

JUSTICE SYSTEM

# Canadians Open to Alternative Penalties for Non-Violent Offences

*More than half of respondents believe their justice system does not treat every person fairly.*

[VANCOUVER – Jun. 28, 2010] – People in Canada have little confidence in their province's criminal courts and are inclined towards allowing the use of alternative penalties for personal marijuana use, a new Angus Reid Public Opinion poll has found.

The online survey of a representative national sample of 1,004 Canadian adults also finds that the provincial police forces in Ontario and Quebec garner a high level of confidence from respondents in the two provinces.

## Community Problems and Crime

One third of respondents (34%) say that health care is the most important problem or concern in their community today, followed by the economy (26%), unemployment (15%), crime, violence and gangs (12%), and education and schools (7%).

In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, more than half of respondents (54%) select crime, violence and gangs as the most important problem or concern, while a majority of Quebecers (56%) pick health care.

Two-in-five Canadians (39%) believe there has been an increase in the amount of crime in their community over the past five years, while a similar proportion of respondents (41%) report no change, and 10 per cent say the crime rate has decreased.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **80% would support using alternative penalties rather than prison for personal marijuana use**
- **59% believe the justice system in Canada does not treat every person fairly**
- **27% fear being a victim of crime in their community "to a great extent" or "only a fair amount."**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

*From June 16 to June 17, 2010, Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among 1,004 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.1%. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region data to ensure samples representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.*

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Atlantic Canadians (51%), British Columbians (45%) and Albertans (43%) are more likely to believe that criminal activity has intensified in their community.

One-in-four Canadians (27%) say they fear being a victim of crime in their community "to a great extent" or "only fair amount". Less than one-in-five respondents (14%) report that they have actually been victims of crimes which involved the police in the past two years.

### **Elements of the Justice System**

This question seeks to gauge the level of confidence in the internal operations and leadership of five different elements of the Canadian justice system. Overall, the provincial police forces are rated highly by 38 per cent of respondents in Quebec and Ontario. Across the country, 35 per cent of Canadians express confidence in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), followed by the municipal police forces with 33 per cent, and the Supreme Court of Canada with 33 per cent.

Less than one-in-five respondents express "complete confidence" or "a lot of confidence" in the criminal courts in their province (18%). In fact, on this element, the proportion of negative responses ("Not much confidence" or "No confidence at all") outnumbered the percentage of positive responses by a 2-to-1 margin.

### **Alternative Penalties**

Seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) support the concept of using alternative penalties—such as fines, probation or community service—rather than prison for non-violent offenders, while one-in-four (25%) disagree with this idea. Four-in-five respondents (80%) would endorse alternative penalties for people who commit offences related to personal marijuana use. However, support is much lower for enacting a similar guideline for other crimes, such as credit card fraud (33%), drunk driving (25%), and arson (15%).

### **Final Assessment**

Overall, a majority of respondents (60%) believe that the criminal courts in Canada do a good job in determining whether or not an accused person is guilty. However, only one third of respondents (34%) readily admit that the justice system in Canada treats every person fairly. In addition, two-thirds of Canadians (66%) disagree with the notion that the prison system in the UK does a good job in helping prisoners become law-abiding.

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### Justice System

What do you feel is the most important problem or concern in your own community today?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Health Care / Hospitals	34%	18%	31%	24%	26%	56%	35%
The Economy	26%	32%	27%	9%	28%	24%	32%
Unemployment	15%	13%	5%	5%	25%	7%	15%
Crime / Violence / Gangs	12%	16%	22%	54%	8%	4%	7%
Education / Schools	7%	12%	7%	4%	6%	6%	10%
Other	6%	9%	8%	3%	7%	3%	2%

### Justice System

Over the past five years or so, would you say there has been an increase, a decrease, or no change in the amount of crime in your community?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
An increase	39%	45%	43%	71%	36%	28%	51%
A decrease	10%	11%	4%	8%	12%	12%	3%
No change	41%	33%	40%	18%	41%	50%	41%
Not sure	10%	11%	13%	3%	11%	10%	5%

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### Justice System

To what extent do you fear being a victim of crime in your community?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
<b>To a great extent</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Only a fair amount</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Not too much</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>47%</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Not sure</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>0%</b>

### Justice System

In the past two years, have you, yourself, been a victim of a crime which involved the police, such as an assault, a car break-in or some other type of crime?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
<b>Yes</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>83%</b>

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### Justice System

How much confidence do you have in the internal operations and leadership of these elements of the Canadian justice system?

	Complete confidence / A lot of confidence	A fair amount of confidence	Not much confidence / No confidence at all	Not sure
Your provincial police force (QU and ON Only)	38%	42%	17%	3%
The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)	35%	41%	20%	5%
Your municipal police force	34%	44%	17%	5%
The Supreme Court of Canada	33%	34%	27%	7%
The criminal courts in your province	18%	38%	40%	3%

### Justice System

Broadly speaking, do you support or oppose using alternative penalties—such as fines, probation or community service—rather than prison for non-violent offenders?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Support	70%	77%	67%	69%	71%	68%	67%
Oppose	25%	19%	26%	29%	25%	24%	30%
Not sure	5%	4%	7%	1%	4%	8%	3%

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### Justice System

For each of the following offences, would you support or oppose using alternative penalties rather than prison?

	Support	Oppose	Not sure
Personal marijuana use	80%	18%	2%
Credit card fraud	33%	65%	2%
Drunk driving	25%	73%	2%
Arson	15%	83%	2%

### Justice System

Do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
The justice system in Canada treats every person fairly	34%	59%	6%
The criminal courts in Canada do a good job in determining whether or not an accused person is guilty	60%	33%	7%
The prison system in Canada does a good job in helping prisoners become law-abiding	19%	66%	15%

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*Angus Reid Public Opinion is a 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](http://www.angusreidforum.com)), Springboard America ([www.springboardamerica.com](http://www.springboardamerica.com)) and Springboard UK ([www.springboarduk.com](http://www.springboarduk.com)) online panels, which are recruited via an industry-leading process that incorporates a high-quality, multi-streamed approach and an in-depth screening procedure.*

*The panels are highly engaged communities with industry leading response rates and are researched with state-of-the-art sampling techniques, combined with deep profiling on demographic, behavioural and attitudinal characteristics. 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.*

*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.*

*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. More information on our electoral record can be found at:*

*<http://www.visioncritical.com/record-of-accuracy>*

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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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