

Perceptions of and confidence in the Canadian family justice system: Key findings from the 2022 National Justice Survey

March 2023¹

Ting Li
Research and Statistics Division
Department of Justice Canada

Introduction

The National Justice Survey (NJS) is an annual national public opinion research study conducted by the Department of Justice Canada. Some of the objectives of the NJS include:

- informing policy development;
- encouraging public engagement and communication; and
- supporting the mandate of the Department of Justice Canada.

The survey collects information on the views, knowledge, concerns and priorities of Canadians on important justice-related issues. The 2022 NJS collected information on the following:

- confidence in the fairness and accessibility of Canada's family justice system (FJS);
- confidence in the fairness and accessibility of Canada's criminal justice system;
- public awareness and understanding of the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights*;
- perceptions of Canada's youth criminal justice system, including the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*; and
- perceptions and concerns about cybercrime in Canada.

¹For more information, please contact: Rsd-drs@justice.gc.ca

This study focuses on the public’s opinion of the FJS. It provides information on Canadians’ perceptions and confidence in the fairness and accessibility of the FJS in detail, and compares public confidence in the criminal justice system with the FJS.

Methodology

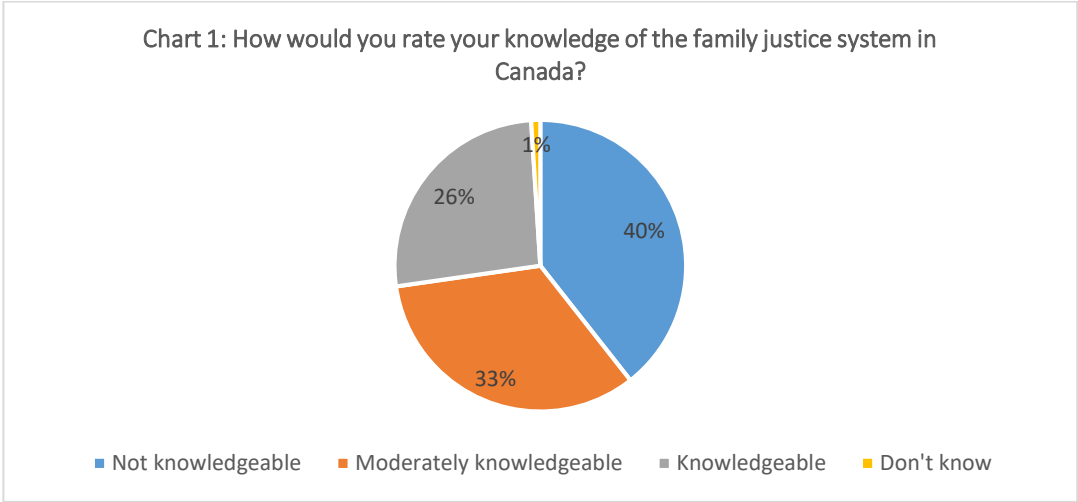
A random sample of potential respondents was selected using random digit telephone dialing (including both landline and cell phone numbers). The sample consists of 4,949 people aged 18 years and older living in each of Canada’s provinces and territories. Two more random samples were taken from this randomly generated population sample to populate the study sample: the first from the general population, and the second from those who have been identified as belonging to Indigenous or racialized ethno-cultural groups.

In order to compare the responses of Indigenous and racialized people to those of White people, an oversampling of Indigenous respondents and respondents from racialized ethno-cultural groups was required. The final sample was weighted to known population proportions, resulting in a sample that is reasonably generalizable to the Canadian population. Only findings that are statistically significant are presented in this Research in Brief.

Findings

Many Canadians reported a low level of knowledge of the FJS in Canada

Overall, just over one in four (26%) Canadians reported being knowledgeable about the FJS, and 40% indicated they were not knowledgeable (Chart 1).



Data source: National Justice Survey 2022

Indigenous people reported themselves to be more knowledgeable than White people about the FJS (32% versus 26%). Canadians from racialized groups were more likely to indicate they were not knowledgeable about the FJS than White people (44% vs. 38% not knowledgeable).

People in the older age groups (55 to 64 years) reported being more knowledgeable about the FJS than younger people (18 to 24 years) (29% vs. 19% knowledgeable). Canadians living in urban² areas were more likely to say they were not knowledgeable about the FJS compared to those residing in rural³ areas (40% vs. 34% not knowledgeable).

