

# Perceptions of and confidence in Canada's criminal and civil justice systems: Key findings from the 2023 National Justice Survey

February 2024

Jennifer Duff  
Research and Statistics Division  
Department of Justice Canada

## Introduction

The National Justice Survey (NJS) is an annual national public opinion research study conducted by Justice Canada. The survey collects information on the views, knowledge, concerns and priorities of people living in Canada on important justice-related issues. Results of the study are used to inform policy development, departmental reporting, communications and public engagement.

The objective of the 2023 NJS was to collect information on the following:

- a) public awareness of restorative justice (RJ) processes, as well as opinions regarding its use;
- b) public awareness of and views on the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA);
- c) public perceptions about Indigenous justice systems and processes; and
- d) public awareness of and confidence in the criminal justice system and the civil justice system (with a focus on the family justice system).

In addition to questions on the topic areas outlined above, the survey included questions on key demographic characteristics of respondents (e.g., gender, age, racialized identity, Indigenous identity).

This report summarizes the findings of each of the survey topics while highlighting significant differences<sup>1</sup> between population groups (e.g., Indigenous respondents compared with White respondents, younger respondents compared with older respondents, men compared with women). A distinctions-based approach, where data are presented separately for First Nations and Métis respondents, is taken wherever possible. However, data for Inuit could not be reported separately due to a small sample size. Likewise, where possible,

---

<sup>1</sup> Significant difference at  $p < .05$ .

analysis was conducted for each racialized group separately. Differences between groups are only reported if they are significant; smaller sample sizes reduce the likelihood of significant effects and are a limitation of the study. Bar charts presented in this report may not total 100% for every question as the “Don’t know” response option is not displayed.

## Methodology

The 2023 NJS was conducted online with 4,487 people aged 18 years and older living in each of Canada’s provinces and territories from March 9<sup>th</sup> to May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Data collection was completed by Advanis, a Canadian market research firm. Advanis maintains a proprietary panel of respondents who are pre-profiled for key demographic information. Indigenous and racialized respondents<sup>2</sup> were oversampled to ensure sufficient sample for analysis. Participants were randomly selected from the panel and recruited by telephone. Respondents were sent a survey invitation by text message or email and could complete the survey in the official language of their choice. The average time to complete the survey was 18 minutes.

Survey data were weighted by key sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, region, highest level of education completed, Indigenous identity and racialized identity) to be representative of the Canadian population aged 18 years or older according to the 2021 Census of Population.<sup>3</sup>

## Findings

### Respondents are more likely to be aware of the role of police than of courts or corrections

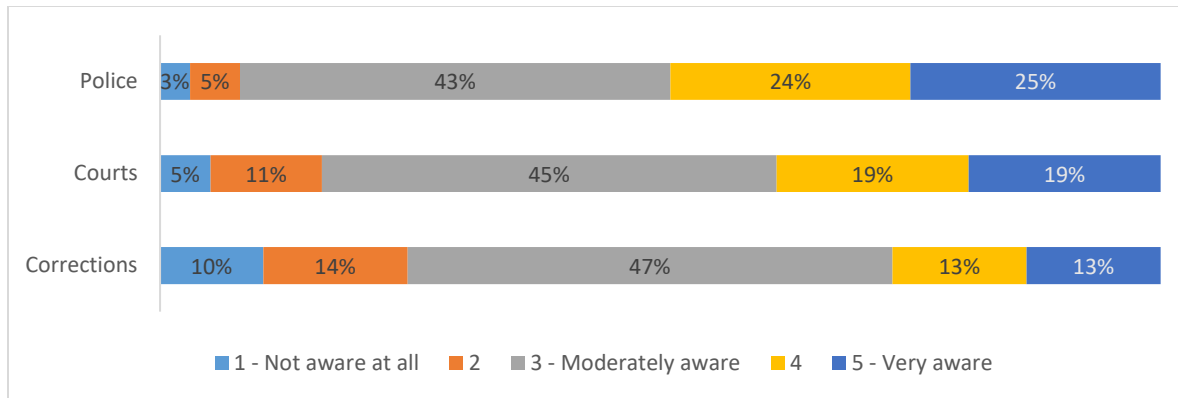
People living in Canada were generally more aware of the role of the police than they were of courts or corrections. Most respondents (91%) reported being moderately to very aware of the police, with one-quarter (25%) reporting being very aware. Regarding the role of the courts, 83% of respondents reported being moderately to very aware, with just under one-fifth (19%) reporting being very aware. The majority of people living in Canada (74%) reported that they were moderately to very aware of the role of corrections, with 13% reporting being very aware.

