

PROSTITUTION

Gender Shapes Views on Debate Over Prostitution in Canada

Half of Canadians believe adults should be allowed to engage in consensual prostitution, but women are not as convinced as men that decriminalization is the best course of action.

[TORONTO – Nov. 27, 2009] – As the Ontario Superior Court ponders a legal challenge to the validity of existing regulations regarding prostitution, a new Angus Reid Public Opinion poll conducted for *Maclean's* finds that half of Canadians would allow adults to engage in consensual prostitution.

The survey also shows that few Canadians are actually aware of the legal status of the sex trade in the country, and finds that male respondents are more welcoming of changes to existing legislation, while women are more resistant to amending the Criminal Code.

The Status of Prostitution in Canada: Low Level of Awareness

Under current regulations, exchanging sex for money in Canada is legal, but the Criminal Code makes many activities surrounding prostitution illegal.

About one-in-four Canadians (23%) are aware that exchanging sex for money is legal in the country, while two-thirds (69%) believe this is

KEY FINDINGS

- **Only 23% know that it is legal to exchange sex for money in Canada**
- **60% support or oppose allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels**
- **50% would decriminalize some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allow adults to engage in consensual prostitution**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

From October 8 to October 9, 2009, Angus Reid Strategies conducted an online survey among 1,006 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

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currently illegal.

People in Quebec (31%) are more likely to know that exchanging sex for money is legal in Canada.

The Court Case: An Even Split on Fairness and Safety

The Ontario Superior Court is currently reviewing a legal challenge to the provisions in the Criminal Code that prohibit "public communication for the purposes of prostitution", and make it illegal to "own, run, occupy or transport anyone to a bawdy house (or brothel)".

Canadians are evenly divided in their assessment of both sides of the issue, with 41 per cent believing the existing provisions are fair to the purpose of protecting the public good, and 41 per cent claiming that these provisions are unfair and force prostitutes into unsafe situations.

In British Columbia, where pig farmer Robert Pickton was convicted in 2007 for the murder of six women, almost half of respondents (48%) believe prostitutes are being forced into unsafe situations because of the Criminal Code provisions.

The Scandinavian Way: Punish the "Clients"

In some countries, including Sweden and Norway, prostitution is regarded as a form of exploitation. Existing regulations make it a criminal offence to buy services from prostitutes, and contemplate both fines and sentences to "clients" of prostitutes.

Canadians are not embracing this approach. Less than a handful of respondents—a statistically insignificant proportion—would only punish the prostitutes, and eight per cent in the entire country would punish the "clients." However, one-third of Canadians (34%) believe both the prostitutes and their "clients" should be punished.

Still, almost half of Canadians (48%) regard prostitution as an issue that does not require punishment, and believe that adults should be allowed to engage in consensual prostitution. The proportion of respondents who agree with this view is consistently high across the entire country, with the exception of Atlantic Canada.

Taking the Sex Trade Off the Streets

One of the key issues in the Ontario Superior Court case is a proposal to allow prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels. Proponents of the change in the Criminal Code provisions think this will make them safer,

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and stop them from working on the streets. The opponents of this change believe that allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels would lead to a legitimization of prostitution, which could turn Canada into a safe haven for sex tourism.

Respondents were presented with both sides of the argument, and backed allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels by a two-to-one margin (60% support the idea, 30% oppose it). Quebec and British Columbia had the highest level of strong support for the change, while Atlantic Canadians voice the strongest level of opposition.

The Policy Options: Rejection of the Status Quo

Respondents were presented with three policy options to deal with the issue of prostitution in Canada. Only 16 per cent of Canadians support the continuation of the status quo, which criminalizes some of the activities surrounding prostitution. One-in-four (25%) would prefer to take a tougher approach by prohibiting prostitution entirely, and making it illegal to exchange sex for money.

Half of Canadians (50%) think it is time to decriminalize some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allow adults to engage in consensual prostitution. This position was shared by a majority of respondents in British Columbia, Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Analysis: The Gender Divide

Throughout the entire survey, male respondents are more welcoming of prostitution than female respondents. On the question of allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels, 71 per cent of men voice support, compared to only 50 per cent of women.

On the punishment question, three-in-five men (60%) think nobody should be punished for engaging in prostitution, but only 36 per cent of women share this view. In fact, a majority of women want to either punish both prostitutes and their "clients" (43%) or the "clients" exclusively (11%).

A large disparity also ensues on the policy question, where three-in-five men (62%) would prefer to decriminalize some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allow adults to engage in consensual prostitution. Only 40 per cent of women consent to this option.

The results show that women are both more likely to perceive prostitution as an exploitation issue, as evidenced by the higher level of support for punishing those engaged in the trade. It is remarkable that, despite the fact that many of the arguments that have been used in the Ontario Superior Court case are related to safety, Canadian women are, at this point, not convinced that decriminalization is the solution.

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Prostitution

Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about prostitution in Canada. From what you have seen, read or heard, is it legal or illegal to exchange sex for money in Canada?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Legal	23%	23%	21%	11%	31%	18%	12%
Illegal	69%	69%	72%	85%	60%	73%	79%
Not sure	8%	7%	7%	4%	9%	9%	9%

Prostitution

Exchanging sex for money is currently legal in Canada. However, the Criminal Code makes many activities surrounding prostitution illegal.