People with some high school education (36%) reported themselves to be more knowledgeable than people with other education credentials. For example, 23% of those with a registered apprenticeship or other trade certificate or diploma, and 24% of those with a bachelor’s degree reported to be knowledgeable about the FJS.

People with a household income of \$20,000 to just under \$40,000 reported being more knowledgeable about the FJS compared with people in a higher household income group of \$100,000 to just under \$120,000 (32% vs. 24%).

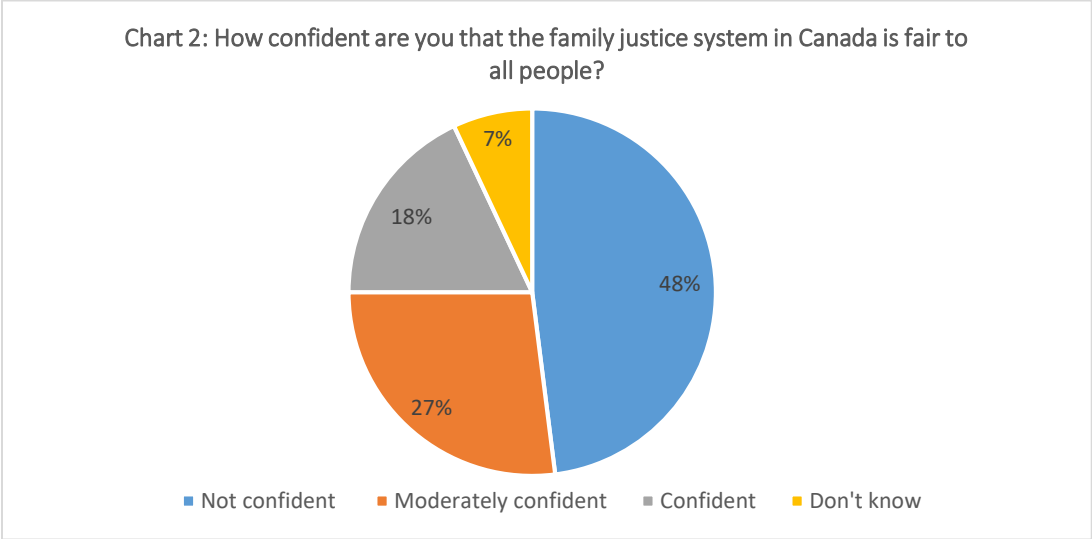
People born outside of Canada were more likely to say they were not knowledgeable about the FJS compared with those born in Canada (43% vs. 38%).

Students attending school full-time (57%) were more likely to have less knowledge of the FJS compared to those with other employment statuses; for example, those working full-time (41%), unemployed but looking for work (38%), and retired respondents (35%).

Individuals with previous involvement with the FJS were more knowledgeable about this system than those without previous involvement (65% vs. 23%).

Less than half of Canadians reported confidence in the fairness of the Canadian FJS

Close to half (48%) of Canadians stated that they were not confident the FJS is fair to all people (Chart 2). Indigenous respondents were less likely than White respondents to believe the system is fair to all people (63% vs. 50% not confident).



Data Source: National Justice Survey 2022

² This includes cities, towns, and suburbs.

³ This refers to a small or sparsely populated community, with fewer than 5,000 or so residents, usually with considerable open/farmland surrounding it.

In contrast, Canadians who identified as being from racialized groups were more likely to say the system is fair to all people compared with those who identified as White (29% vs. 16% confident).

Men were more likely than women to indicate the system is fair to all people (20% vs. 17%). Regionally, those who lived in Nova Scotia were less confident that the system is fair to all people compared with residents of Saskatchewan (63% vs. 39% not confident). Those who lived in urban communities were more likely than rural residents to believe the system is fair to all people (19% vs. 14% confident).

Older Canadians (65 years old or older) were more likely than younger Canadians (18 to 24 years old) (22% vs. 9%) to state that the system is fair to all people. Similarly, retired respondents were more confident that the system is fair to all people compared with students attending school full-time (23% vs. 10%).

Respondents with a bachelor’s degree were more likely than those with a registered apprenticeship or other trade certificate or diploma to say the system is fair to all people (20% vs. 13%).

