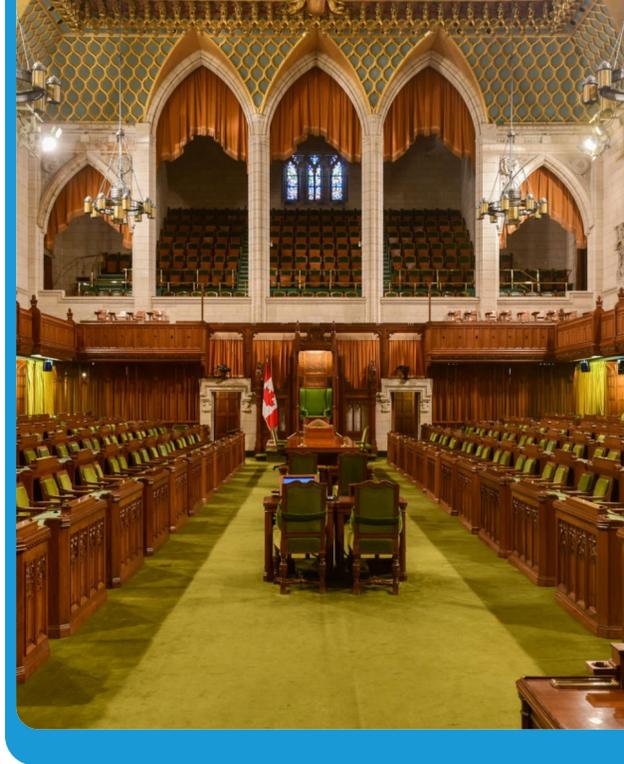


## REALITY CHECK

# Unequal Votes and Uneven Representation: Facts on Canada's Parliament

**Mark Milke and Ven Venkatachalam**

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## Introduction

The Aristotle Foundation recently commissioned Léger to survey 2,710 Canadians on their knowledge of parliamentary representation vis-à-vis their province. We also asked Canadians in every province about their thoughts on reforming the House of Commons and Senate—including having a more equal number of voters per riding—and their willingness to negotiate changes to federal transfer programs if separatist sentiments in the West and in Quebec rise.

This Reality Check accompanies the Léger survey to give Canadians the statistics about representation in the House of Commons and the Senate, as well as data about net fiscal transfers over time. We paraphrase some of the questions below.

This Reality Check can be read on its own but is intended to be read in parallel with the Léger survey. The contrast between what Canadians think, by province, about representation in the House of Commons and Senate as well as beliefs about provincial contributions to the federal treasury (and subsequent spending and transfers) is helpful to compare.

This Reality Check provides the data on actual numbers, proportions, and percentages. Readers should consult the survey overview in PDF form for the high-level results. The full Excel data set includes national, regional, and provincial responses and breakdowns to each question.

- [Multiple Solitudes: Léger Survey Report Overview \(PDF\)](#)
- [Multiple Solitudes: Léger Data \(Excel\)](#)

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[www.aristotlefoundation.org](http://www.aristotlefoundation.org)

## Léger poll questions on the Senate and House of Commons

### Questions 1 and 2: Representation in the House of Commons and Senate

Questions 1 and 2 ask Canadians if they think their province is under- or overrepresented in the House of Commons and the Senate. Western provinces and Atlantic Canadians were more likely to answer “underrepresented.”

### Question 9: Representation by population in the House of Commons

Question 9 asked whether respondents agree or disagree with the principle that all Members of Parliament should represent approximately the same number of people (i.e. that federal ridings across Canada should contain approximately the same number of people).

The net agreement ranged from 61% in Atlantic Canada to 73% in British Columbia, with the national percentage being 66%. Only 16% (13% somewhat and 3% strongly) disagreed.

### Questions 10 and 11: Reforming the House of Commons and the Senate

Question 10 asked respondents about the ways in which they would like to see reform in the House of Commons to ensure closer representation by population. This question was based on the lower houses in Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia, where ridings more closely represent about the same number of people.

#### Answers included:

- Freeze the number of seats and remove seats from overrepresented provinces (37%)
- Add more seats to the House of Commons to ensure better representation by population (33%)
- Neither, leave the House of Commons as is (10%)
- Don't know (21%)

Question 11 asked if the Senate should be reformed to better reflect the actual population distribution across regions.