---

<sup>2</sup> Respondents were asked to respond to the following question: *I identify as:*  
Black (e.g., African/African descent, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino/Afro-Latina/Afro-Latinx)  
White (e.g., European/European descent)  
Latino/Latina/Latinx (e.g., non-white Latin American descent)  
South Asian/South Asian descent (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)  
Middle Eastern or North African/Middle Eastern or North African descent (e.g., Afghan, Iranian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Algerian, Saudi Arabian, Turkish, Iraqi, Yemeni, Jordanian)  
East Asian/ East Asian descent (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)  
Southeast Asian/Southeast Asian descent (e.g., Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai)  
More than one of the groups above  
Prefer to self-identify as: \_\_\_\_\_  
Prefer not to answer

<sup>3</sup> <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E&>

**Chart 1: Awareness of police, courts, corrections**



Population-based differences were notable at the ends of the scale. For example, awareness of the role of the police (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) was higher among First Nations respondents (59%) compared with White respondents (51%) but lower among respondents who identified as Latinx<sup>4</sup> (33%), South Asian (41%), Middle Eastern or North African (31%), and East Asian or Southeast Asian (37%). Moreover, awareness was higher among respondents aged 18 to 34 years (55%) compared with respondents aged 35 to 54 years (48%) and respondents 55 years or older (45%). Compared with women (43%), men were more likely to report being aware of the role of the police (54%). Respondents living in the Atlantic region<sup>5</sup> (58%) reported higher levels of awareness compared with respondents from British Columbia (46%) and Québec (42%).

Self-reported awareness (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) of the role of the courts was higher among White respondents (40%) compared with respondents who identified as Latinx (22%), Middle Eastern or North African (28%), or East Asian or Southeast Asian (29%). Younger respondents aged 18 to 34 years reported a higher level of awareness (42%) of the role of the courts compared with respondents 55 years or older (36%), while men reported a higher level of awareness (44%) compared with women (32%). Self-reported awareness of the role of the courts was higher in the Atlantic region (45%) and lower in the Prairies<sup>6</sup> (35%) and Québec (33%).

Compared with White respondents (28%), Indigenous respondents<sup>7</sup> (34%), including First Nations (37%), reported a higher level of awareness (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) of the role of corrections, while respondents who identified as Latinx (16%) or Middle Eastern or North African (16%) reported a lower level of awareness. Men reported higher levels of awareness (30%) compared with women (23%). Awareness of the role of corrections was highest in the Atlantic region (36%) and lowest in Québec (22%).

At the other end of the scale, respondents aged 18 to 34 years were more likely to report not being aware (a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale) of the role of corrections (32%) compared with older respondents (aged 35 to 54 years: 24%; 55 years or older: 20%).

<sup>4</sup> Latinx refers to respondents who identified as “Latino/Latina/Latinx.”

<sup>5</sup> The Atlantic region includes New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

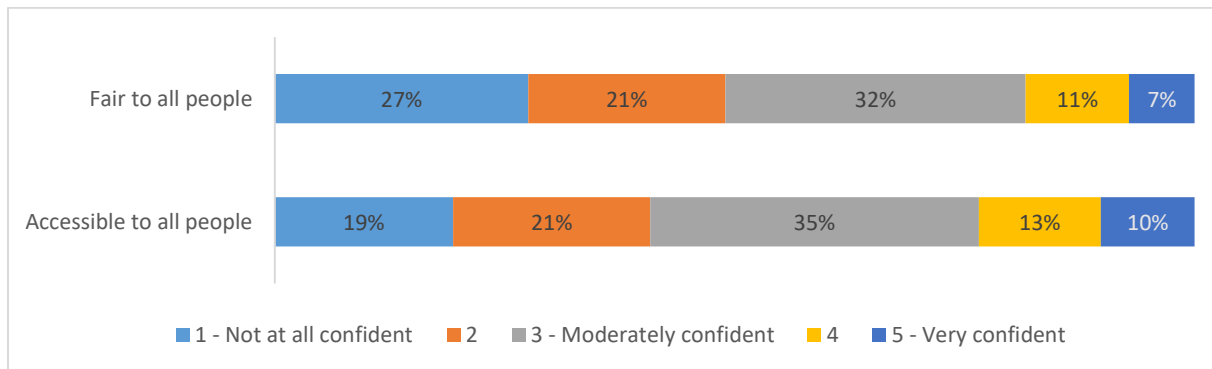
<sup>6</sup> The Prairies includes Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

<sup>7</sup> Indigenous respondents refers to all respondents who identified as Indigenous including First Nations, Inuk (Inuit), Métis, and multiple Indigenous identities. Where significant differences were found, First Nations and Métis are reported separately.

## Respondents report moderate levels of confidence in the criminal justice system

Half of respondents (50%) reported being moderately to very confident that the criminal justice system (CJS) is fair to all people, with 7% reporting being very confident. More than half of respondents (58%) reported being moderately to very confident that the CJS is accessible to all people, with 10% reporting being very confident.

