

Cabinet construct: Canadians lean towards gender parity among first ministers as a goal, not the standard

Regional balance viewed as more important than gender balance, diversity

January 18, 2018 – The latest round of cabinet shuffling this week offered a window into the Liberal government's strategy when it comes to the creating what it believes is the most politically appealing mix of first ministers.

With the departure of Nova Scotia minister Scott Brison, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was tasked with promoting MPs who reflect not just the gender balance that defined his term, but also the regional balance previous governments have sought to get right.

But how important are such considerations - and machinations – in the minds of Canadians?

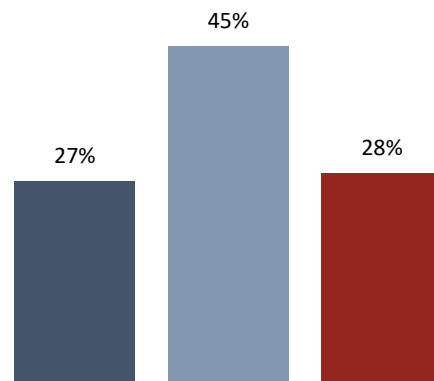
A new Angus Reid Institute survey finds a plurality (45%) say gender parity should be a goal for government when composing a cabinet, though they're less inclined to believe it should not be a top priority. The rest are evenly divided between viewing gender parity as the standard for future governments (27%) and not a consideration at all (28%).

Additionally, while the plurality view a gender balanced cabinet as having has a positive impact on government (45%), one-in-five disagree (21%), while a third say it has had no impact either way.

More Key Findings:

- Young women are particularly positive about the impact that gender balance has had on the overall function of the federal government. Seven-in-ten (68%) say it has been positive, compared to 44 per cent of young men (the highest level among male age groups)
- Half of Canadians say regional representation should continue to be the standard going forward, while only 7 per cent say it should not be a consideration. Support for this idea is highest in Saskatchewan (68%) and lowest in Ontario (47%)

Looking ahead to future Canadian governments, what would you say is the best overall approach to this issue of gender balance in the federal Cabinet?



- Gender balance should be the new standard for any future Canadian government Cabinet
- Gender balance should be a goal, but not a top priority
- Gender balance should not even be a consideration

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 28 – December 6 among a representative randomized sample of 1,800 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 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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- Women are twice as likely as men to say that diversity should be a standard for future cabinets (36% to 19%), though half of men (48%) believe it should at least be a goal

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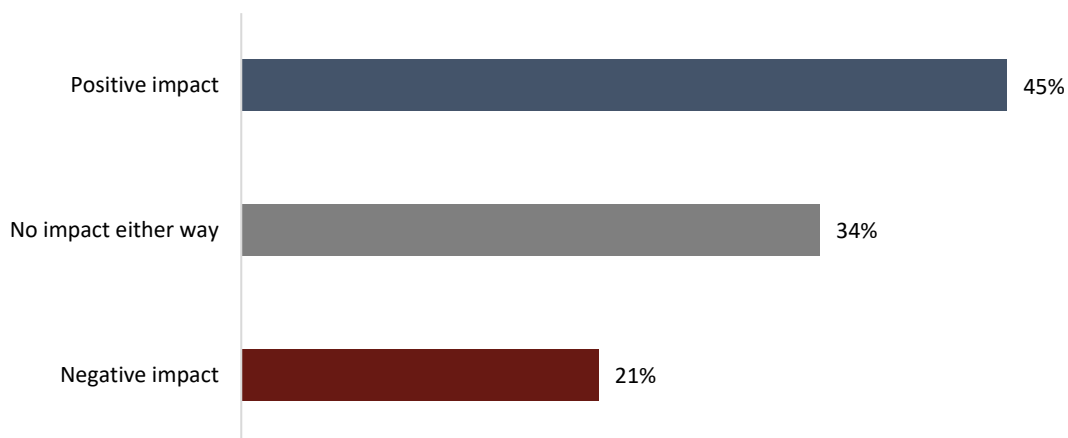
- **Is Gender balance a benefit?**
- **Should it be the standard?**
- **Regional representation important**
- **More division about diversity**

Is Gender balance a benefit?

Notwithstanding some observers were left perplexed this week by the decision to move Jody Wilson-Raybould from the Ministry of Justice, to Veterans Affairs, the government shakeup was arguably relatively minor, with the most public faces remaining in their current positions. The government has largely maintained its core roster and its principle of gender balance in cabinet; one that was met with praise from some and criticism from others when it was announced in 2015.

