

Two-in-three Canadians say the Senate is ‘too damaged’ to ever earn their goodwill

Four-in-ten call for the Red Chamber to be abolished, even at the cost of a constitutional fight

May 3, 2016 – As Mike Duffy returns to the Red Chamber this week for the first time in three years, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute (ARI) indicates most Canadians believe progress has been made on the spending and other issues that have plagued the Senate for decades.

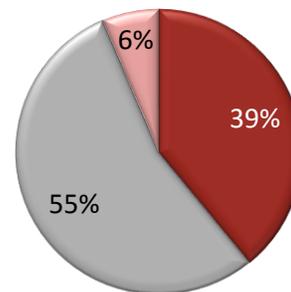
That said, they're far from convinced that changes made in the wake of several senate-related scandals mark the end the institution's perception problems.

Indeed, two-in-three Canadians (64%) say the Upper House is “too damaged to ever earn their goodwill”, while nearly two-in-five respondents call for the Senate to be abolished altogether – the vast majority of whom are willing to re-open a constitutional can of worms in order to see it happen.

Key Findings:

- More than nine-in-ten Canadians continue to call for further Senate reform (55%) or outright abolition (39%). Six per cent say the institution should be “left alone”
- The majority calling for abolition also say they're willing to open a Constitutional debate in order to see it happen (71%)
- Most Canadians (58%) say implemented Senate reforms help solve some of the Red Chamber's problems, but most (64%) say it's too damaged to overcome any malice Canadians feel

Overall, which of the following would you say would be the best outcome? Would you say the Senate should be:



■ Abolished ■ Reformed ■ Left as is

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 28 – May 3, 2016, 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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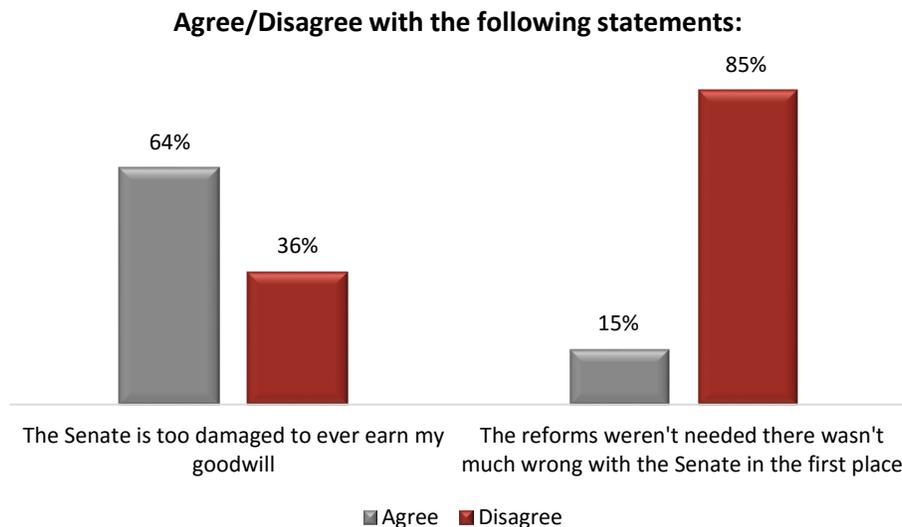
End of Duffy doesn't end Senate troubles:

During the three-plus years he was under investigation, suspended, on trial and fulsomely acquitted, Mike Duffy became the poster-child for all the ills of Canada's Senate. Even after being cleared of any wrongdoing, the P.E.I. Senator – and the institution itself – [remains the subject of skepticism](#).

Canadians followed the trial closely – particularly [during the 2015 election campaign](#), when three-in-five reported at least seeing some news and having the odd conversation about it. Attention has ebbed slightly since then, but most (53%) still say they've followed the news of Duffy's acquittal at least somewhat closely.

The conclusion of these legal proceedings appears to have done little to shore up public confidence in the institution [for which some have said it was a proxy trial](#).

As seen in the following graph, two-in-three Canadians (64%) agree with the statement “the Senate is too damaged to ever earn my goodwill,” fully four times more than the number (15%) who think there wasn't much wrong with it in the first place:



Older Canadians have the most jaded view of the Senate. Fewer than one-in-ten (8%) of those 55 and older say the chamber wasn't in need of reform, compared to nearly one-in-four younger Canadians (23%) who feel the same – a generation gap likely attributable to the older generation's fatigue with an institution that has arguably been [plagued by scandal](#) for most of their lifetimes, compared to younger Canadians who may be less engaged by – or familiar with – the history of Senate scandals.

