

24 Sussex: Most Canadians say political cowardice is the reason why PM's official residence continues to crumble

Seven-in-ten say PM should have taxpayer-funded residence; less support for other political figures

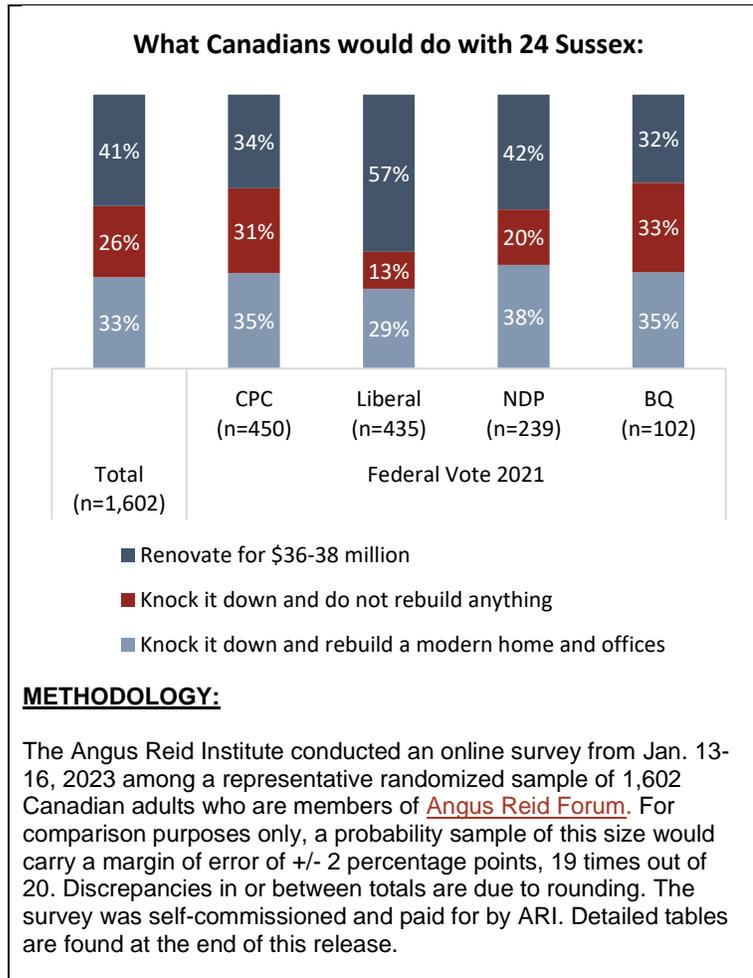
January 23, 2023 – As the National Capital Commission prepares to begin abatement work on 24 Sussex Drive [this spring](#), the future of the prime minister's official residence – not occupied by one since 2015 – is in serious doubt.

The federal government has yet to decide what to do with the dilapidated dwelling of the prime minister. However, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds half of Canadians (50%) oppose renovating 24 Sussex at the estimated cost of \$36 to \$38 million. Still, a plurality (41%) believe that to be the best solution, while a further third (33%) say it's best to knock it down and build a modern home and office for the prime minister.

Amid the high costs of maintaining official residences, some of which date back to confederation, there appears to be little appetite among Canadians for taxpayers to fund homes for political figures other than the prime minister.

Seven-in-ten (69%) believe the government should foot the bill for a house for the prime minister, but fewer believe the governor general (39%), leader of the opposition (25%), or the speaker of the house (19%) should receive publicly funded housing. Though not as significant as the bill for 24 Sussex, all of the official residencies for those positions also currently have [seven-figure deferred maintenance](#) costs hanging over them.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to the required renovations has been fear of political fallout. Two-thirds (64%) of Canadians believe this to be the case, saying recent federal governments have failed to maintain the prime minister's residence "because they are afraid of the public backlash." However, just half (49%) who say federal governments let 24 Sussex fall into disrepair because they were afraid of the political consequences also say they support the renovation of the prime minister's official residency at the estimated cost.