**Chart 2: Confidence in the criminal justice system**



Population-based differences were notable at the ends of the confidence scale. For example, White respondents (17%) were more likely to report that the CJS is fair to all people (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) compared with Indigenous respondents (11%), including First Nations (5%) and Métis (12%). Respondents who identified as Latinx (32%), East Asian or Southeast Asian (23%), or Middle Eastern or North African (29%) were more likely than White respondents (17%) to report that the CJS is fair to all people. Men (23%) were more likely to report that they were confident that the CJS is fair to all people compared with women (13%). Respondents living in Québec (24%) were more likely to report that the CJS is fair to all people than respondents from all other provinces (ranging between 15% and 18%) or territories<sup>8</sup> (8%). At the other end of the scale, younger respondents (aged 18 to 34) were more likely to report that they were not confident (a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale) that the CJS is fair to all people (62%) compared with respondents aged 35 to 54 years (49%) and respondents 55 years or older (40%).

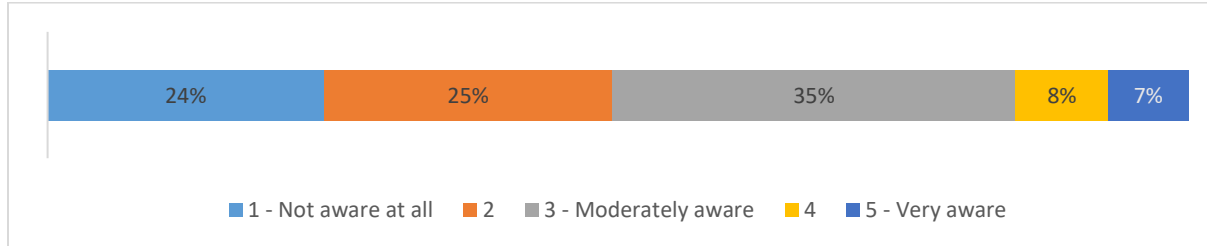
White respondents (23%) were more likely to report being confident (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) that the CJS is accessible to all people compared with Indigenous respondents (16%), including First Nations (13%) and Métis (16%). Respondents who identified as Latinx (34%) or Middle Eastern or North African (34%) were more likely than White respondents (23%) to report that the CJS is accessible to all people. Younger respondents (aged 18 to 34) were less likely to report that the CJS is accessible to all people (19%) compared with older respondents (aged 35 to 55 years: 24%; aged 55 years or older: 25%). Men (26%) were more likely than women (20%) to report that they were confident that the CJS is accessible to all people. Respondents living in Québec (26%) were more confident that the CJS is accessible to all people than respondents from the Atlantic region (18%) and from British Columbia (19%).

<sup>8</sup> Small base (n=32).

### Respondents have moderate self-reported awareness of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*

Half of respondents (50%) reported being moderately to very aware of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA), with 7% reporting being very aware.

**Chart 3: Awareness of the Youth Criminal Justice Act**

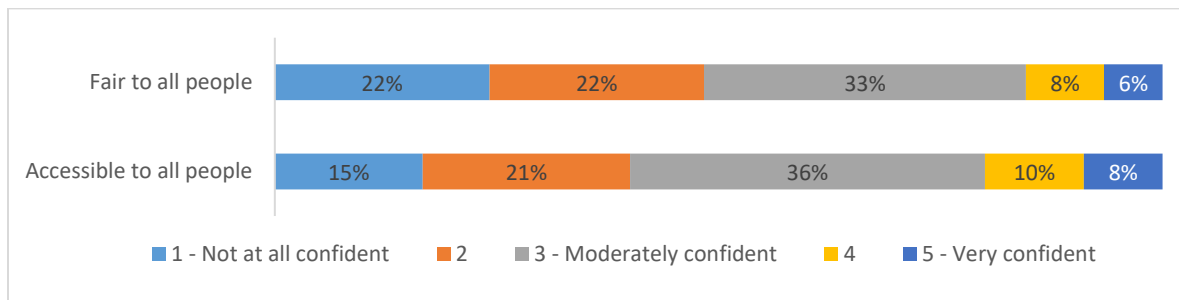


Population-based differences were notable at the ends of the awareness scale. For example, self-reported awareness (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* was higher among Indigenous respondents (23%), including First Nations (24%) and Métis (23%), compared with White Respondents (15%) and lower among Latinx respondents (7%). Self-reported awareness was higher among respondents aged 18 to 34 years (19%) compared with respondents aged 35 to 54 years (14%) and respondents 55 years or older (13%).

### Just under half of respondents report confidence in the youth criminal justice system

Slightly less than half of respondents (47%) reported being moderately to very confident that the youth criminal justice system (YCJS) is fair to all people, with only 6% reporting being very confident. Just over half of respondents (54%) reported being moderately to very confident that the YCJS is accessible to all people, with 8% reporting being very confident.