Reforms already underway

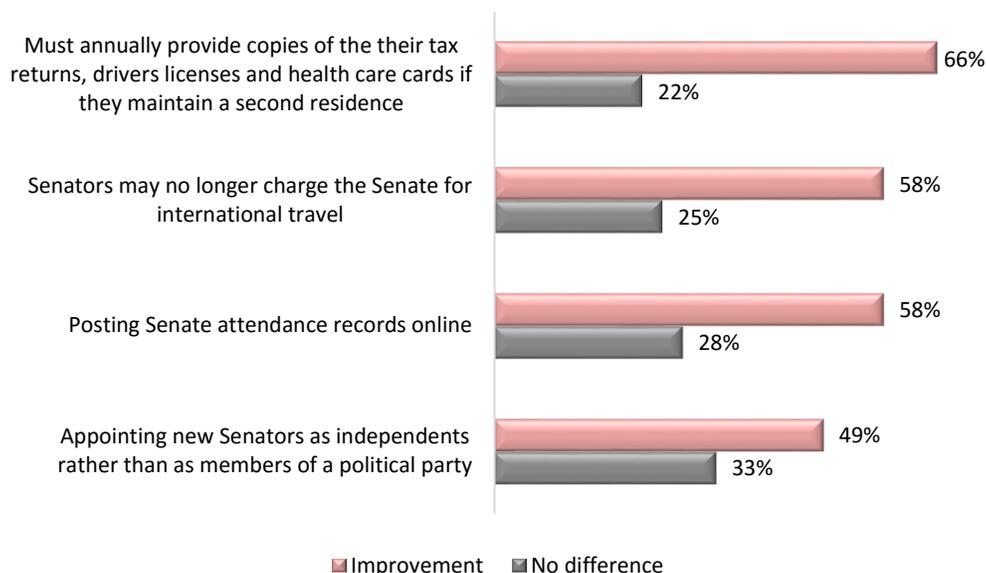
For all their skepticism about the Senate's ability to change, however, most Canadians say the Senate Duffy returns to this week is already better than it was when he was suspended in 2013.

Since the expenses scandal began, members of the Red Chamber have set about a modest program of self-reform, [updating and clarifying the rules](#) that Duffy, Pamela Wallin, and Patrick Brazeau were all accused of violating.

Among the examples: senators are no longer allowed to charge the institution for the cost of international travel; they must provide copies of their tax returns, drivers' licenses, and health cards if they maintain a second residence; and they will [soon have their attendance records posted online](#).

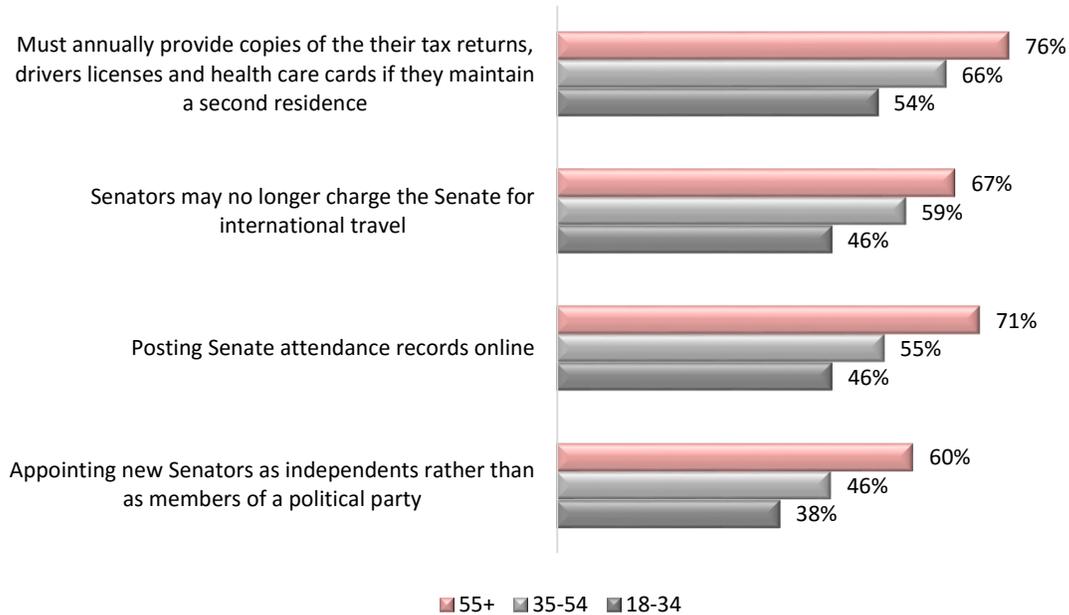
Most Canadians see these changes as improvements, and nearly half say the same about the Trudeau government's new process for appointing Senators as independents:

Do you think each of the following changes improve the Senate or make no difference?



Again, there is an age divide in responses to this question, with older Canadians much more likely to say each change is an improvement, and younger Canadians more likely to anticipate that they'll make no difference or to be unsure.