For their part, Canadians lack consensus when reflecting upon the last three years and the impact that gender parity might have made in federal politics. The largest group, 45 per cent, say they believe this composition has had a positive impact – more than twice as many who say it has been a detriment overall (21%). However, a significant number, one-in-three (34%) also say that they don't believe there has been an impact either way:

What kind of impact do you think this gender balance has had on the overall functioning of the federal Cabinet and the government it directs?



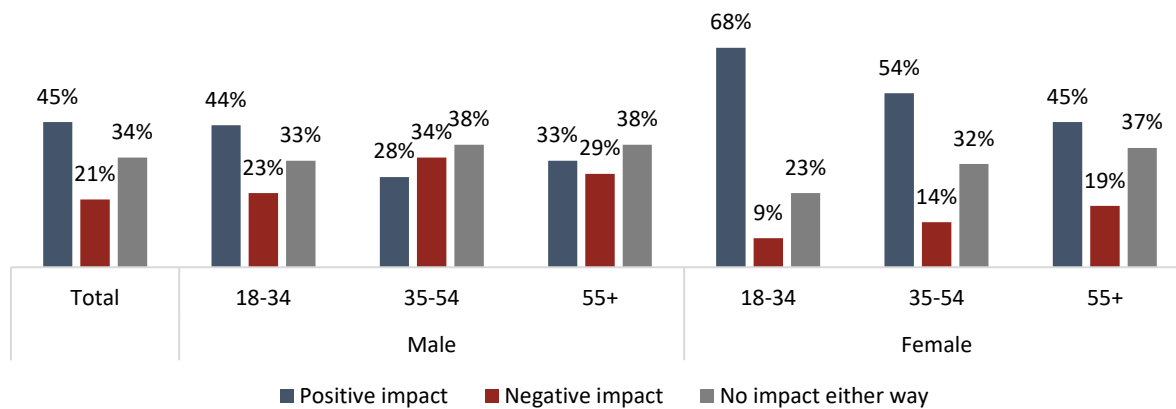
Given the nature of this question, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a gendered element to public opinion in responses. Young women (those between the ages of 18 and 34) are overwhelmingly positive, with two-thirds (68%) saying that this has been a benefit for the functioning of the government. A majority of women age 35 to 54 also say this, while women 55 and older and young men mirror the national total.

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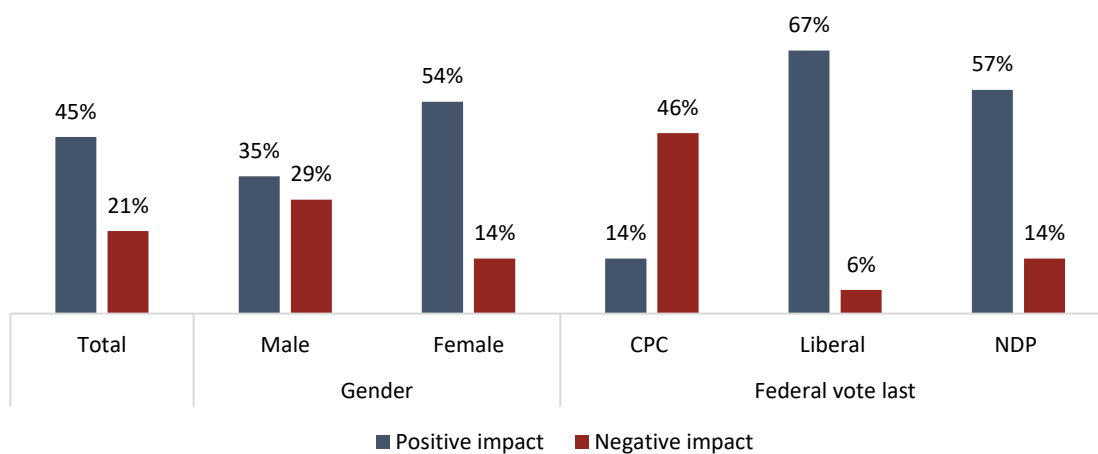
Men over the age of 35, however, are much more likely to say that gender balance has had a negative impact:

What kind of impact do you think this gender balance has had on the overall functioning of the federal Cabinet and the government it directs?



Overall, men are twice as likely as women to say that this aim of the Liberals has had a negative impact. Conservatives, meanwhile, are substantially more critical than supporters of the other two major federal parties:

What kind of impact do you think this gender balance has had on the overall functioning of the federal Cabinet and the government it directs?