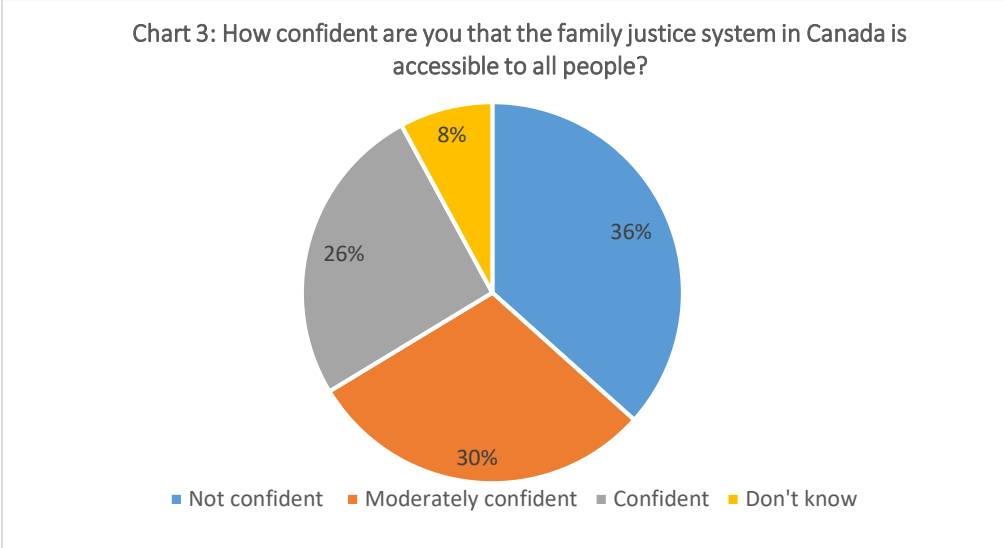
Those with a household income of \$150,000 or higher were more likely to feel that the system is fair to all compared with people with a household income between \$120,000 and just under \$150,000 (23% vs. 16%).

Participants born outside of Canada were more confident that the system is fair compared to participants born in Canada (30% vs. 15%).

Canadians who indicated they have been involved in the FJS were less likely to believe that the FJS is fair to all compared with people without previous involvement (59% vs. 47% not confident).

Most Canadians reported a lack of confidence in the accessibility of the FJS to all people

Overall, just over a quarter (26%) of Canadians believed the FJS was accessible to all people (Chart 3). Indigenous respondents were less confident than White respondents (48% vs. 37% not confident) in the accessibility of the FJS. In contrast, racialized Canadians were more likely than those who identified as White to say they were confident the FJS was accessible to all people (32% vs. 25% confident).



Data source: National Justice Survey 2022

Respondents in the age group of 45 to 54 years old were more likely than their younger counterparts of 18 to 24 years old to believe the FJS was accessible to all people (32% vs. 19%). Men were more likely than women to have the same belief (29% vs. 23%).

Respondents with some high school education were more likely than those with a bachelor’s degree to say the FJS was accessible to all people (40% vs. 24%). Those with a household income of \$150,000 and above were more likely to feel the system was accessible in comparison with people whose income was between \$120,000 to just under \$150,000 (30% vs. 22%).

People who were born outside of Canada were more likely to believe the system was accessible than their counterparts who were born in Canada (33% vs. 24%). Moreover, retired respondents were more likely to believe that the system was accessible compared to students attending school full-time (30% vs. 13%).

People with previous involvement in the FJS were less likely to believe that the system was accessible to all compared with people without previous involvement (47% vs. 36% not confident).

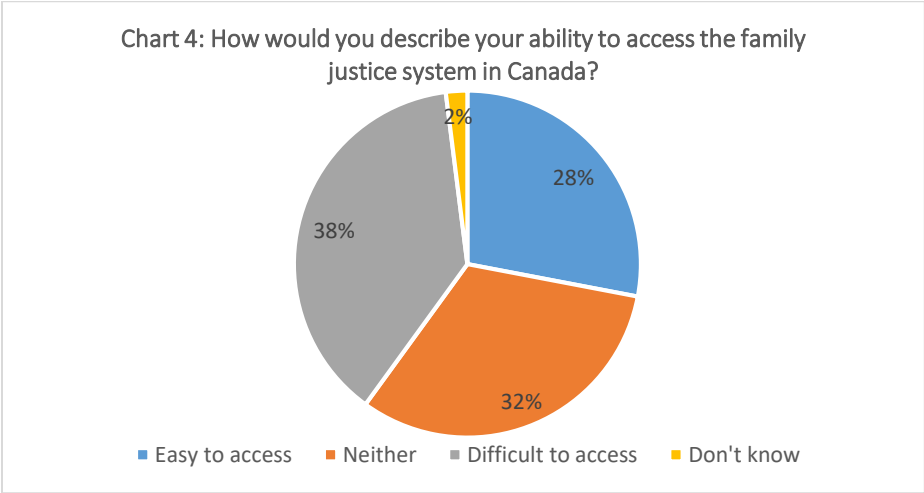
Very few Canadians had recent contact with the FJS