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More Key Findings:

- Among those who voted in the 2021 federal election, only past Liberal voters support a taxpayer-funded official residence for the governor general at a majority level (54%). This, after former Governor General Julie Payette became the first in her position to live somewhere else than Rideau Hall during her tenure.
- Past Liberal voters, as well, are the only group of political supporters to believe at a majority level (57%) 24 Sussex should be renovated at the current estimated cost. Three-in-five past CPC (60%) and Bloc Québécois voters (60%) are opposed.

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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Opinions about renovating 24 Sussex

The official residence for Canada's prime minister has not had a prime minister in it since 2015. Instead, [since his election that year](#), Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his family have been living at Rideau Cottage, a house on the grounds of Rideau Hall, the official residence of the governor general. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper lived in 24 Sussex from 2006 to 2015, despite it already being in poor state of repair. [A 2008 auditor general's report](#) estimated it would cost \$10 million to renovate the building at the time.

When it was revealed Trudeau and his family had no interest in moving in when first elected as prime minister, [several renovation reality stars](#) offered their services to get the job done. However, a full-term majority and two successive minority governments later, 24 Sussex is still an unfixed fixer-upper and the price tag to get it up to snuff is now estimated to be [at least \\$36.6 million](#). The property now has more [mould, lead, and asbestos](#) than occupants, as the last government employees vacated 24 Sussex [in November](#) due to its poor condition.

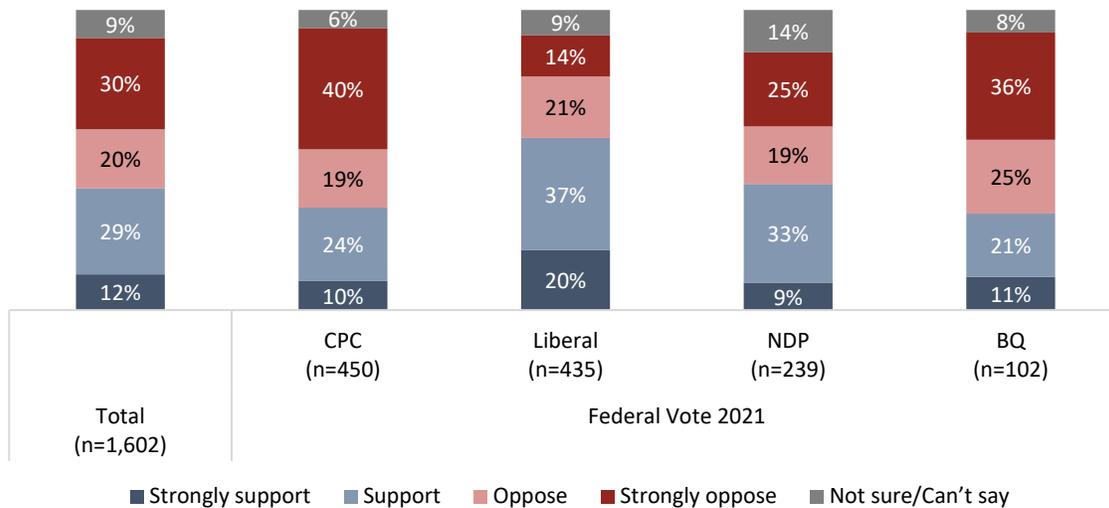
The challenge perhaps facing successive governments as 24 Sussex crumbled is the optics of spending millions on a house for a prime minister. This might be especially an issue in an era where the cost of living, and [especially housing affordability](#), continues to be a top national concern.

Canadians are more likely to oppose than support spending \$36-38 million to renovate 24 Sussex Drive. Half (50%) oppose the expenditure, including 30 per cent who do so strongly. Those who voted for the Conservatives (60%) and Bloc Québécois (60%) are stronger in their opposition than those who voted Liberal (34%) or NDP (44%):

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It will cost an estimated \$36-38 million to renovate 24 Sussex Drive. Do you support or oppose the expenditure of this money to repair the building?