**Chart 4: Confidence in the youth criminal justice system**



Population-based differences were notable at the ends of the confidence scale. For example, White respondents (14%) were more likely to report being confident (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) that the YCJS is fair to all people compared with Indigenous respondents (9%), including First Nations (7%) and Métis (9%), but less likely compared with Middle Eastern or North African respondents (25%). At the other end of the scale, Black respondents (54%) were more likely than White respondents (45%) to report not being confident (a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale) that the YCJS is fair to all. Moreover, respondents aged 18 to 34 years (52%) were more likely to report not being confident that the YCJS is fair to all people compared with respondents aged 35 to 54 years

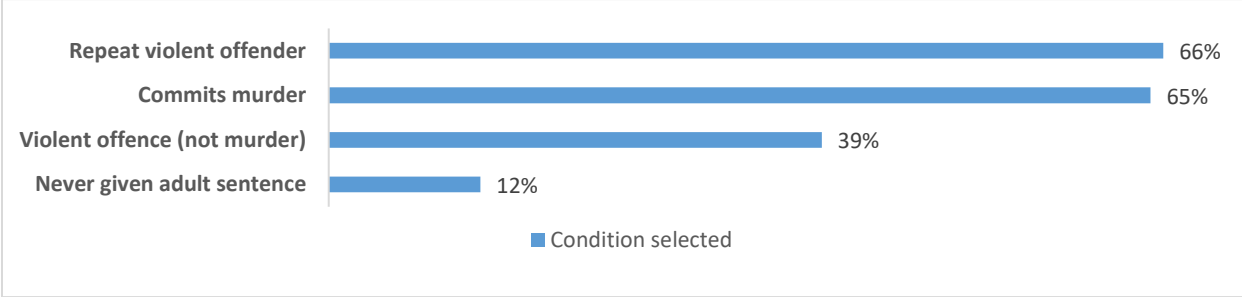
(45%) and respondents 55 years or older (40%). Confidence was higher among men (17%) compared with women (11%) and among respondents from Québec (21%) compared with respondents from all other provinces (ranging between 11% and 13%).

Confidence that the YCJS is accessible to all (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) was higher among men (20%) compared with women (16%) and among respondents from Québec (24%) compared with respondents from all other provinces ranging between 11% and 18%). At the other end of the scale, higher proportions of Indigenous respondents (50%), including First Nations (56%) and Métis (46%), as well as Black respondents (45%) reported low confidence (a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale) that the YCJS is accessible to all people compared with White respondents (35%). Respondents aged 18 to 34 years (44%) were more likely to report not being confident that the YCJS is accessible to all people compared with respondents aged 35 to 54 years (37%) and those who are 55 years or older (32%).

**Respondents report moderate support for the use of adult sentences for youth offenders under certain circumstances**

The majority of people living in Canada (83%) agreed that there are certain conditions under which a youth found guilty of an offence should be eligible to receive an adult sentence. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) agreed that a repeat, violent young offender should be eligible to receive an adult sentence, and 65% agreed that a youth who is found guilty of murder should be eligible to receive an adult sentence. More than one-third (39%) of respondents agreed that youth found guilty of violent offences (other than murder) should be eligible to receive an adult sentence. Twelve percent of respondents indicated that youth should never be given an adult sentence.

**Chart 5: Conditions for which youth should be eligible to receive an adult sentence**



Respondents who identified as Black (52%), Latinx (56%), and Middle Eastern or North African (44%) were less likely than White respondents (67%) to indicate that youth should be eligible for an adult sentence if they are repeat violent offenders. Black respondents were also less likely to agree that youth who commit murder (56%) and youth found guilty of a violent offence (other than murder; 30%) should be eligible to receive an adult sentence compared with White respondents (66% and 40%, respectively). Moreover, Black respondents were more likely (19%) than White respondents (12%) to agree that youth should never be given adult sentences. Women were more likely (14%) than men (11%) to indicate that youth should never be given adult sentences.

The majority of respondents (74%) agreed that there should be a process in place to review a youth’s case to ensure that an adult sentence remains appropriate, while just over half of respondents (53%) agreed that certain limitations should be placed on adult sentences given to youth (e.g., forbid life sentences). White respondents were more likely (54%) to agree that certain limits should be in place for adult sentences given to