#### Answers included:

- Yes, reform the Senate (50%)
- No, leave as is (15%)
- No, abolish it entirely (12%)
- Don't know (23%)

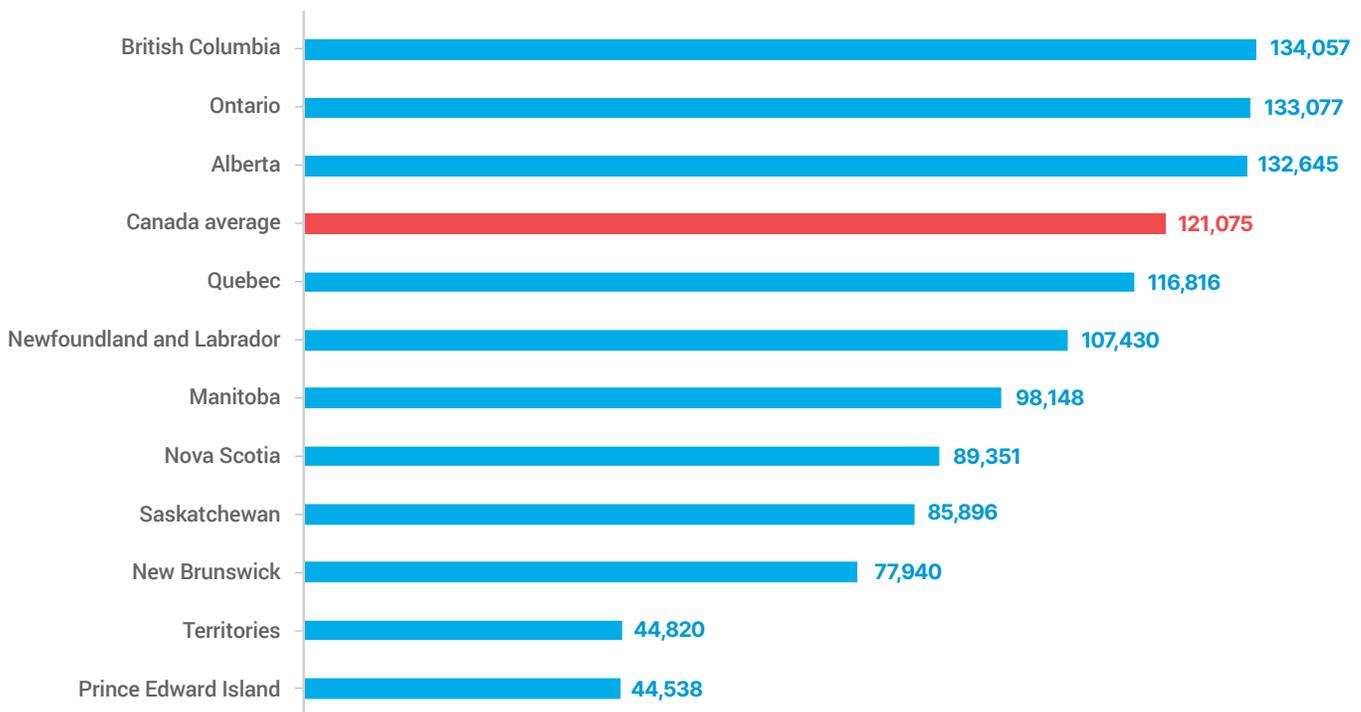
## The data on representation in the Senate and House of Commons

### The data show that:

- In the House of Commons, Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia are underrepresented. All other provinces are *overrepresented* (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>
- In the Senate, Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia are *underrepresented*. All other provinces are *overrepresented* (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>
- If the Senate is portrayed regionally, and assuming “Central Canada” is composed of Quebec and Ontario, Western Canada has the highest number of residents per senator, followed closely by Central Canada, with Atlantic Canada significantly overrepresented in the Senate in comparison (Figure 3).