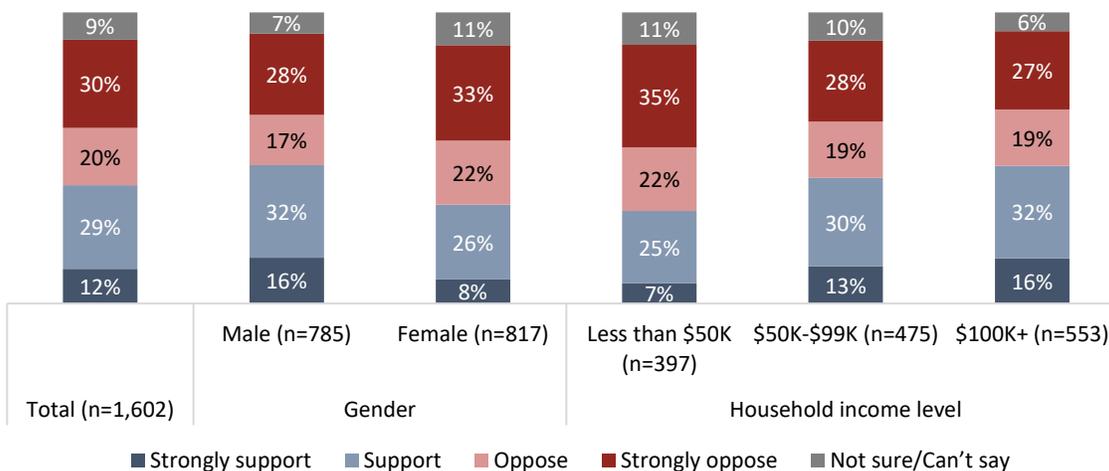
After a year of high inflation, half of Canadians [said in December](#) they were worse off now than 12 months earlier. It was a financially difficult year for many Canadians.

Related: [Holiday hurt: Inflation realities deflate Christmas shopping plans, two-in-five cut back on charitable giving](#)

Perhaps because of this, those in lower income households are more likely to oppose spending the more than \$36 million to renovate 24 Sussex.

As well, men are much more supportive of the \$36-million repairs (48%) than women (34%):

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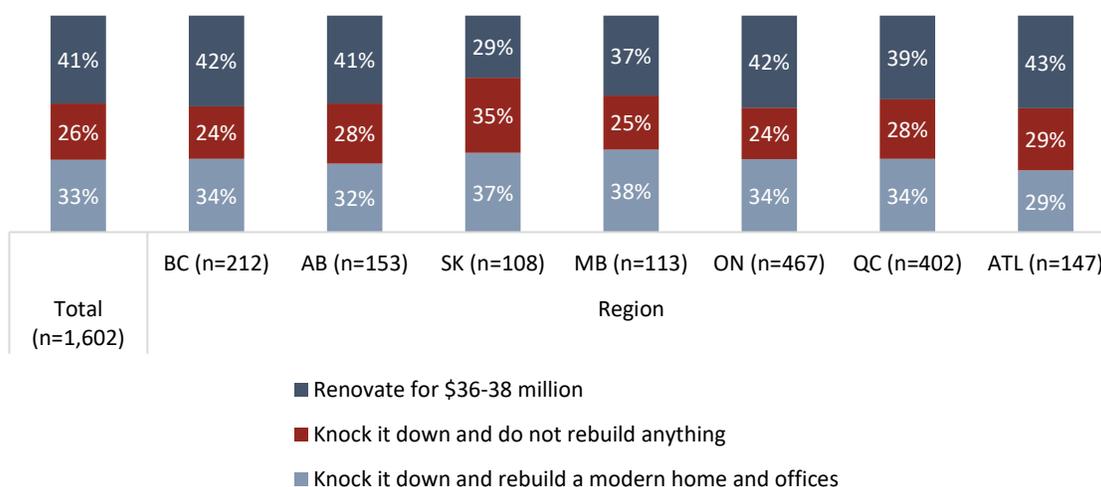
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The federal government is still working on its plan for 24 Sussex, but has not divulged any details. Some have proposed that a completely new building could be built, one with both space for official meetings, additional rooms for visiting leaders and staff, as well as the residence for the prime minister and their family. Perhaps they will even spring for central air conditioning so visiting vice presidents won't have to sweat in the July heat. This would give the prime minister a residence with similar functionality of those of other Group of Seven countries, such as the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Those who opposed, or offered no opinion on, renovating 24 Sussex were then asked if they would replace it with a modern home and offices or knock it down without replacing it at all. When those responses are aggregated with the Canadians who support renovating the existing structure, the data suggests a larger base of support for modernizing the official prime minister's residences. Indeed, three-quarters (74%) would either renovate or knock down 24 Sussex and build something new. One-quarter of Canadians (26%) would demolish the building and not rebuild.