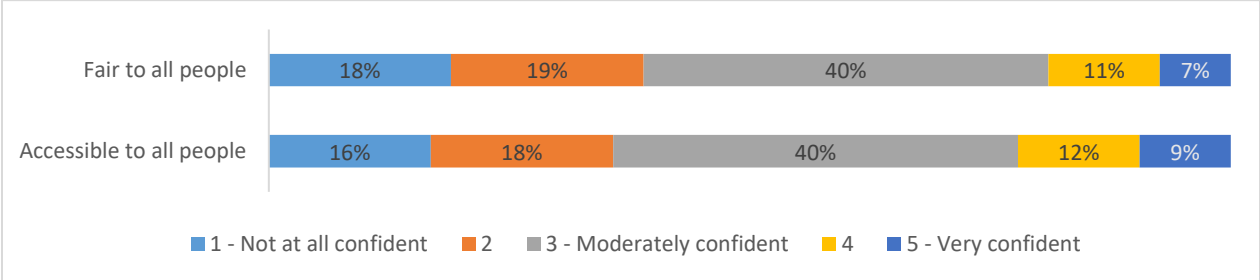
youth compared with respondents of East Asian or Southeast Asian decent (46%), as were women (56%) compared with men (50%).

Just over one-third of respondents (36%) agreed that youth aged 14 and 15 should not be eligible for adult sentences due to their level of maturity, and just over one-fifth of respondents (21%) indicated that youth aged 16 and 17 should not be eligible for an adult sentence for the same reason. Respondents identifying as Black (49%) or Middle Eastern or North African (47%) were more likely than White respondents (36%) to agree that youth aged 14 and 15 should not be eligible for an adult sentence. Similarly, respondents identifying as Indigenous (25%) (including First Nations: 27%), Black (32%), South Asian (27%), or Middle Eastern or North African (27%) were more likely than White respondents (19%) to agree that youth aged 16 and 17 years old should not be eligible for an adult sentence. Women were more likely (40%) than men (33%) to agree that youth aged 14 and 15 should not be eligible for an adult sentence and that youth aged 16 and 17 should not either (25% and 16%, respectively).

**Respondents report moderate levels of confidence in the civil justice system**

More than half of respondents (58%) reported being moderately to very confident that the civil justice system<sup>9</sup> is fair to all people, with 7% reporting being very confident. More than half of respondents (61%) reported being moderately to very confident that the civil justice system is accessible to all people, with 9% reporting being very confident.

**Chart 6: Confidence in the civil justice system**



Population-based differences were notable at the ends of the scale. For example, compared with White respondents (17%), respondents who identified as Indigenous (12%), including First Nations (11%) or Métis (11%), were less likely to report being confident (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) that the civil justice system is fair to all, while respondents who identified as Latinx (30%) or Middle Eastern or North African (28%) reported a higher level of confidence. Younger respondents aged 18 to 34 years (14%) were less likely than respondents 35 years or older (19%) to be confident that the civil justice system was fair to all, while men (20%) were more likely to report being confident compared with women (15%). Respondents from Québec (25%) were more likely than respondents from all other provinces (ranging from 14% to 16%) or territories<sup>10</sup> (7%) to report that they were confident that the civil justice system is fair to all people.

<sup>9</sup> Questions relating to the civil justice system excluded the family law components: Q. “How confident are you that the civil justice system (excluding the family justice elements) in Canada is... Fair to all people; Accessible to all people?”

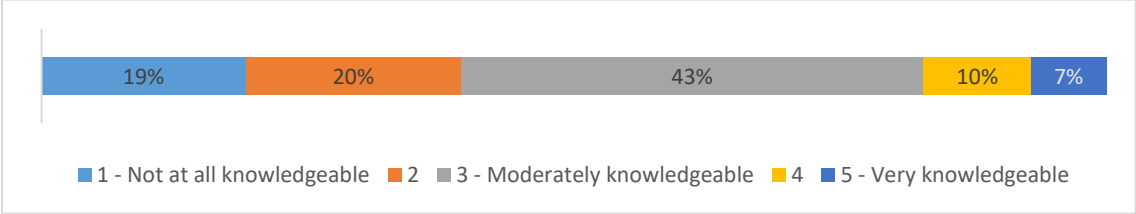
<sup>10</sup> Small base (n=32).

Compared with White respondents (21%), respondents who identified as Indigenous (15%), including First Nations (11%), were less likely to report being confident (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) that the civil justice system is accessible to all, while respondents who identified as South Asian (28%) or Middle Eastern or North African (31%) reported a higher level of confidence. Men (24%) were more likely than women (19%) to report that they were confident that the civil justice system is accessible to all. Respondents in Québec (28%) were more likely than respondents from all other provinces (ranging from 15% to 18%) to report that they were confident that the civil justice system is accessible to all people.

**Respondents report moderate levels of knowledge about the family justice system**

After being shown a definition of the family justice system<sup>11</sup> (FJS), more than half of respondents (60%) reported being moderately to very knowledgeable about the FJS, with 7% reporting being very knowledgeable.

**Chart 7: Knowledge of the family justice system**



Indigenous respondents (25%), including First Nations (25%) and Métis (26%), were more likely to report that they are knowledgeable about the FJS compared with White respondents (17%).