Figure 1

### House of Commons, average population per riding 2025

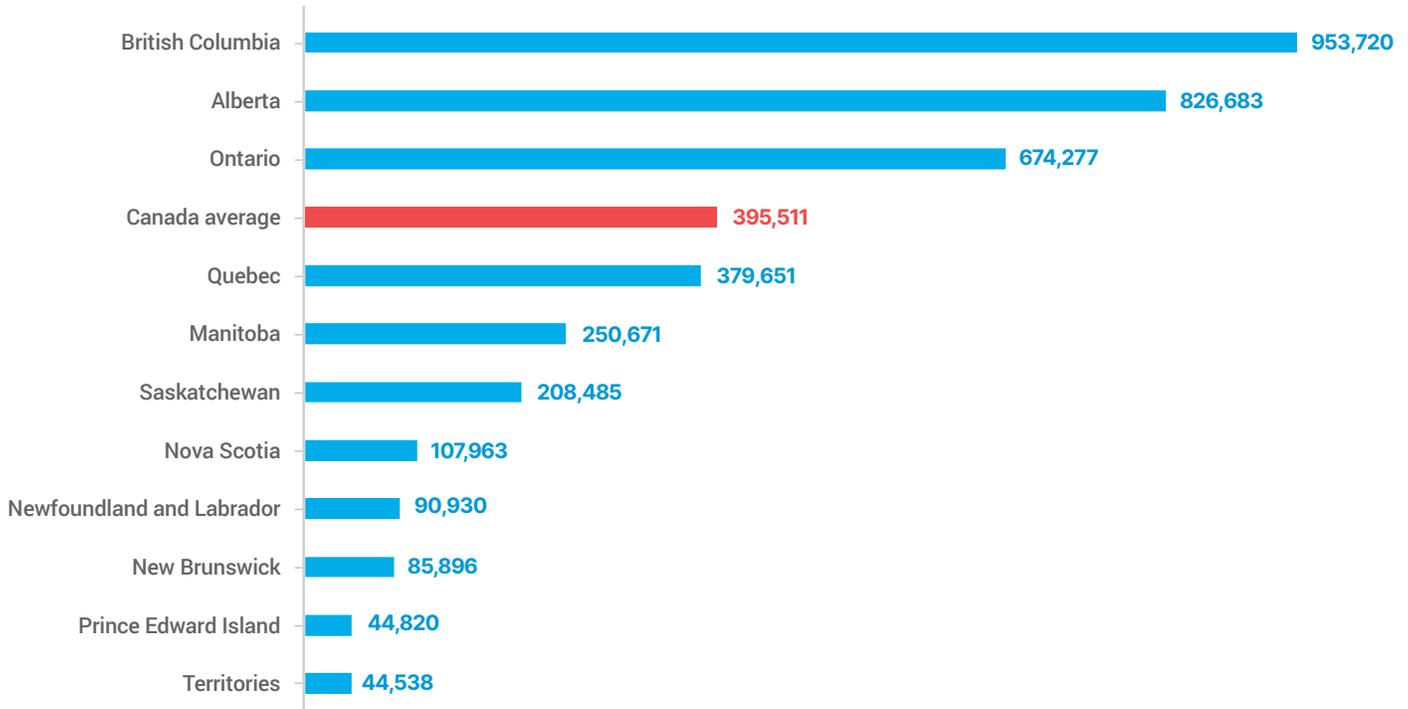


**Source:** Author’s calculation from Marc Bosc and André Gagnon (Eds.) (2017), “The House of Commons and Its Members” in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Third edition (Éditions Yvon Blaise) <[https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/procedure-and-practice-3/ch\\_04\\_1-e.html](https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/procedure-and-practice-3/ch_04_1-e.html)>; Statistics Canada (2025), “Population estimates, quarterly—Table 17-10-0009-01,” Statistics Canada (December) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>>.

