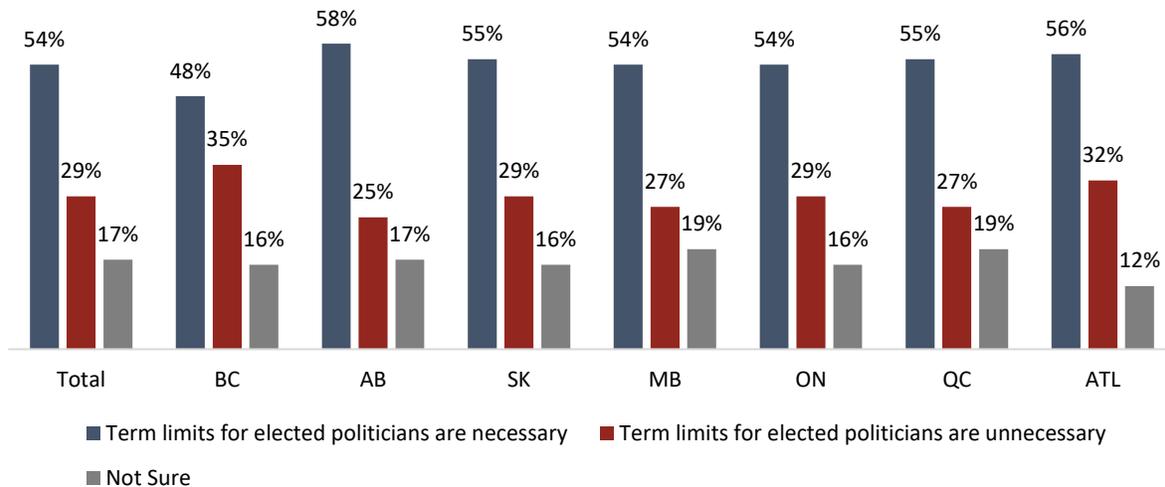
Other people say term limits are necessary. They argue term limits prevent politicians from building up too much power and financial support that new challengers do not have. They say that turnover is good for democracy because new voices can bring new ideas.

Asked to pick a side in this argument, Canadians mostly side with supporters of term limits: 54 per cent say such rules are necessary, while 29 per cent say they are unnecessary (the remaining 17% are uncertain). This preference can be seen across every region of the country:

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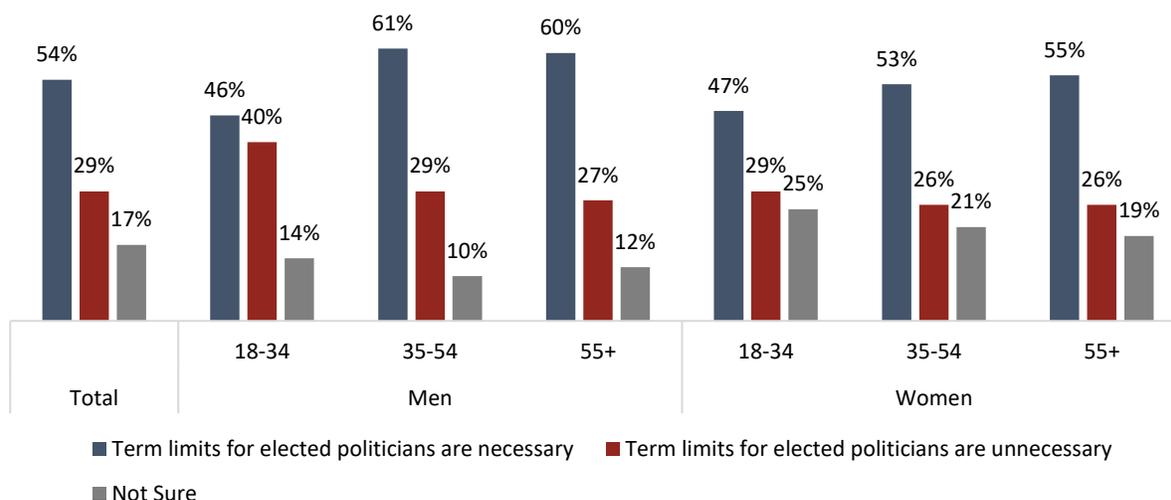
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Do you think term limits are necessary or unnecessary? (All respondents)



The desire for term limits also transcends age and gender lines, though it's notable that younger men are only slightly more likely to say term limits are necessary than unnecessary, while older men feel this way by a much wider margin:

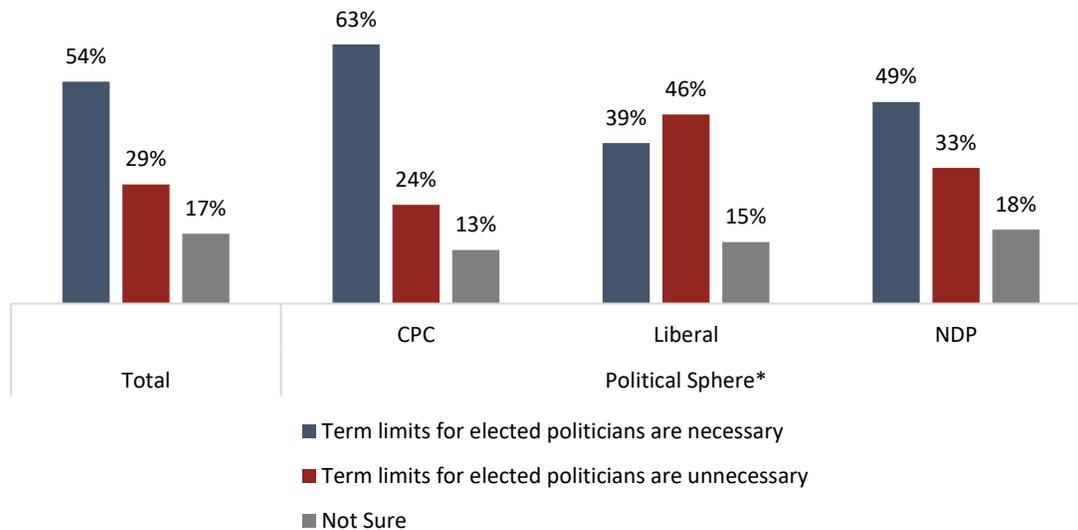
Do you think term limits are necessary or unnecessary? (All respondents)



Those with university degrees are more divided on this question – though they still lean toward term limits being worthwhile. Those with lower levels of formal education lean more strongly toward the view that term limits are necessary.

Political partisanship appears to be more heavily correlated with views on this question than demographic factors. Those open to voting for Justin Trudeau’s Liberal Party in the next election are more likely to say term limits are unnecessary (46%) than necessary (39%). Potential supporters of the opposition Conservative and New Democratic parties lean in the opposition direction, with those in the Conservative sphere doing so more strongly (*for a detailed explanation of political spheres, see notes on methodology at the end of this release).

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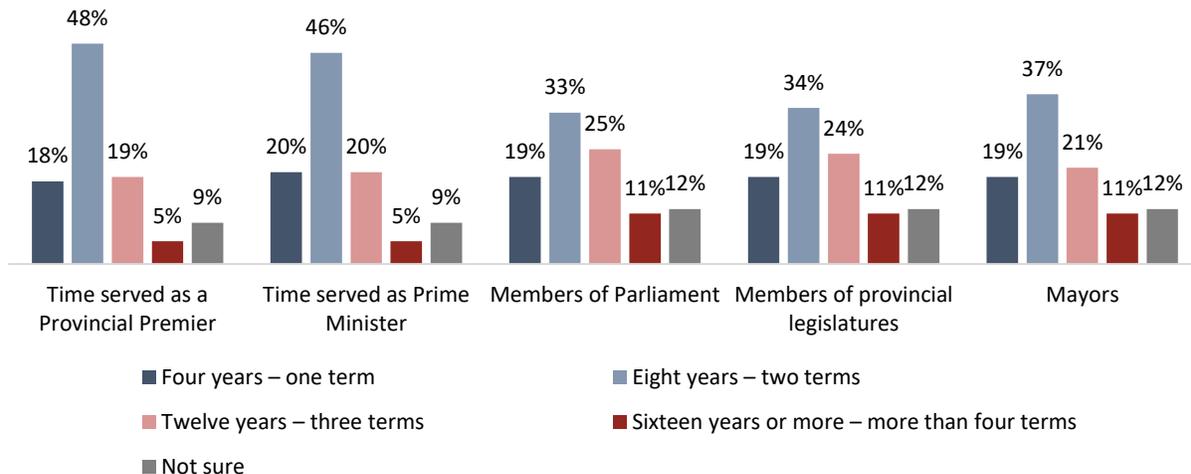
Preferred limit is two terms

Term limits may not be making their way to Canadian legislatures any time soon, but if they did, the clear preference among the Canadian public is for a two-term limit.

Nearly half of respondents (48%) say those sworn in as premiers should be limited to two terms, and a similar number (46%) say this should be the limit for those serving as prime ministers as well.