More than one-third (35%) in Saskatchewan believe 24 Sussex should be knocked down and not replaced, the most in the country:

What Canadians would do with 24 Sussex:

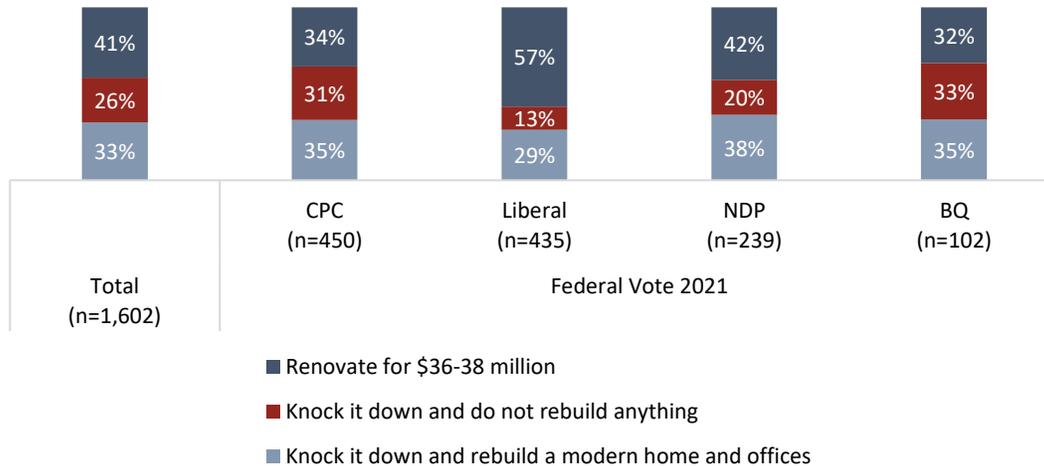


Few, but still 13 per cent, of past Liberal voters would knock down 24 Sussex and be done with the matter. Past CPC (31%) and BQ (33%) voters are more likely to choose that option:

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What Canadians would do with 24 Sussex:



Majority say governments have failed due to fear of political backlash

There is a significant political challenge to a prime minister seen as feathering their own nest. Former Prime Minister Jean Chretien said he was reluctant to spend on repairs for 24 Sussex because of the potential blowback [when he was in office](#), despite needing buckets to collect water from a leak in a roof. It took a storm [blowing off the roof for it to be replaced](#).

In Australia, there was much controversy over a [\\$11.5-million renovation](#) of that country’s prime minister’s official residence in Canberra. However, the prime minister and opposition leader cooperated to create [an advisory committee](#) to provide the government guidance on future renovations. In Canada, a former privy council clerk [suggested](#) that a trust with an endowment or capital fund could be created to manage 24 Sussex, removing some of the political barriers to the maintenance of the residence.