When asked about their source for information related to the FJS, respondents were most likely to report relying on government websites and publications (28%), family or friends (19%), a legal professional (15%), or popular culture (11%).

More than half of respondents (59%) reported that they are comfortable looking for information or reading about the FJS system online and are comfortable completing forms online using fillable PDF forms (57%). Slightly less than half of respondents (48%) were comfortable using video conferencing platforms for what would normally be in-person meetings (mediation or court sessions).

**Respondents report moderate levels of knowledge about and confidence in the family justice system**

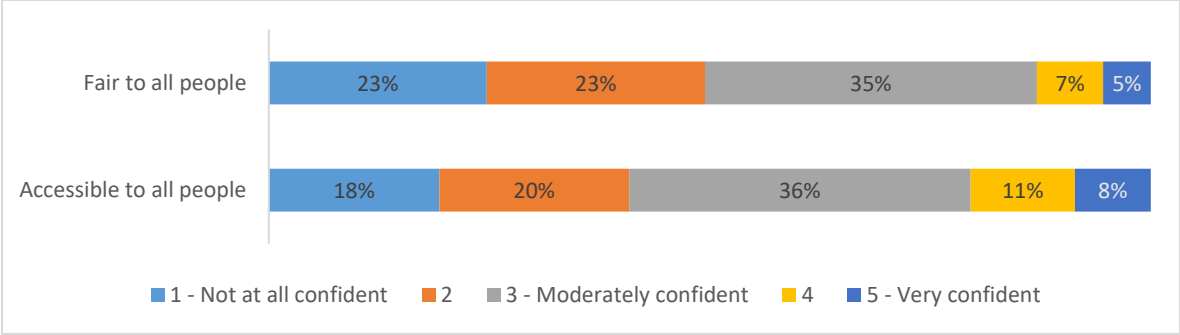
Just under half of respondents (47%) reported being moderately to very confident that the FJS is fair to all people, with 5% reporting being very confident. Slightly more than half of respondents (55%) reported being moderately to very confident that the FJS is accessible to all people, with 8% reporting being very confident.

---

<sup>11</sup> The family justice system in Canada extends beyond the courts and includes family justice services such as parent education sessions, supervised access, and family dispute resolution services. Issues such as divorce, parenting (custody and access), child and spousal support, as well as division of property are all handled by the family justice system.



**Chart 8: Confidence in the family justice system**



Population-based differences were notable at the ends of the scale. For example, White respondents (11%) were more likely than Indigenous respondents (7%), including First Nations (6%), to report that they are confident (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) that the FJS is fair to all people. However, Latinx respondents (24%) and Middle Eastern or North African respondents (23%) were more likely than White respondents (11%) to report that they were confident. Men (13%) were more likely than women (10%) to report that they are confident that the FJS is fair to all, while respondents from Québec (17%) were more likely than respondents from all other provinces (ranging from 9% to 11%) to report that they are confident that the FJS is fair.

White respondents (18%) were more likely than Indigenous respondents (13%), including First Nations (9%), to report that they are confident (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) that the FJS is accessible to all people. However, Latinx respondents (30%), Middle Eastern or North African respondents (30%), and East Asian or Southeast Asian respondents (24%) were more likely than White respondents (18%) to report that they were confident. Respondents 35 years or older (20%) were more likely than younger respondents aged 18 to 34 years (15%) to report being confident that the FJS is accessible to all people. Men (21%) were more likely than women (17%) to report that they were confident that the FJS is accessible to all. Respondents from Québec (24%) were more likely than respondents from all other provinces (ranging from 16% to 18%) or territories<sup>12</sup> (11%) to report that they are confident that the FJS is accessible to all people.

Of the respondents who reported being involved with the FJS in the past two years (5%), more than one-third (43%) reported that it is difficult to access (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point difficulty scale).

**Respondents report high levels of support for restorative justice despite low levels of awareness of restorative justice processes**

After being shown a definition of restorative justice (RJ) processes, over half of respondents (55%) reported not being familiar with RJ (a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale), though 86% agreed that the victim of a crime should be given the opportunity to communicate with an offender to relay the impact of the crime.