Figure 2

### Average population per Senate seat

By province • 2025

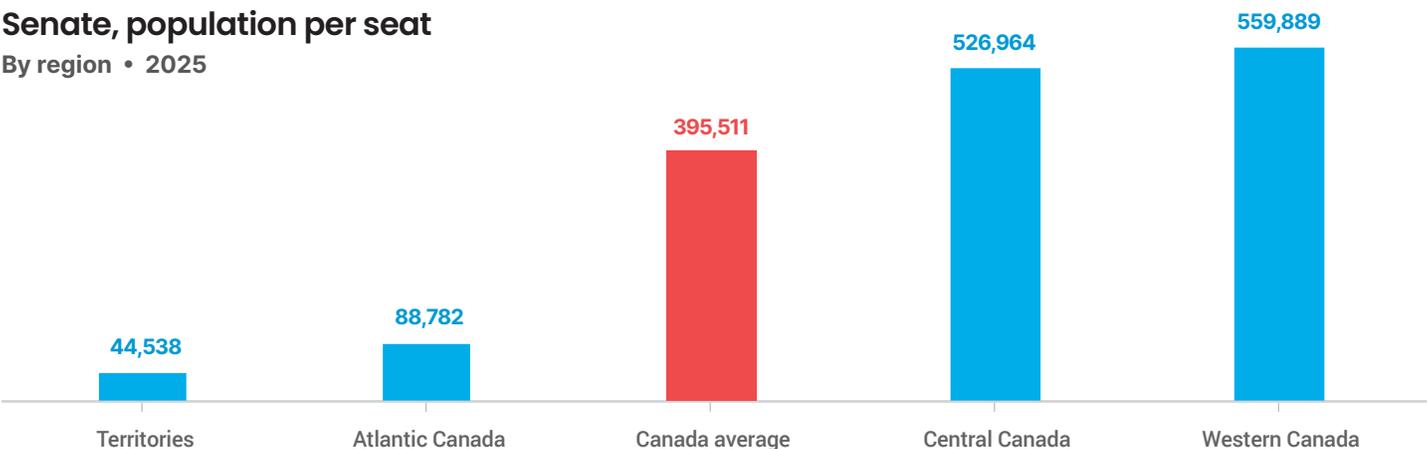


Source: Author's calculation from Parliament of Canada (n.d.), "Senators," Parliament of Canada <<https://learn.parl.ca/understanding-comprendre/en/people-in-parliament/senators/>>; Statistics Canada (2025), "Population estimates, quarterly—Table 17-10-0009-01," Statistics Canada (December) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>>.

Figure 3

### Senate, population per seat

By region • 2025



Source: Author's calculation from Parliament of Canada (n.d.), "Senators," Parliament of Canada <<https://learn.parl.ca/understanding-comprendre/en/people-in-parliament/senators/>>; Statistics Canada (2025), "Population estimates, quarterly—Table 17-10-0009-01," Statistics Canada (December) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>>.

## Léger poll questions on federal transfer payments

### Question 3: Perceptions of provincial net contributions and benefits

Question 3 asked Canadians if they thought their province was a net contributor or a net recipient of federal taxation and spending. In other words, do taxpayers in their province pay more in federal taxes than their province and its residents receive “back” in federal spending (and in transfers to their provincial government)?

- A majority of respondents in all provinces thought they paid more in tax than they received back in program spending with the exception of Atlantic Canadians and Manitobans, where 49% and 43%, respectively, thought they paid more in taxes than they received in spending.

### Questions 12 and 13: Support for federal transfer payment reform amid separatist tensions

Questions 12 and 13 asked Canadians about their willingness to reform federal transfer programs if Western or Quebec separatism flares up. In both cases, 43% were willing to reform the federal transfer payment program.

### Question 14: Likelihood to support reform given Alberta’s net contributions

Question 14 asked if Canadians were more likely to support reforming federal transfers when they learned that Alberta “sent”—via the federal government—over \$600 billion on a net basis to other provinces since the 1960s.

Knowing that about Alberta, 40% were somewhat or a lot more likely to support reforming federal transfer payments, with 46% responding it did not make them more likely to support reforming federal transfer payments. (Note that the 40% and 46% may, in question 13, have already previously supported reforming federal transfers or opposed reform but were persuaded by knowledge about Alberta in question 14.)

## The data on net contributions to the federal fiscal balance

Data from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, published in 2020, show that:

- On a net basis between 1961 and 2018, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia were net contributors to the rest of the country via the federal government, while others were net recipients (Figures 4 and 5).<sup>3</sup>

Figure 4

### Total net contribution by provinces to the federal fiscal balance

In billions of 2018 \$ • 1961–2018



Source: R. Mansell, M. Khanal, & T. Tombe (2020), "The regional distribution of federal fiscal balances: who pays, who gets and why it matters," *The School of Public Policy Publications*, 13 (June) <<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Federal-Fiscal-Balance-Mansell-Khanal-Tombe.pdf>>.

Figure 5

### Average annual per capita federal fiscal balances by province

1961–2018 • 2018 \$



Source: R. Mansell, M. Khanal, & T. Tombe (2020), "The regional distribution of federal fiscal balances: who pays, who gets and why it matters," *The School of Public Policy Publications*, 13 (June) <<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Federal-Fiscal-Balance-Mansell-Khanal-Tombe.pdf>>.