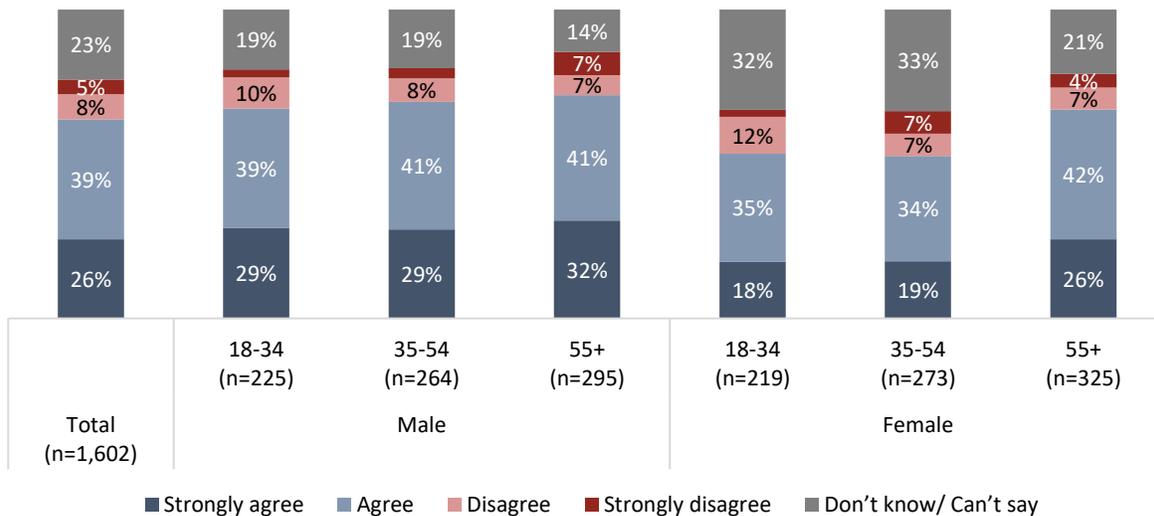
Two-thirds of Canadians (64%) believe the potential political fallout is why recent governments have failed in their responsibility to maintain the prime minister’s residence. This is also the majority belief of past voters of all four of the country’s major political parties ([see detailed tables](#)).

Men are more likely than women to believe public backlash has kept recent federal governments from maintaining 24 Sussex:

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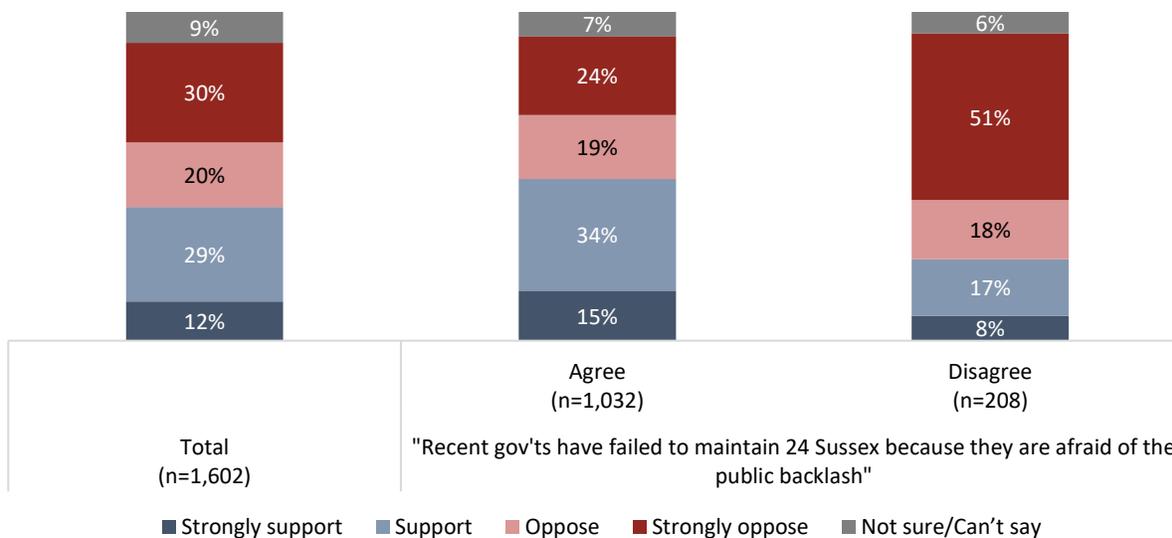
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**Agree vs. disagree -
"Recent federal governments have failed their responsibility to maintain 24
Sussex because they are afraid of the public backlash"**