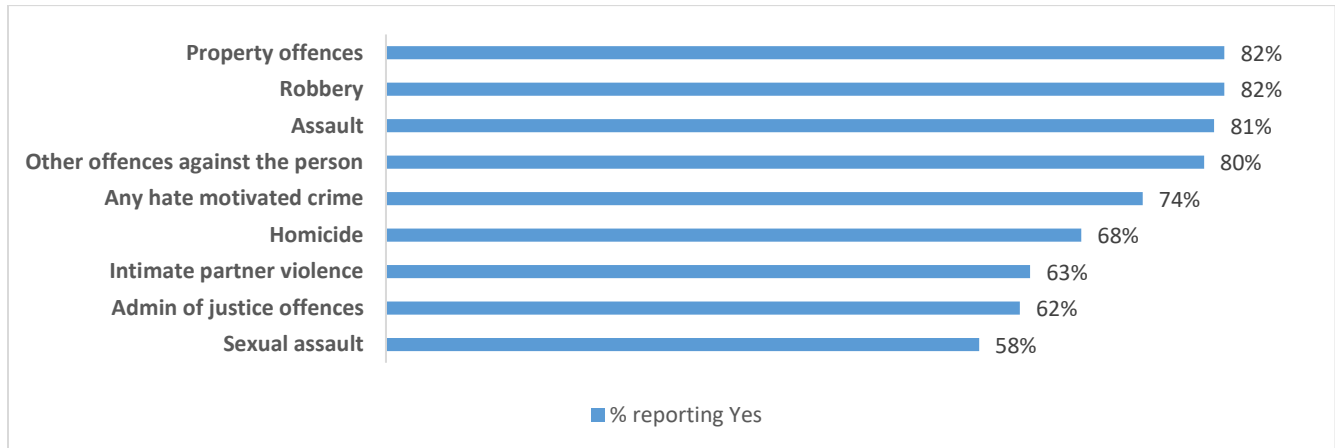
Respondents who identified as Indigenous reported greater familiarity (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with RJ (all Indigenous: 23%; First Nations: 26%; Métis 22%) compared with White respondents (16%). Respondents who identified as Latinx (7%), East Asian or Southeast Asian (8%), or Middle Eastern or North African (10%) reported a lower level of awareness. Younger respondents (aged 18 to 34) were more aware of RJ (21%) than

<sup>12</sup> Small base (n=32).

respondents aged 35 to 54 (16%) and respondents 55 years or older (10%). Awareness of RJ was highest in the Atlantic region (24%) and lowest in Québec (13%).

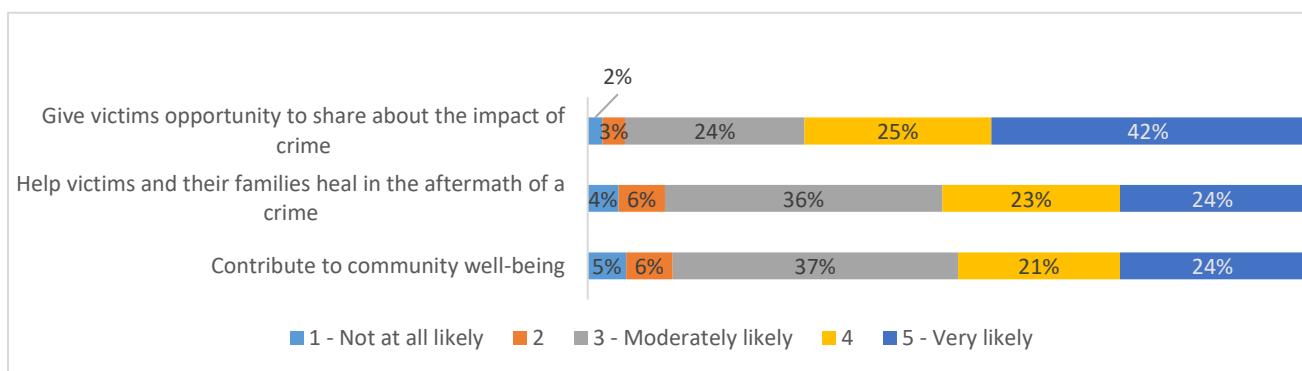
The majority of respondents were supportive of a wide range of offences being eligible for RJ provided that both the victim and offender want to take part in the process. Support was highest for cases involving property offences (82%), robbery (82%), assault (81%), and other offences against the person (80%). Most respondents were also supportive of the use of RJ for hate-motivated crimes (74%) and cases involving homicide (68%), intimate partner violence (63%) or sexual assault (58%).