## Léger poll questions on population

### Question 4: Provincial “weight” in Canada since 1949

Question 4 asked respondents if their province’s share of Canada’s population has grown since 1949, when the last province to join Confederation, Newfoundland and Labrador, became part of Canada. The question here was designed to tease out if a respondent knew if their province was a “bigger” or “smaller” part of Canada’s population “pie.” The 1949-2025 comparison is illustrated in Figure 6.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 6

### Canada, provincial population proportions 1949 and 2025

	1949	2025	Change
Prince Edward Island	0.7%	0.4%	-0.3%
Newfoundland and Labrador	2.6%	1.3%	-1.3%
New Brunswick	3.8%	2.1%	-1.7%
Manitoba	5.6%	3.6%	-2.0%
Nova Scotia	4.7%	2.6%	-2.1%
Saskatchewan	6.2%	3.0%	-3.2%
Quebec	28.9%	21.9%	-7.0%
Territories	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%
Alberta	6.6%	11.9%	5.3%
British Columbia	8.3%	13.8%	5.5%
Ontario	32.6%	39.0%	6.4%

**Source:** Statistics Canada (2025), “Population estimates, quarterly—Table 17-10-0009-01,” Statistics Canada (December) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>> and Statistics Canada (2000), “Table 36-10-0280-01—Population of Canada and the provinces, annual, 1926 - 1960 (x 1,000),” Statistics Canada <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3610028001>>.

## Léger poll questions on threats from separatists

### Questions 5 and 6: Willingness to negotiate amid separatist threats

Questions 5 and 6 asked if Canadians were willing to negotiate on at least some demands if Western or Quebec separatism becomes a threat, with 55% willing to negotiate in the case of the West and 49% in the case of Quebec. Of note, 26% said “no” to negotiations vis-à-vis Western separatist demands, with 33% saying “no” if Quebec separation was an issue.

### Questions 7 and 8: Support for House of Commons and Senate reform amid separatist threats

Questions 7 and 8 asked if Canadians favoured reform of the House of Commons and Senate in the case of threats from Western separatism and Quebec separatism.

- “Yes” and “maybe” totalled 67% for House of Commons reform and 68% Senate reform in the face of Western separation, with 66% for both House of Commons and Senate reform in the face of Quebec separation threats.

## References

1. Author's calculation from Marc Bosc and André Gagnon (Eds.) (2017), "The House of Commons and Its Members" in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Third edition (Éditions Yvon Blaise) <[https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/procedure-and-practice-3/ch\\_04\\_1-e.html](https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/procedure-and-practice-3/ch_04_1-e.html)>.
2. Author's calculation from Parliament of Canada (n.d.), "Senators," Parliament of Canada <<https://learn.parl.ca/understanding-comprendre/en/people-in-parliament/senators/>>; Statistics Canada (2025), "Population estimates, quarterly—Table 17-10-0009-01," Statistics Canada (December) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>>.
3. R. Mansell, M. Khanal, & T. Tombe (2020), "The regional distribution of federal fiscal balances: who pays, who gets and why it matters" *The School of Public Policy Publications*, 13 (June) <<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Federal-Fiscal-Balance-Mansell-Khanal-Tombe.pdf>>.
4. Statistics Canada (2025), "Population estimates, quarterly—Table 17-10-0009-01," Statistics Canada (December) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>> and Statistics Canada (2000), "Table 36-10-0280-01—Population of Canada and the provinces, annual, 1926 - 1960 (x 1,000)," Statistics Canada <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3610028001>>.

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## About the authors

**Mark Milke**, PhD, is the founder and president of the Aristotle Foundation for Public Policy. Mark is a public policy analyst and author with six books, over 70 studies, and more than 1,000 columns published in the last 25 years. His policy work has been published by numerous think tanks in Canada and internationally. He is editor of the Aristotle Foundation's first book, *The 1867 Project: Why Canada Should Be Cherished—Not Cancelled*. Mark is also the past president of the Sir Winston Churchill Society of Calgary where he drove ahead the commissioning, fundraising, and installation of [a statue of Churchill in Calgary](#) on June 6, 2024—the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day.

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