Percentage saying each reform is an "improvement"



Interestingly, this age divide does not show up in responses to a similar question about the efficacy of Senate reforms already underway.

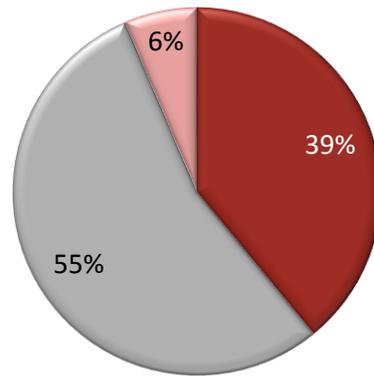
Asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement “these changes will help solve the problems with the senate,” some 58 per cent of respondents agree, and this proportion is roughly the same across all three age groups ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Most want even more reform ...

Though most feel steps in the right direction have been made, few Canadians are satisfied that enough has been done to “fix” the Senate. Indeed, many don’t deem it fixable at all.

When presented with three main choices for the future of the nation’s chamber of sober second thought, more than half (55%) say the body must be reformed further, and another four-in-ten (39%) say, ultimately, the body will need to be abolished. This leaves just six per cent of Canadians who say they’re satisfied with the Senate as it is.

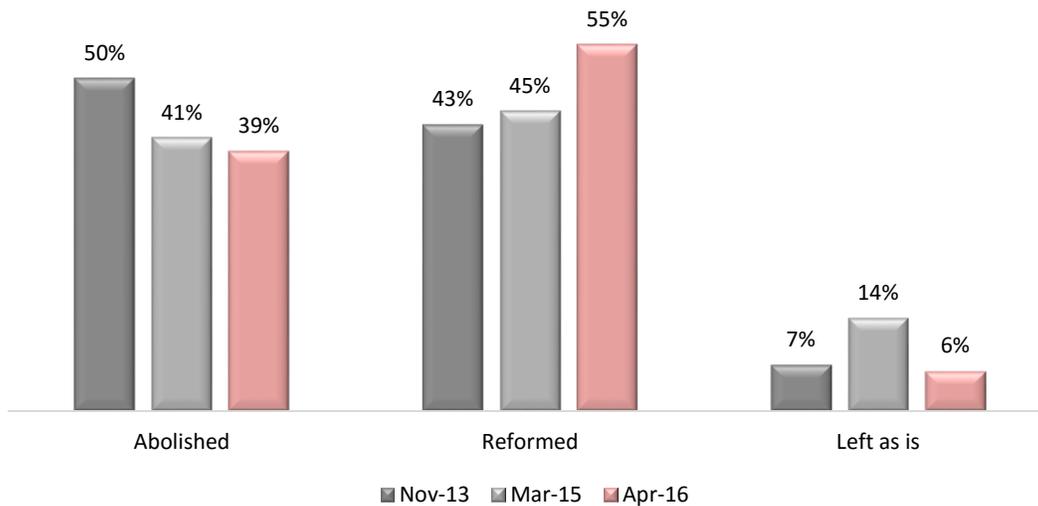
There are three broad choices in terms of the future of the Canadian Senate. Overall, which of the following would you say would be the best outcome? Would you say the Senate should be:



■ Abolished ■ Reformed ■ Left as is

Canadians' desire for abolition is unchanged in the past year, but has declined since the outbreak of the latest scandal. In November of 2013, driven by the suspensions of Brazeau, Wallin and Duffy, fully half of Canadians said abolition was the right route to pursue. This dropped to 41 per cent in March 2015, and is statistically unchanged – at 39 per cent – in this most recent wave of polling:

Should the Senate be:



... And they're willing to change the constitution to get it

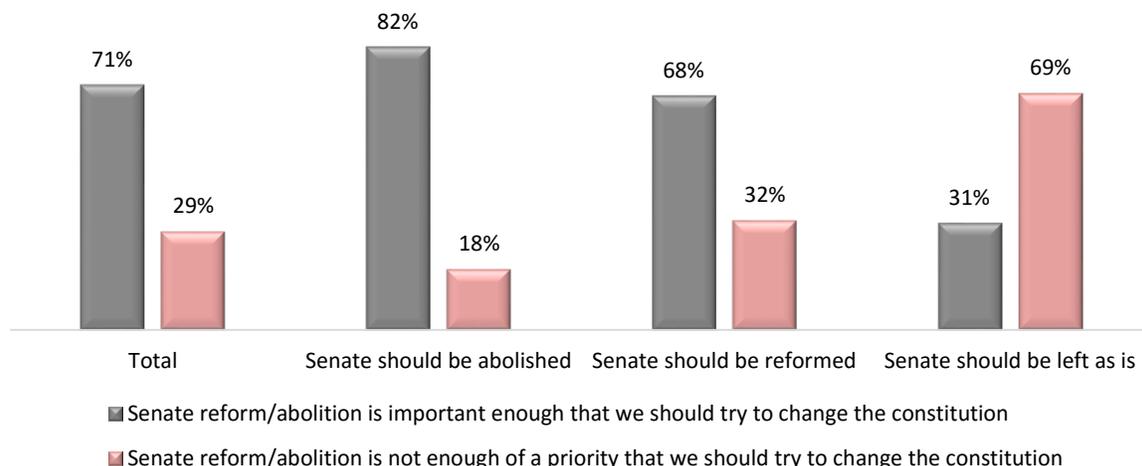
Any significant changes to the Senate – examples of which may include electing Senators – require a constitutional amendment. Such a change must have, at minimum, the support of seven of the provincial legislatures, and the representation of 50 per cent of the population, the so-called “7+50 formula”.