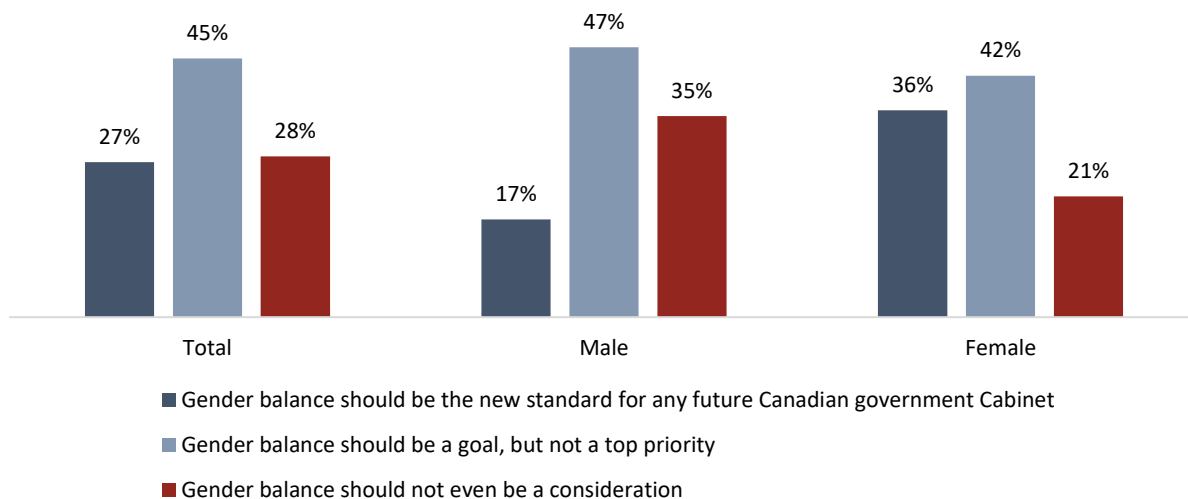
Should it be the standard?

While Canadians are more positive than negative about the impact gender-balance in cabinet has had, they are divided about what future governments should commit to.

One-quarter (27%) say that gender balance in cabinet should be the standard, but almost half say it should be more of a goal and less of an obligation (45%). Another 28 per cent would prefer that gender not be a consideration at all in forming government.

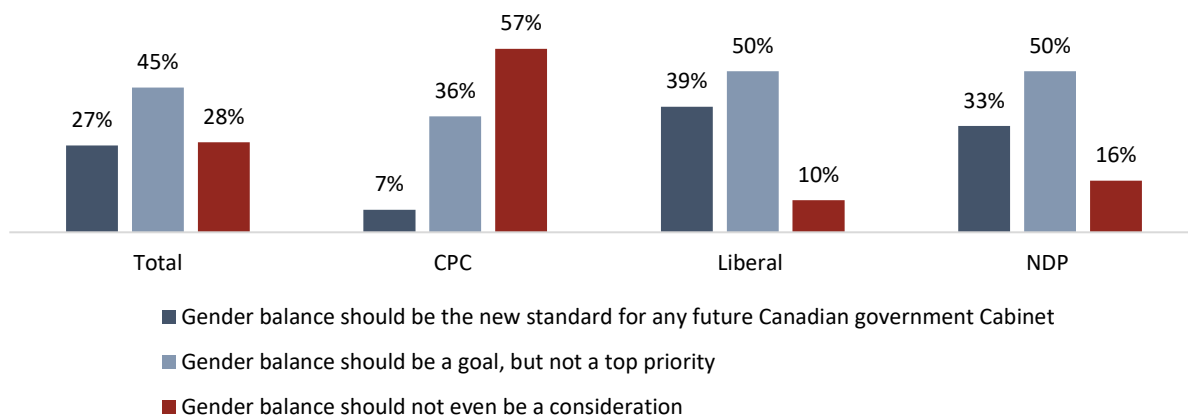
Men and women are close to equally likely to choose the middle option on this question – their disagreement is on the margins.

Looking ahead to future Canadian governments, what would you say is the best overall approach to this issue of gender balance in the federal Cabinet?