Perhaps that fear is well placed. Two-in-five (43%) of those who accuse federal governments of being afraid of the political fallout also say they are against spending the estimated \$36 million or more to renovate 24 Sussex:

**It will cost an estimated \$36-38 million to renovate 24 Sussex Drive. Do you
support or oppose the expenditure of this money to repair the building?**



Should the PM, others be provided a publicly funded home?

The National Capital Commission maintains five other official residences in addition to 24 Sussex Drive: Rideau Hall, the residence of the governor general; Harrington Lake, the country residence of the prime minister; 7 Rideau Gate, a residence used by visiting dignitaries; Stornoway, the official residence of the leader of the opposition; and The Farm, the official residence of the speaker of the house. (The speaker of the house also has the use of a [small apartment](#) located in the House of Commons itself.) As heritage buildings, some of which date back to the confederation of Canada, they require significant upkeep.

The NCC [estimated in 2021](#) that the official residences, including their support buildings, have a total of \$89.1 million in deferred maintenance, including the more than \$36 million it estimated at the time would be required to fix 24 Sussex Drive.

Overall, Canadians support giving the prime minister housing at public expense (69%) but are less supportive of official residences for the governor general (39%), opposition leader (25%), and the speaker of the house (19%).

Only past Liberal voters support giving the governor general an official residence at a majority level (54%). Notably, former Governor General Julie Payette, [who resigned from the position after an external review found a toxic workplace culture in her office](#), became the [first governor general](#) to not live at Rideau Hall during her four-year term from 2017 to 2021. Her successor, Mary Simon, did not follow suit when she took over the position in 2021, [despite a looming \\$31-million deferred maintenance bill](#).

Which, if any of these positions do you think should come with housing at public expense?					
	Total (n=1,602)	2021 Federal Vote			
		CPC (n=450)	Liberal (n=435)	NDP (n=239)	BQ (n=102)
The Prime Minister	69%	61%	88%	73%	73%
The governor general	39%	36%	54%	40%	20%
The leader of the opposition	25%	28%	28%	23%	18%
The speaker of the House of Commons	19%	15%	23%	18%	14%
None of them	28%	35%	10%	26%	27%

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Three-in-ten (30%) of Canadians under the age of 35, and one-third of those aged 35 to 54, say none of those government positions should come with taxpayer-funded [housing](#). Canadians over the age of 54 are more supportive of an official residence for the prime minister (78%) and the governor general (45%) than younger age groups. However, support for the latter falls short of a majority level even among that age group:

Which, if any of these positions do you think should come with housing at public expense?						
	Total (n=1,602)	Gender		Age		
		Male (n=785)	Female (n=817)	18-34 (n=444)	35-54 (n=537)	55+ (n=621)
The Prime Minister	69%	72%	66%	64%	64%	78%
The governor general	39%	43%	34%	38%	32%	45%
The leader of the opposition	25%	31%	19%	26%	21%	28%
The speaker of the House of Commons	19%	22%	15%	25%	18%	15%
None of them	28%	25%	31%	30%	35%	21%

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

For detailed results by whether or not respondents believe recent governments have failed to maintain 24 Sussex because they are afraid of the public backlash, [click here](#).

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