



Gouvernement du Canada
Bureau du Conseil privé

Government of Canada
Privy Council Office

The Trust, Information and Digital Ecosystems Study (TIDES)

Methodological report

Prepared for the Privy Council Office (PCO)

Supplier: EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

Contract Number: CW2365761

Contract Value: \$276,807.62 (tax included)

Award Date: June 18, 2024

Delivery Date: March 6, 2026

Registration Number: POR 009-24

For more information on this report, please contact: POR-ROP@pco-bcp.gc.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

Canada

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This public opinion research report presents the methodology for the conduct of four online surveys conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of the Privy Council Office (PCO).

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Catalogue Number: CP22-244/2026E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-0-660-99044-6

Catalogue Number (French Report): CP22-244/2026F-PDF

ISBN: 978-0-660-99045-3

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SUMMARY

A. Background and Methodology

The Privy Council Office (PCO) is the hub of non-partisan, public service support to the Prime Minister and Cabinet and its decision-making structures. Led by the Clerk of the Privy Council, PCO helps the Government implement its vision and respond effectively and quickly to issues facing the government and the country.

Public distrust in governments and public institutions is a stressor on public policy effectiveness and on democratic resilience. Tracking trust vs. distrust in government institutions and associated stressors, such as social discord, fragmented information ecosystems, disinformation and adversarial influence, and challenges to pluralistic democratic consensus can inform government action, elevate citizen concerns, and identify pathways to measurably improve trustworthiness in the behaviours of government and public institutions. To support the government's agenda on these issues, PCO carried out a series of research initiatives, aiming to:

- Build a greater understanding of the factors that shape individuals' and groups' relationships with information and institutions in the digital age;
- Deepen and broaden the Government's understanding of challenges in maintaining and enhancing public trust and confidence in democracy;
- Develop a more robust understanding of the human and system-level factors that are associated with higher or lower trust in democratic processes, government institutions, and government actions; and
- Identify opportunities to identify and test potential interventions designed to augment Government actions, processes, and/or communications to increase its own trustworthiness.

Building upon the success of the first four waves of TIDES (December 2022 to March 2025), PCO established a new phase of TIDES that involved five additional waves of data collection fielded in the 2024-26 fiscal years that:

- Continued to broadly examine the challenge of rising distrust in elected governments and public institutions in Canada (in two cross-sectional waves, each 25-minute surveys of 3,000 Canadians/wave); and,

- Tracked the influence of global democratic events on Canadians' democratic attitudes and outlooks, more specifically (in three longitudinal waves, each 25-minute surveys of 2,000 Canadians/wave).

The goal of the study was to provide PCO and other interested government departments with research-based information on Canadians' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours relating to a variety of topics under the broader umbrellas of public trust, stressors on trust, and democratic resilience. The study aimed to build generalizable knowledge within and across policy contexts, identifying unique and horizontal stressors and potential interventions. This report outlines the methodology used in undertaking this study.

The target audience for the study was adults living in Canada 18 years of age and older, aiming for appropriate representation of gender, age, education, and regional split (Canadian citizens as well as permanent residents).

The study consisted of five survey waves. A total of 3,000 respondents were surveyed in waves 5 and 9, and 2,000 for waves 6, 7 and 8. The sample included general population respondents in all survey waves, as well as an oversample of selected underrepresented populations (for example, Indigenous Peoples, 2SLGBTQI+, low socioeconomic-status, young adults (aged 18-30), recent immigrants to Canada, and/or visible minorities) varying wave-to-wave.

B. Expenditure

The contract amount for this project was **\$276,807.62** (including HST).

C. Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)

APPENDICES

A. Detailed Methodology

Data was collected through a series of four online survey waves with Canadians 18 years of age and older, randomly recruited from EKOS' probability-based online panel. In each wave EKOS conducted an approximately 25-minute online survey with a sample of 3,000 respondents for waves 5 and 9, and 2,000 respondents for waves 6, 7 and 8. The fifth and ninth waves consisted of approximately 2,500 general population respondents, and roughly 500 respondents from an oversample of underrepresented populations identified by the client. Waves 6, 7 and 8 consisted of approximately 1,750 general population respondents, and roughly 250 respondents were oversampled from underrepresented populations identified by the client. Section A4 provides more details about the sample sizes and sample composition in each of the four survey waves.

In each wave, efforts were made to include only panelists who did not participate in a previous wave (with the exception of repeat respondents for the longitudinal waves), however some panelists in hard-to-reach groups (such as those under 35 years of age, those with high school education, etc.) were surveyed more than once over the course of the study.

The general population sample frame for each survey wave consisted of roughly 50% women and 50% men for each age group (18 to 34; 35 to 54; 55+), and for each region:

- Atlantic Canada (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick);
- Quebec;
- Ontario;
- Manitoba/Saskatchewan/Nunavut;
- Alberta/Northwest Territories;
- British Columbia/Yukon.