Overall, six percent of Canadians reported they have been involved with the FJS in Canada within the past two years. Indigenous people were more likely than White people to have been involved in the FJS (10% vs. 6%). Black Canadians were more likely than White Canadians to have been involved with the system (10% vs. 6%).

People in the age group of 45 to 54 years old were more likely to be involved with FJS compared with those 65 or older (9% vs. 3%). Those with a household income under \$20,000 were more likely to be involved with the system than those with a household income of \$150,000 and above (14% vs. 4%). Those who said they were not in the workforce were more likely than people who were retired to be involved in the system (10% vs 3%).

Almost two in five Canadians indicated that they had difficulty accessing the FJS

Overall, 38% of Canadians⁴ who had contact with the FJS indicated that they had a difficult time accessing the FJS in Canada (Chart 4).



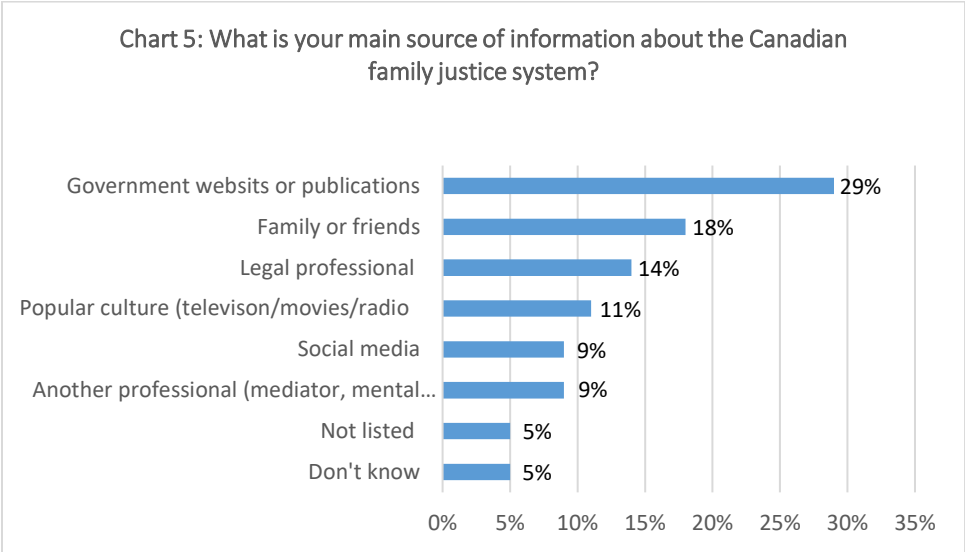
Data source: National Justice Survey 2022

⁴ This is the percent of people who had contact and had difficulty.

Canadians aged 35-44 were more likely than those aged 45-54 to say the system was difficult to access at the time of the survey (51% vs. 30%).

Canadians were more likely to use government websites as their main source of information on the FJS

Close to one-third (29%) of Canadians reported that they were more likely to use government websites or publications as their main source of information about the Canadian FJS than other sources. Fewer said they used family or friends (18%), a legal professional (14%) or popular culture⁵ (11%) as a primary source of information. Only 9% of respondents said social media as a key source (Chart 5).

