

COVID and Attitudes Towards the Role of Government

The Role of Government

There is strong evidence that all types of respondents see the government's responsibility in supporting society as more important now because of COVID. Nearly two-thirds of respondents, for example, said they now saw the role of government in supporting society as much more or somewhat more important than they did before the pandemic. In fact, very few respondents (3.6 percent) viewed the government's support role as less important now.

I am normally not much of a political person, but I have to admit, how the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal branches of government in coordination with the Public Health unit have all come together to see that they have put the lives and livelihoods of all Canadians first, has amazed me. There has been no hesitation on doing something better or more to see that we all get through this together. Let's hope that it will continue even after COVID-19, I mean the collaboration, because we all know the funding cannot possibly continue but it has been a life saver for a lot of Canadians if not most Canadians — Older female office worker

These views were impacted marginally by whether respondents were receiving direct income support from the government. Two-thirds of those who relied on CERB/CESB, ODSP or OW viewed the role of government as much more or somewhat more important. Amongst those who did not rely on public support during COVID, nearly 60 percent still felt the role of government in supporting society was now much more or somewhat more important.

All levels of government have done such a good job, working across the country to support the populations in each area — Older woman receiving CERB

Chart 1: Changes in views about the role of government in supporting society (%)

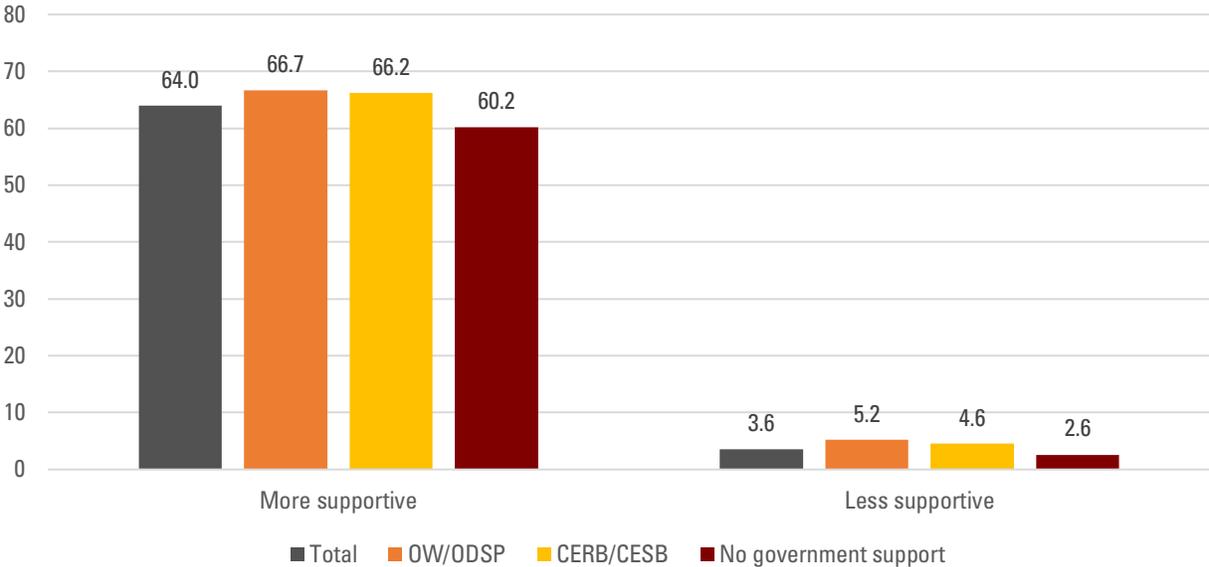
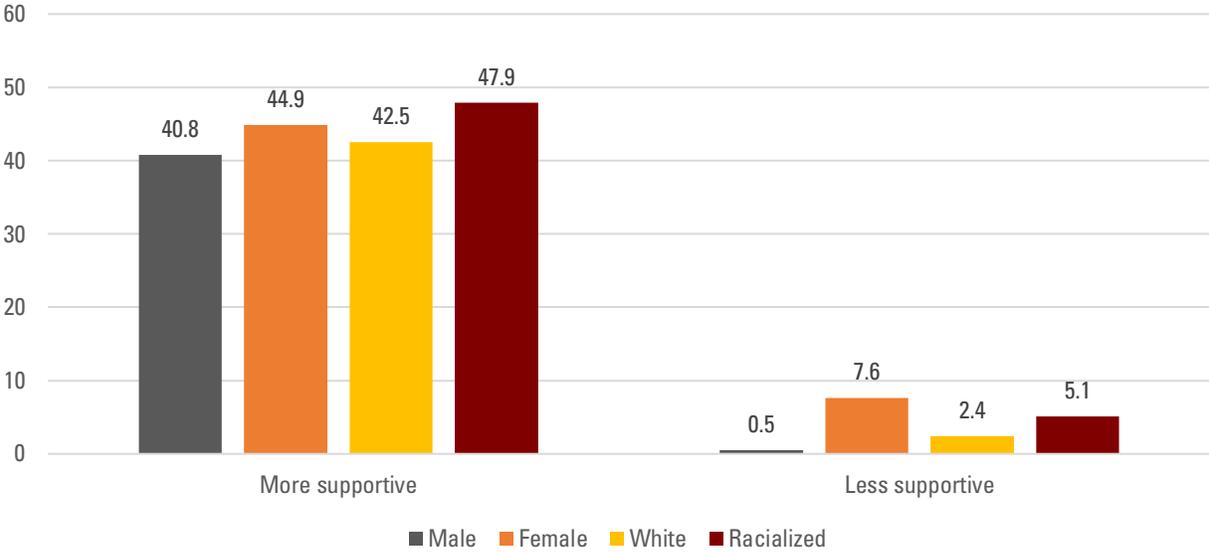