The survey results for waves 5 and 9 (n=3,000) are valid within a margin of error of ± 1.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, while the survey results for wave 6, 7 and 8 (n=2,000) are valid within a margin of error of ± 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

A1. Survey Programming and Pre-Test

PCO provided EKOS with the final English questionnaire for each survey wave. EKOS translated, programmed and pre-tested the questionnaire for each survey wave with at least 30 respondents (a minimum of 10 English and 10 French pre-test completions each wave). Appended to the pre-test questionnaire was a diagnostic battery of questions which allowed respondents to provide an assessment of the clarity and flow of the questionnaire and provide any final comments about the survey. The questionnaire for each survey wave was finalized in consultation with PCO.

A2. Survey Administration/Quality Control

The final questionnaire in each survey wave was administered to the full sample using a bilingual e-mail invitation and a bilingual questionnaire, installed on a web server controlled by EKOS. The e-mail invitation included a description of the survey (in both languages) along with a link to the survey website. When respondents clicked on the survey link, they were taken to a website containing the survey instrument. Once inside the survey, the respondent had the choice of completing the questionnaire in French or English (and they could change the survey language between French and English at any time). The survey database was mounted using a Personalized Identification Number (PIN), so only individuals with a PIN were allowed access to the survey (the PIN was included in the e-mail invitation). The PIN also allowed respondents to exit and re-enter the survey at any time to complete or change information before the questionnaire was completed/submitted.

Survey data collection adhered to the Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research—Online Surveys, as well as all applicable industry standards. EKOS informed respondents of their rights under the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act and ensured that those rights were protected throughout the research process. This included: informing respondents of the purpose of the research; identifying both the sponsoring department and the research supplier; informing respondents that their participation in the study is voluntary, and that the information provided would be administered according to the requirements of the Privacy Act.

Both the e-mail invitation and the survey instructions included an e-mail address and a 1-800 number that respondents could use in the event that there were questions about the study or completing the questionnaire.

In order to increase the response rate to the surveys, all non-respondents were sent up to three bilingual reminder e-mails, emphasizing the relevance and importance of the survey, and asking

them to take the time needed to participate. Additionally, incentives of \$15 were offered to everyone aged 18-24, to certain groups aged 25-34, as well as certain oversample groups, in an effort to increase response from these hard-to-reach groups. Some of our non-responding panelists (those aged 18-34, certain oversample groups, and other target groups who did not respond after the reminder emails) were also called by an interviewer from our call centre to remind them about the survey, and re-send the survey invitation if needed.

A3. Sample Source/Data Analysis

The sample for the survey was drawn from EKOS' in-house probability-based panel, *Probit*. *Probit* is a research panel that has been designed by EKOS to provide statistically representative data. Our online panel offers complete coverage of the Canadian population (i.e., Internet, phone, cell phone), random recruitment (in other words, participants are recruited randomly, they do not opt themselves into our panel), and equal probability sampling. All respondents to our panel are recruited by telephone using random digit dialling and are confirmed by live interviewers.

Our panel is considered to be probability based as it is recruited from random digit dial (RDD) sample, both landline and cell phone. The overall panel size is roughly 130,000 Canadian households. Random stratified samples are drawn from the panel database for individual research assignments.

Once the data for each survey wave was collected, the database was reviewed for data quality. Coding of open-ended questions was also completed. Survey results were weighted based on Statistics Canada data according to age, gender, region and education to ensure the sample was representative of the general public aged 18 years and older. Based on an analysis plan provided by PCO, EKOS provided results for each survey wave in the form of Excel data tables and SPSS files.

A4. Overview of Survey Waves

Below we outline the field dates, sample sizes, sample composition (general public and underrepresented populations), and response rates¹ for each of the five survey waves conducted as part of this study.

Table 1: Overview of Survey Waves

Month	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9
Field Date	Aug 6-Sep 1 2024	Oct 8-Nov 3 2024	Nov 26-Dec 17 2024	Jan 30-Feb 24 2025	Oct 24-Nov 20 2025
Mode/Recruitment	Cross-sectional	Longitudinal	Longitudinal	Longitudinal	Cross-sectional
Sample Size	3,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	3,000
General Public	2,595	1,832	1,813	1,936	2,510
Oversample	405	168	187	64	490

Table 2: Response Rate by Wave

Month	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9
Total Sample	55,755	52,127	18,903	18,023	38,807
Invalid (email bounced, not correct person)	11,069	23,704	2,817	2,698	8,440
Valid Sample	44,686	28,423	16,086	15,325	30,367
Partial complete	220	250	113	91	267
Refused	352	354	93	39	260
No response	40,900	25,640	13,815	13,168	26,683
Responding					
Complete	3,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	3,000
Ineligible	1	5	2	1	4
Quota filled	213	174	63	26	153
Total responding	3,214	2,179	2,065	2,027	3,157
Response Rate (Total responding over Valid sample)	7.2 %	7.7%	12.8%	13.2%	10.4%

¹ The response rates were calculated using the formula recommended by the Government of Canada:

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{\text{Responding units}}{(\text{Unresolved} + \text{In-scope non-responding} + \text{Responding units})}$$