Canadians are more divided on the length of time to which they would limit the service of MPs and MLAs, though eight years is still the most popular choice:

Suppose term limits were going to be imposed on elected politicians. If this was the case, what do you think would be the maximum number of years for each of the following elected positions? (All respondents)



This question generates an unusual pattern in responses by age and gender.

Specifically, women 35 and older are considerably more likely than any other age-gender cohort to say each office should be limited to just one term, while men under 35 are more likely than other groups to say each office should have a limit of 3 terms or longer ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Should a popular politician be able to run again after a term off?

Canadians' preference for term limits doesn't seem to translate into a lifetime ban from office for those who have already served the maximum amount of time.

Most (54%) believe that a politician who has already served a full term and left office because of term limits should be allowed to run for the same office again after taking some time off from the job.

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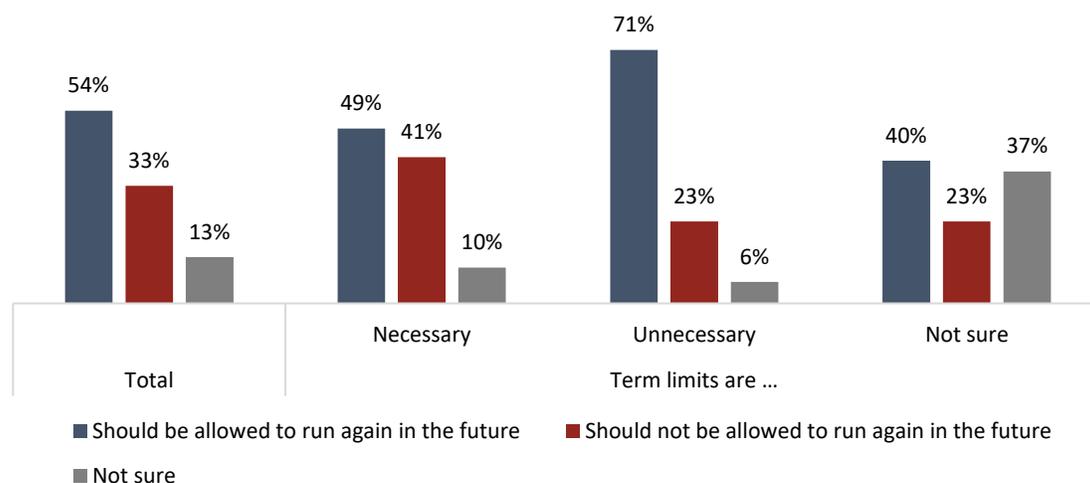
**Suppose an elected politician has reached their term limit and stepped down for a few years. Should such a person be allowed to run for that same elected position again in the future? Or should the first term limit prevent them from doing so?
(all respondents)**



This finding is especially notable because it reflects support not only from those who think term limits are unnecessary, but also from those who think they *are necessary*.

Nearly half of those who feel term limits are necessary say politicians who have already reached those limits once should be able to come back in the future after a term off:

Suppose an elected politician has reached their term limit and stepped down for a few years. Should such a person be allowed to run for that same elected position again in the future? Or should the first term limit prevent them from doing so?



Political Sphere Methodology

Rather than rely on respondents' potentially faded memories regarding their vote in the 2015 federal election, ARI researchers constructed a measure of political partisanship based on willingness to vote for the main federal parties in a future election under their current leaders.

The question specifically asked respondents how likely they would be to vote for "The Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau," "The Conservative Party led by Andrew Scheer," and "The New Democratic Party led by Jagmeet Singh" in a future election. The response options were "definitely support" the party and leader in question, "certainly consider" them, "maybe consider" them, and "definitely not even consider" them.

Respondents choosing either of the first two options (definitely support or certainly consider) are considered to be a party's "sphere." They represent potential supporters of that party, not necessarily decided voters.

It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents were asked to give an opinion on each of the main parties and had the option to say they would "certainly consider" each one.

Thus, many respondents may appear in the spheres of multiple parties.

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

Do you think term limits are necessary or unnecessary?				
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1600)	Political sphere		
		CPC (643)	Liberal (479)	NDP (406)
Term limits for elected politicians are necessary	54%	63%	39%	49%
Term limits for elected politicians are unnecessary	29%	24%	46%	33%
Not Sure	17%	13%	15%	18%

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Suppose an elected politician had reached his or her term limit and stepped down for a few years. Should such a person be allowed to run for that same elected position again in the future? Or should the first term limit prevent them from doing so?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1600)	Term limits are ...		
		Necessary (866)	Unnecessary (465)	Not sure (269)
Should be allowed to run again in the future	54%	49%	71%	40%
Should not be allowed to run again in the future	33%	41%	23%	23%
Not sure	13%	10%	6%	37%

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