**Chart 9: Offences suitable for restorative justice**



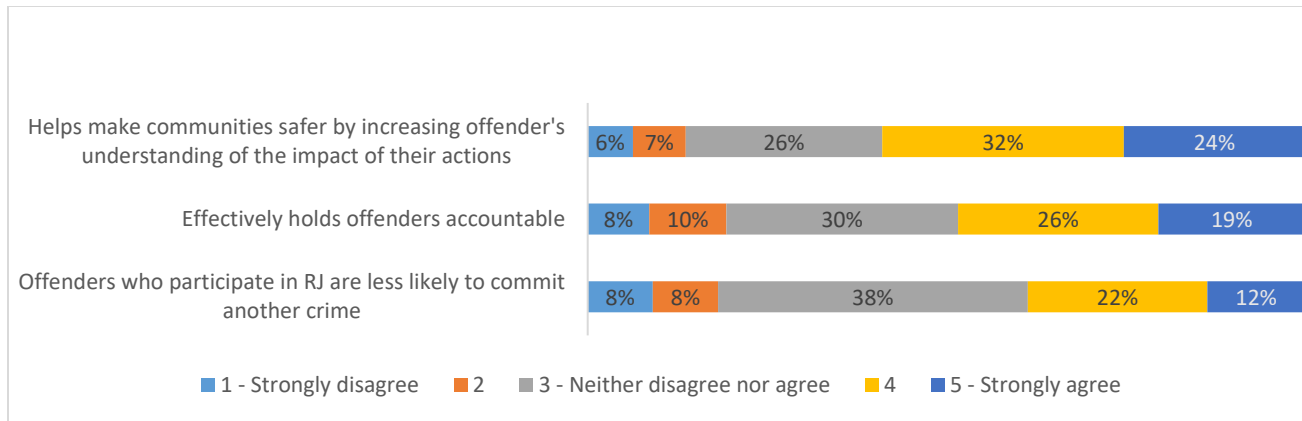
Two-thirds of respondents (67%) reported that RJ would likely (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) give victims an opportunity to share how the crime impacted them, while just under half of respondents indicated that it would help victims and families heal in the aftermath of a crime (47%) and contribute to community well-being (45%).

**Chart 10: Offences suitable for restorative justice**



Just over half of respondents (56%) agreed that RJ helps make communities safe by increasing offenders' understanding of the impact of their actions. Slightly less than half of respondents (45%) agreed (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) that RJ effectively holds offenders accountable, while just over one-third (34%) agreed that offenders who participate in RJ are less likely to commit another crime.

**Chart 11: Restorative justice offender impact**



Black respondents were more likely than White respondents to agree that RJ helps victims and their families heal in the aftermath of a crime (55% compared with 47%), contribute to community well-being (56% compared with 44%), and effectively holds offenders accountable (57% compared with 43%).

East Asian or Southeast Asian respondents were less likely than White respondents to agree that RJ gives victims the opportunity to share about the impact of crime on them (57% compared with 68%). However, they were more likely to agree that RJ effectively holds offenders accountable (52% compared with 43%) and makes communities safe by increasing offenders' understanding of the impact of their actions (61% compared with 54%).

Women were more likely than men to agree that RJ gives victims the opportunity to share about the impact of crime on them (69% compared with 63%), helps victims and their families heal in the aftermath of a crime (51% compared with 43%), contributes to community well-being (48% compared with 42%), and effectively holds offenders accountable (49% compared with 40%).

Half of respondents (50%) indicated that RJ would be more satisfying (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) than the mainstream justice system for victims of crime, while 51% of respondents indicated that the process would be more meaningful (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) for offenders than the mainstream justice process.

East Asian or Southeast Asian respondents were less likely than White respondents to agree that RJ would be more satisfying than the mainstream justice system for victims of crime (44% compared with 52%) or that the process would be more meaningful for offenders than the mainstream justice process (44% compared with 53%).

**Less than half of respondents support an Indigenous-administered legal system**

When asked whether Indigenous people in Canada should be able to administer their own legal systems of justice, including enforcing Indigenous laws and by-laws on their land, slightly less than half of respondents (45%) agreed. Indigenous respondents (60%), including First Nations (70%) and Métis (57%), and Black respondents (53%) were more likely than White respondents (44%) to agree that Indigenous people should administer their own legal systems. Respondents who identified as East Asian or Southeast Asian (36%) were less likely than White respondents (44%) to agree that Indigenous people should be able to administer their own legal systems. Younger respondents aged 18 to 24 (53%) were more likely than older respondents 35 years or older (42%) to agree that Indigenous people should administer their own legal system, as were women (49%)

compared with men (41%). Respondents living in Québec (36%) were less likely to agree that Indigenous people should administer their own legal systems than respondents from all other provinces (ranging from 43% to 50%) or territories<sup>13</sup> (52%).

## Conclusion

The 2023 NJS indicated that people living in Canada have moderate levels of confidence in the criminal (including youth) and civil (including family) justice systems. Levels of awareness of and confidence in these systems varied between population groups. Compared with White respondents, Indigenous respondents reported lower levels of confidence in Canada's criminal and civil justice systems, while most racialized respondents reported higher levels of confidence. Compared with women, men were more confident that the criminal and civil justice systems are fair and accessible to all people. Women were more likely than men to support restorative justice processes and to agree that Indigenous peoples in Canada should be able to administer their own legal systems. Older respondents and respondents living in Québec reported higher levels of confidence in Canada's criminal and civil justice systems compared with younger respondents and respondents living elsewhere in Canada.

### Related Links

[National Justice Survey webpage](#)

[2023 National Justice Survey data tables](#)

For more information, please contact: [rsd-drs@justice.gc.ca](mailto:rsd-drs@justice.gc.ca)

---

<sup>13</sup> Small base (n=32).