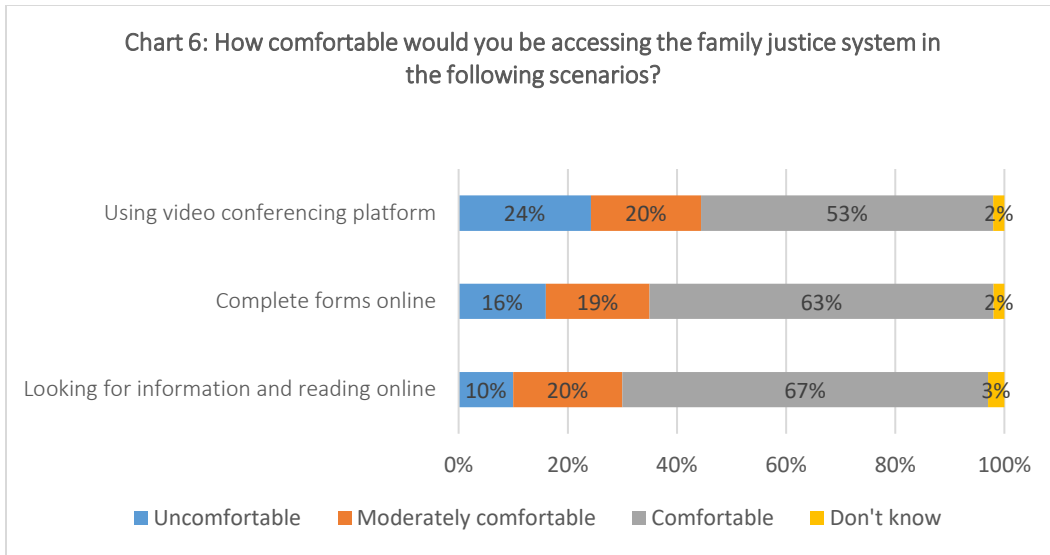


Data source: National Justice Survey 2022

Most Canadians were comfortable accessing information on the FJS online

Overall, most Canadians were comfortable looking for information and reading about the FJS online (67%), completing forms online using fillable PDF forms (63%), and with using video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meet; 53%) (Chart 6).

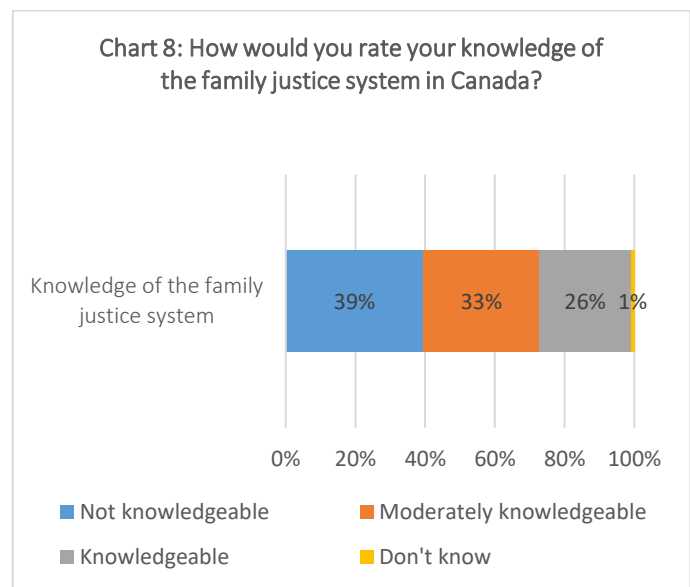
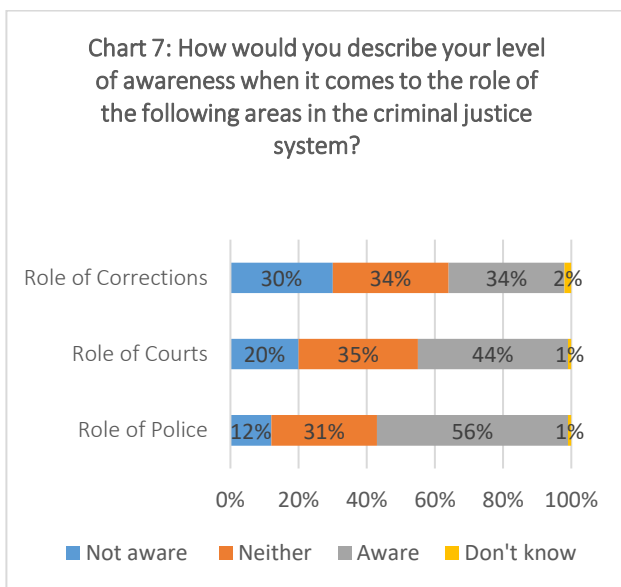
⁵ Popular culture includes television, movies, radio and magazine.