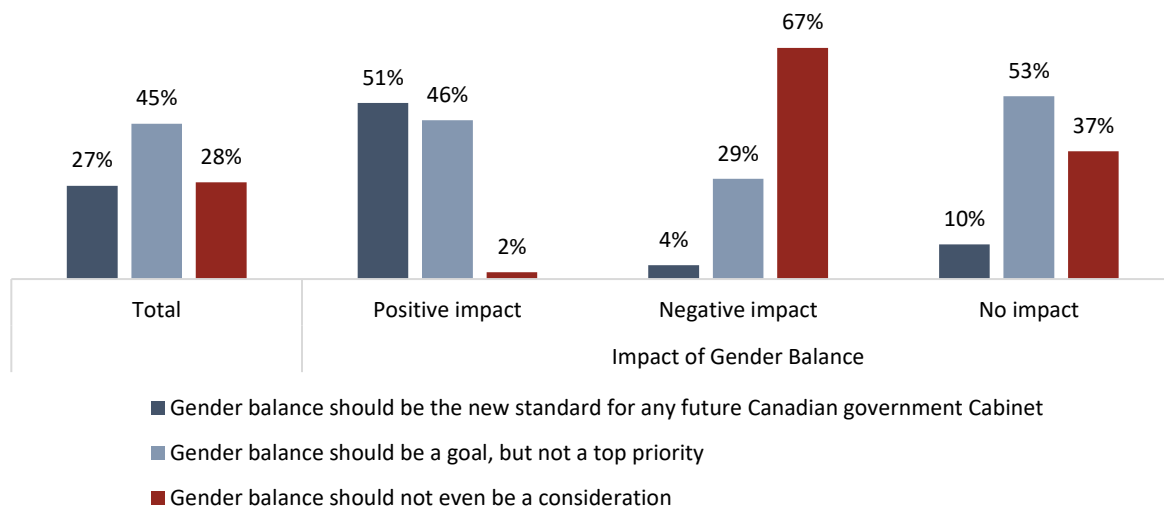
Again, those who supported the federal Conservatives in 2015 are substantially more likely than supporters of the other major federal parties to say that gender balance should be no consideration at all:

Looking ahead to future Canadian governments, what would you say is the best overall approach to this issue of gender balance in the federal cabinet?



Notably, half of those who view the Trudeau government's approach on gender balance as positive say that it should additionally be the standard (51%), but another 46 per cent would prefer that it be the goal of any incoming government rather than a codified norm:

Looking ahead to future Canadian governments, what would you say is the best overall approach to this issue of gender balance in the federal Cabinet?



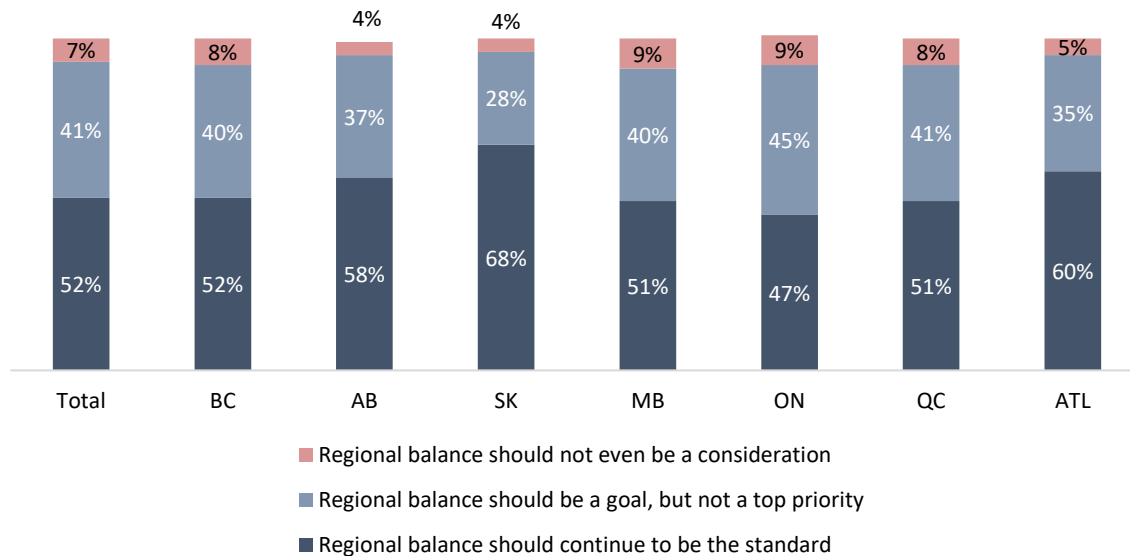
Regional representation

One of the more accepted traditions in building a federal cabinet is regional representation. When Prime Ministers are filling out the top positions in the government, it is common that they will try to ensure that each region of the country is represented.

This idea is much less controversial for Canadians than gender balance. Indeed, twice as many say that this should continue to be the standard as say the same of balancing men and women (52% versus 27%). Another four-in-ten (41%) say that this should be a goal of the government, if not a top priority.