Chart 2 reports findings related to views about the role of government by gender and race. Men and white respondents were marginally less likely to report that they were more supportive of the role of government.

Chart 2: Changes in views about the role of government in supporting society by gender and race (%)



Satisfaction with Government Responses

Respondents were split on how satisfied they were with governments' public health and economic responses to the pandemic. A slight majority of 52.2 percent were satisfied with governments' public health response, and 54.2 percent were satisfied with governments' economic response. This is perhaps not surprising, since these issues have been the most polarizing in public discussions. Some respondents pointed to the way that the pandemic highlighted long-standing problems with the country's economic and policy model.

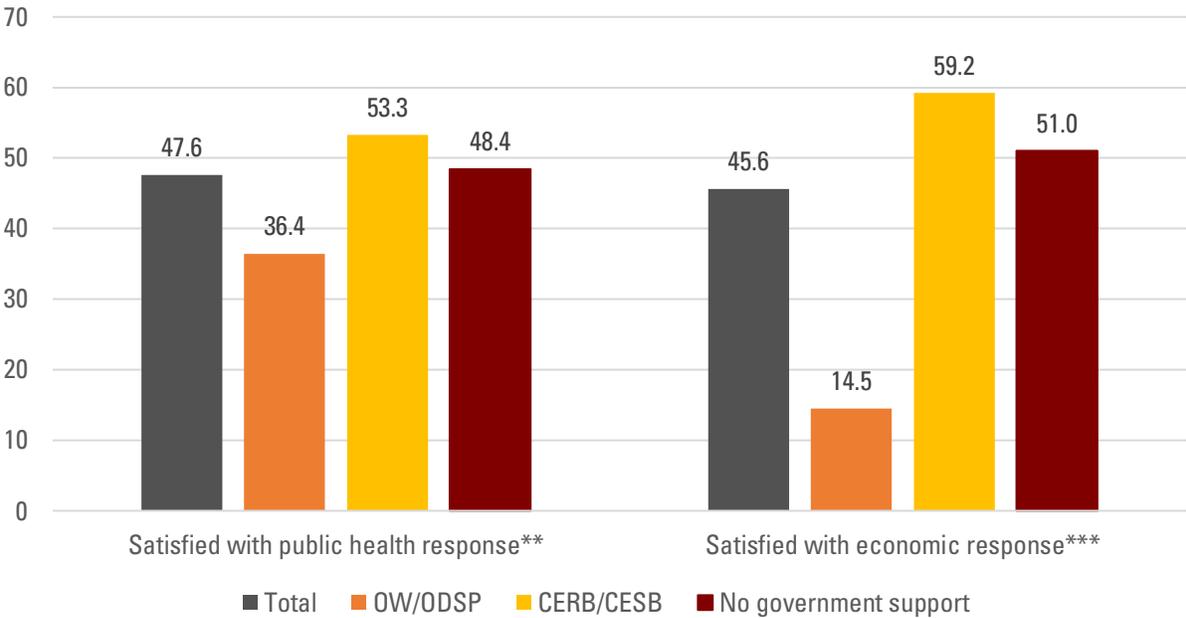
The government response from a health perspective has been great, but the economic response is so aggressively anti-worker it's shocking — and it exposes deep-seated flaws of the neoliberal model of capitalism the Canadian economy has embraced. Working people are being screwed for the benefit of the rich. Still. Even in a pandemic — Young man working in manufacturing