Data source: National Justice Survey 2022

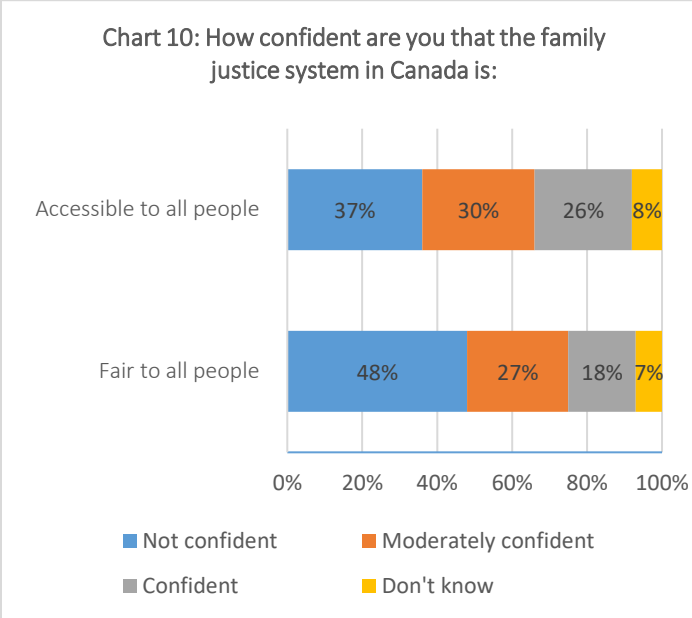
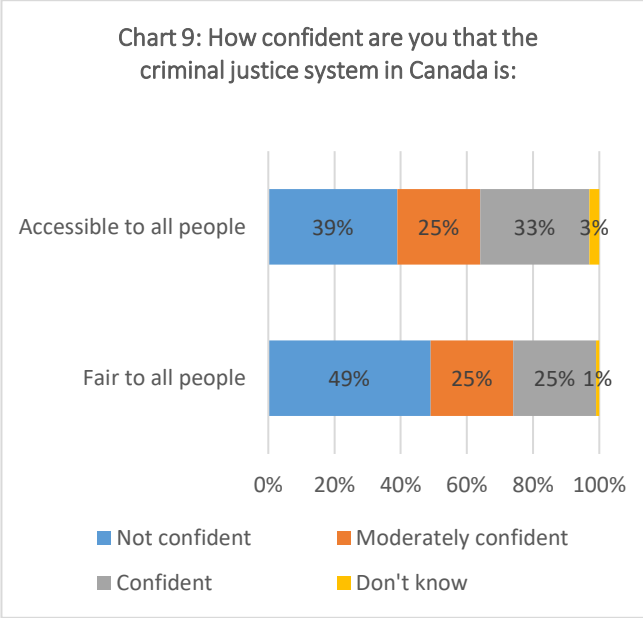
Canadians reported being more aware or knowledgeable of the criminal justice system (CJS) compared to the FJS

The 2022 NJS includes the questions for public confidence in the criminal and family justice systems. While the 2022 NJS asks respondents to rate their **awareness** of the CJS in three areas: police, court and corrections, it asks the respondents to rate their **knowledge** of the FJS overall. In general, people were more aware of the CJS than they were knowledgeable of the FJS. For instance, 56% of respondents who indicated that they were aware of the role of the police, 44% of the role of the court, and 34% of the role of corrections (Chart 7) compared with 26% of respondents said they were knowledgeable of the FJS (Chart 8).



Data source: National Justice Survey 2022

Canadians had more confidence in the CJS than in the FJS (Charts 9 and 10). Overall, 25% of respondents believed the CJS is fair to all people compared with 18% of respondents who had the same belief in the FJS. Furthermore, 33% of respondents were confident that the Canadian CJS is accessible to all people compared with 26% of people who believed the FJS is accessible to all.



Data source: National Justice Survey 2022

Conclusion

The 2022 NJS results indicated that Canadians’ perception and confidence regarding the FJS varied according to their previous involvement with the FJS and demographic characteristics, such as Indigenous and ethno-cultural identity, age, gender, region, educational attainment, income, employment status and place of birth. Some highlights include:

- Indigenous people and people from racialized groups were more likely to report themselves as more knowledgeable about the FJS than White Canadians;
- Indigenous respondents were less likely than White respondents to believe the system is fair and accessible to all people;
- Canadians who indicated they had been involved in the FJS were less likely to believe that the FJS is fair and accessible to all compared with people without previous involvement;
- Close to 40 percent of Canadians (38%) who had contact with the FJS reported that they had a difficult time accessing the FJS;
- Close to one-third of Canadians reported they were more likely to use government websites or publications as main sources of information about the Canadian FJS than other sources; and
- Canadians were more aware of the CJS than the FJS. Likewise, they had more confidence in the CJS than in the FJS.