Saskatchewan, Alberta and Atlantic Canadian residents are most likely to say this should be the standard:

What are your views on this concept of regional representation in the federal Cabinet?



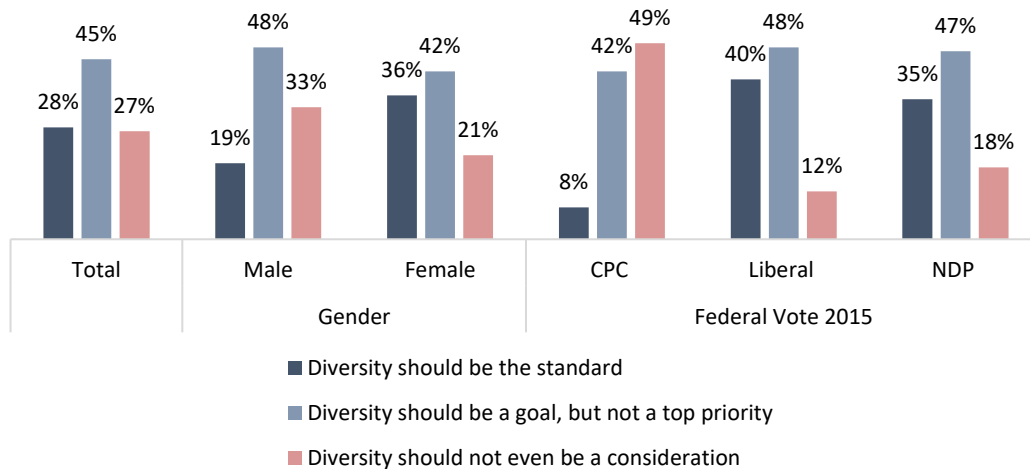
More division about diversity

Alongside seeking gender balance, the Trudeau government has made a concerted effort to create “[a government as diverse as Canada](#)”. This process has extended beyond the federal cabinet, to more than 1,500 lower-level government appointments.

At the federal level, Canadians are less concerned with diversity than they are regional representation. Equal numbers say diversity should be the standard (28%) and that it should not be a consideration at all (27%) while a much larger group (45%) say it should be a goal but not a top priority.

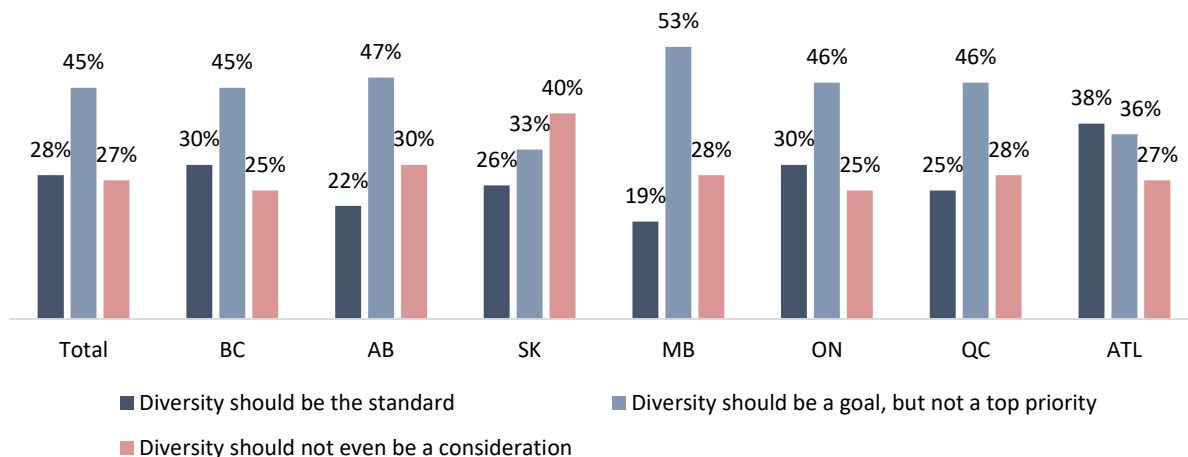
Women are more likely than men to value diversity, with twice as many saying it should be the standard (36% to 19%). Past CPC supporters, meanwhile, are four-times as likely as the current government’s supporters to say that diversity should be given no consideration:

Diversity in the federal cabinet should be:



The idea that the government should make diversity in cabinet a goal or a standard is held by at least six-in-ten residents in every region. Those most opposed are found in Saskatchewan (40%) and Alberta (30%):

Diversity in the federal cabinet should be:



*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.*

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