A closer look at the different locations of respondents reveals some variations in satisfaction with government (Chart 3). Workers relying on pre-COVID forms of social support were generally less satisfied with the public health and economic response compared to those who either accessed CERB/CESB or who did not require any public financial support. Those receiving ODSP were the least satisfied with governments' public health responses, at 36.4 percent. On the question of governments' economic responses, CERB/CESB recipients were the most satisfied, at 59.2 percent, while over 85 percent of ODSP and OW recipients were dissatisfied with governments' economic responses. There were no significant differences between men and women, or between white and racialized respondents related to their satisfaction with the government's response to the COVID crisis.

The CERB lifted my husband and I out of the poverty from pathetically low ODSP rates. If not for my additional work from home income, we would have suffered much more since ODSP clawed back CERB. Any increase went back in paying higher costs of groceries, deliveries, gouging of PPE products, etc. Still can't save for anything — Older woman receiving CERB

If the CERB was set at a livable minimum of \$2,000/month then what does that imply about the standards ODSP recipients are expected to live at with \$1,169/month? — Middle-aged man receiving ODSP

Chart 3: Satisfaction with governments’ responses to COVID crisis by type of government support (%)



* p<.10 ** p<=.05 ***p<=.001

Priorities for Post-COVID Social and Economic Policies

Given the major upheaval caused by the pandemic and the measures taken to manage it, we might expect to see changes in what people hope government will do in the future. A variety of discussions have been happening about the kinds of policies needed to deal with the short- and long-term effects of the pandemic on people’s lives. We asked respondents to indicate the top three policies they would like to see implemented in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, respondents ranked basic income (68.9 percent), affordable housing (49.4 percent) and a public dental plan (45.6 percent) as their top three post-COVID policy priorities (Chart 4).