Abolition, in fact, must be unanimously supported by the provinces. And while this formula has frustrated previous governments' attempts at reform, those most strongly in support of major change have few qualms about the potential struggle changing the constitution could entail.

Canadians overwhelmingly support efforts to change the constitution in order to further reform the Senate. Fully seven-in-ten (71%) say that Senate abolition or reform is important enough to justify attempting to amend the constitution for the first time since the failures of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords more than two decades ago.

The appetite for a constitutional amendment is particularly high among those who support abolition. Here, more than eight-in-ten (82%) support such an endeavor. Just over two-thirds of those who support reform measures say the constitution is fair game, while among those few who say the Senate should be left as is, the opposite is true: 69 per cent in this camp say this isn't a high enough priority to wade into a constitutional battle.

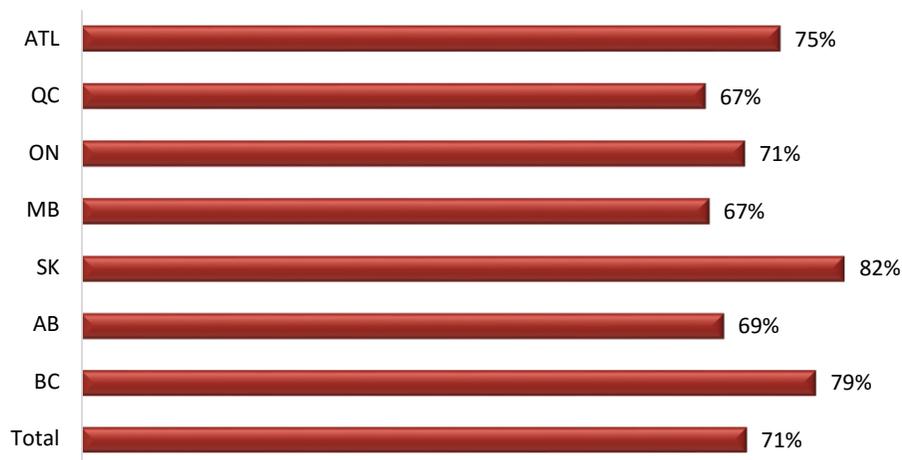
One of the difficulties of reforming/abolishing the Senate is that it requires changing the constitution, which requires the approval of a least 7 provinces representing 50% of the population. Which is closest to your point of view?



Provincially, constitutional change garners majority support across the country. Saskatchewan residents are particularly enthusiastic – 82 per cent see the issue as worthy of constitutional amendment. British Columbians, who arguably stand the most to gain from changing the Senate – provided such a change includes more-proportional representation – are also broadly in favour of a constitutional amendment.

Meanwhile, Quebeckers, in the province where the term referendum (référendum) arguably invokes the strongest emotions both [positively and negatively](#), are least supportive of constitutional action. Two-thirds (67%), however, still say this is a fair course to pursue.

**Senate reform/abolition is important enough that we should
try to change the constitution
(Summary of agree)**



*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 region, age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1508)	Should the Senate be...		
		Abolished (589)	Reformed (822)	Left as is (96*)
Senate reform/abolition is important enough that we should try to change the constitution	71%	82%	68%	31%
Senate reform/abolition is not enough of a priority that we should try to change the constitution	29%	18%	32%	69%

**small sample size*

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:

(weighted sample sizes)	March 2013 (1511)	April 2015 (1500)	May 2016 (1508)
Abolished	50%	41%	39%
Reformed	43%	45%	55%
Left as is	7%	14%	6%

As you may be aware, the trial of Senator Mike Duffy recently ended. Duffy was acquitted of all charges. How closely would you say you have been following this issue?

	April 2015 (1500)	August 2015 (1006)	May 2016 (1508)
Following it in the news, and discussing it with friends and family	19%	25%	20%
Seeing some media coverage, and having the odd conversation about it	36%	34%	33%
Just scanning the headlines	29%	33%	34%
Haven't seen or heard anything about it	16%	7%	12%