The Ontario Superior Court is currently reviewing a legal challenge to the provisions in the Criminal Code that prohibit public communication for the purposes of prostitution, and make it illegal to own, run, occupy or transport anyone to a bawdy house (or brothel). From what you have seen, read or heard, which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
These provisions are fair to the purpose of protecting the public good	41%	36%	43%	43%	43%	40%	45%
These provisions are unfair and force prostitutes into unsafe situations	41%	48%	46%	34%	39%	45%	31%
Not sure	17%	16%	11%	23%	18%	15%	24%

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Prostitution

In some countries, existing regulations make it a criminal offence to buy services from prostitutes, and contemplate both fines and sentences to “clients” of prostitutes. Thinking about this, which of these options do you think would be best for Canada when it comes to prostitution?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Only punishing the prostitutes	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Only punishing the “clients”	8%	9%	15%	6%	8%	7%	4%
Punishing both prostitutes and “clients”	34%	29%	33%	36%	33%	35%	44%
Nobody should be punished—adults should be allowed to engage in consensual prostitution	48%	50%	48%	49%	48%	51%	39%
Not sure	9%	11%	4%	8%	11%	7%	12%

Prostitution

In some countries, existing regulations make it a criminal offence to buy services from prostitutes, and contemplate both fines and sentences to “clients” of prostitutes. Thinking about this, which of these options do you think would be best for Canada when it comes to prostitution?

	Total	Men	Women	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Only punishing the prostitutes	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Only punishing the “clients”	8%	6%	11%	14%	7%	5%
Punishing both prostitutes and “clients”	34%	25%	43%	34%	34%	36%
Nobody should be punished—adults should be allowed to engage in consensual prostitution	48%	60%	36%	42%	50%	52%
Not sure	9%	9%	9%	10%	10%	7%

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Prostitution

Some people support allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels because they believe this will make them safer, and stop them from working on the streets. Other people oppose allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels because they believe it would lead to a legitimization of prostitution, which could turn Canada into a safe haven for sex tourism. Thinking about the views of both sides, do you support or oppose allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Strongly support	20%	26%	22%	7%	15%	31%	12%
Moderately support	40%	37%	41%	56%	41%	36%	37%
Moderately oppose	11%	12%	17%	9%	13%	10%	4%
Strongly oppose	19%	17%	15%	19%	22%	12%	29%
Not sure	10%	9%	4%	9%	9%	10%	18%

Prostitution

Some people support allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels because they believe this will make them safer, and stop them from working on the streets. Other people oppose allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels because they believe it would lead to a legitimization of prostitution, which could turn Canada into a safe haven for sex tourism. Thinking about the views of both sides, do you support or oppose allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels?

	Total	Men	Women	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Strongly support	20%	25%	16%	16%	21%	23%
Moderately support	40%	46%	34%	40%	42%	37%
Moderately oppose	11%	8%	14%	14%	11%	9%
Strongly oppose	19%	14%	23%	17%	19%	21%
Not sure	10%	7%	12%	13%	7%	10%

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Prostitution							
Generally speaking, which of these policy options would you personally prefer to deal with the issue of prostitution in Canada?							
Region							
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Prohibiting prostitution entirely, and making it illegal to exchange sex for money	25%	26%	25%	26%	24%	24%	35%
Keeping the status quo, which criminalizes some of the activities surrounding prostitution	16%	12%	17%	11%	17%	17%	12%
Decriminalizing some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allowing adults to engage in consensual prostitution	50%	54%	49%	53%	50%	53%	42%
Not sure	8%	7%	9%	10%	9%	6%	11%

Prostitution						
Generally speaking, which of these policy options would you personally prefer to deal with the issue of prostitution in Canada?						
	Total	Men	Women	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Prohibiting prostitution entirely, and making it illegal to exchange sex for money	25%	19%	31%	29%	25%	23%
Keeping the status quo, which criminalizes some of the activities surrounding prostitution	16%	12%	19%	21%	14%	13%
Decriminalizing some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allowing adults to engage in consensual prostitution	50%	62%	40%	42%	52%	57%
Not sure	8%	6%	10%	8%	9%	8%

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Angus Reid Public Opinion is the public affairs practice of Vision Critical—a global research and technology company specializing in custom online panels, private communities, and innovative online methods. Vision Critical is a leader in the use of the Internet and rich media technology to collect high-quality, in-depth insights for a wide array of clients. Dr. Angus Reid and the Angus Reid Public Opinion team are pioneers in online research methodologies, and have been conducting online surveys since 1995

Vision Critical is now one of the largest market research enterprises in the world. In addition to its five offices in Canada—located in Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Toronto, and Montreal—the firm also has offices in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, London, Paris and Sydney. Its team of specialists provides solutions across every type and sector of research, and currently serves over 200 international clients.

Angus Reid Public Opinion polls are conducted using the Angus Reid Forum (www.angusreidforum.com), Springboard America (www.springboardamerica.com) and Springboard UK (www.springboarduk.com) online panels, which are carefully recruited to ensure representation across all demographic and psychographic segments of these populations. Panel members pass through rigorous screening and a double opt-in process ensuring highly motivated and responsive members. These premier online survey platforms present respondents with highly visual, interactive, and engaging surveys, ensuring that panel members provide thoughtful and reliable responses. Each survey is actively sampled and weighted to model that characteristics of the universe required and employs the latest in quality control techniques to ensure data validity.

Angus Reid, the only public opinion firm to exclusively use online methods to follow the views of the electorate during the 2008 federal campaign, offered the most accurate prediction of the results of Canada's 40th election.

<http://bit.ly/4zxf1S>

Since 2006, Angus Reid has covered eight provincial elections in Canada—more than any other pollster in the country—and the results have accurately predicted the outcome of each of these democratic processes.

More information on the way Angus Reid conducts public opinion research can be found at <http://bit.ly/3z0u1l>

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**For more information, please contact
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

Copies of this poll are available on our website:

<http://www.visioncritical.com/category/global-opinions-and-trends>

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