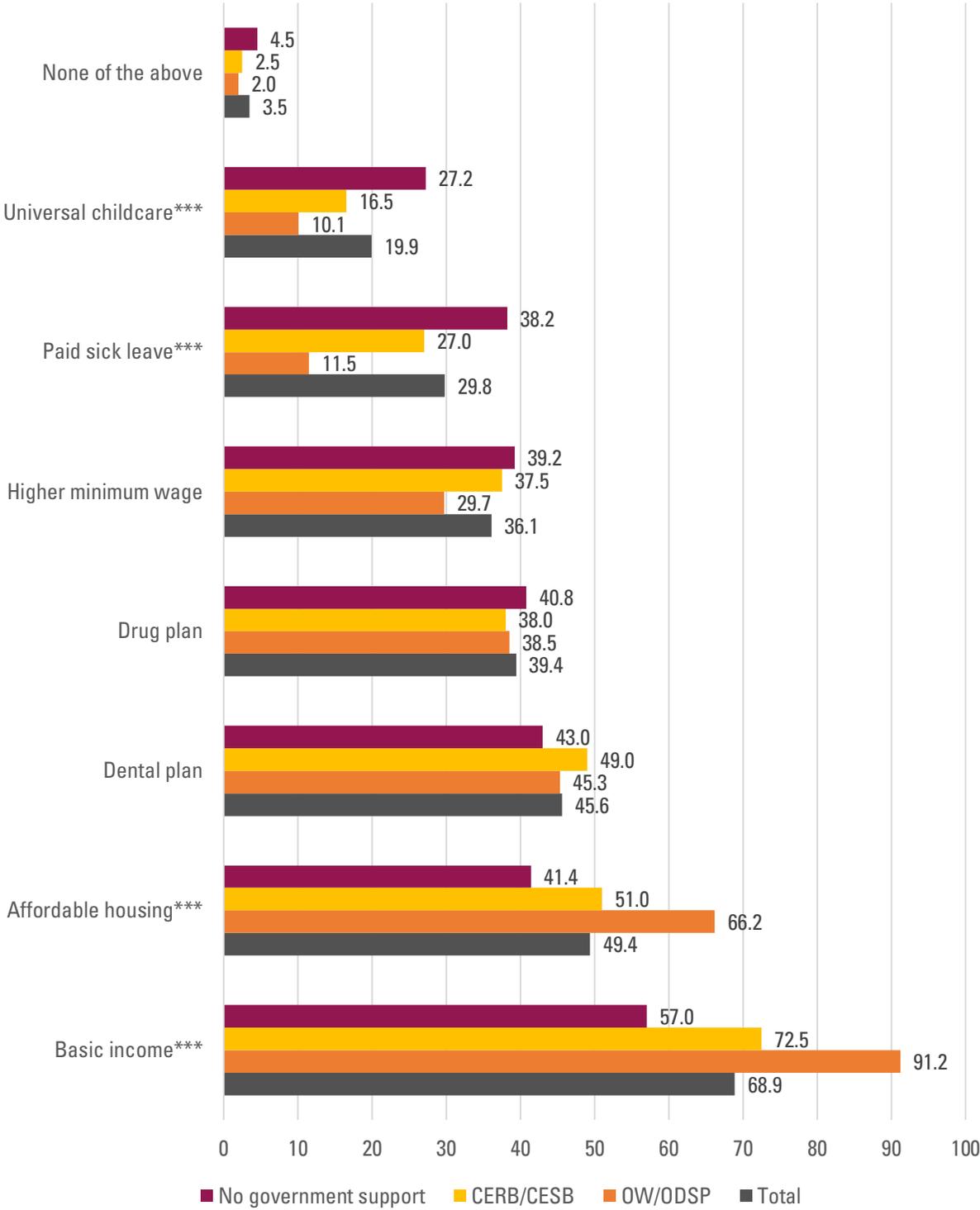
Respondents with different experiences supported these policy priorities to varying degrees. While all categories ranked basic income as their top policy priority, OW/ODSP recipients were by far the strongest supporters of a basic income. Similarly, OW/ODSP recipients were also the strongest supporters of policies to make high quality affordable housing available. Although there was variation in which policies were preferred, very few — 3.5 percent — said they did not want any of the listed policies implemented.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly highlighted many of the preexisting inequalities that have existed for far too long. I sincerely believe that

some type of universal basic income is the most cost effective and efficient method of helping to alleviate poverty, food/housing/economic insecurity and will result in the improvement of the overall health and well-being of our citizens and society. The current system(s) have clearly failed and have been for decades — Older man receiving CERB

[E]ven though I'm a middle-class individual who didn't experience any difficulties during COVID so far, I strongly believe in better social support and universal basic income in particular. I have no problem with the government using my taxes to pay for the needs of the public, regardless if we're talking about a single parent with multiple kids; or a single individual who lost their job long before COVID. I believe that social programs and social welfare should be the #1 priority, and if I had to pay higher taxes to ensure the public's safety and better social assistance, I would gladly do so — Young woman in public finance

Chart 4: Post-COVID policy priorities by type of government support (%)



* p<.10 ** p<=.05 ***p<=.001

Note: Respondents were asked to select their top three of seven policy options

This factsheet is co-authored by Mohammad Ferdosi, Dr. Peter Graefe, Dr. Wayne Lewchuk and Dr. Stephanie Ross, who are the co-investigators in the **COVID Economic and Social Effects Study (CESES)** at McMaster University. CESES is a collaboration between the School of Labour Studies, the Department of Political Science, and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and is supported by funding from MITACS and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. For other factsheets in the series, go to the CESES project website: <https://labourstudies.mcmaster.ca/research/covid19-impact>