

# Attitudes Toward Broadcast Issues, Canadian Content and the CBC

A COMPAS Survey for  
The Friends of Canadian Broadcasting  
May 1999

## Findings

### The CBC

#### **CBC receives very strong marks in fulfilling its mandate and serving the Canadian public nationally and regionally**

Pundits and commentators have been suggesting for years that the CBC was on its last legs, that it had limited appeal among the public and that Canadians did not really care one way or the other about the corporation's future. The results of the FCB/COMPAS polling program continue to demonstrate that the pundits and commentators are not speaking for the public.

The vast majority of Canadians give the CBC positive marks in fulfilling its mandate as the national broadcaster. Indeed tracking data suggest that the CBC has improved its performance in the minds of Canadians in the last half of this decade. This is reflected in the results from three questions asked in the survey:

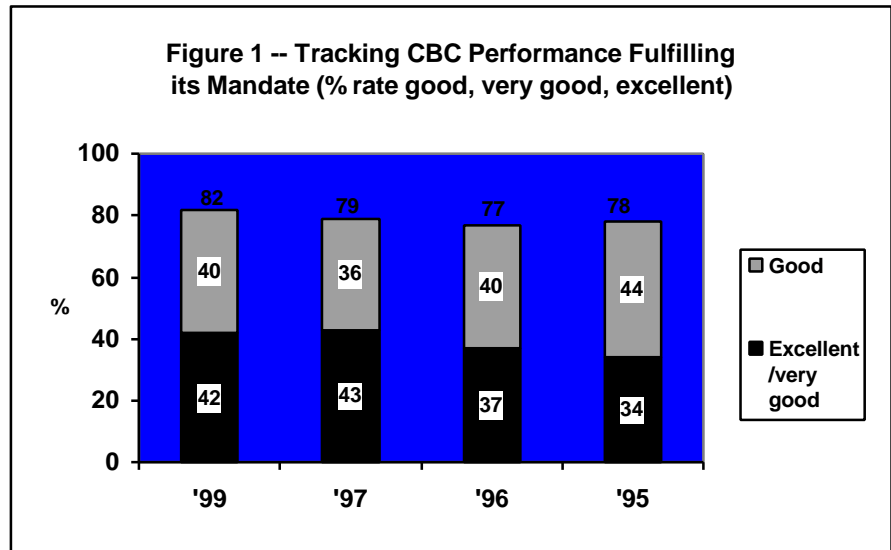
“As you may know, as the national broadcaster, the mandate of the CBC is to provide radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains. Overall, how would you rate the performance of the CBC in fulfilling this mandate to-date...excellent, very good, good, only fair, poor, very poor?”

“Overall, how would you rate the performance of CBC radio in serving the Canadian public...(ROTATE)...on a Canada-wide level, in your part of the country...excellent, very good, good, only fair, poor, very poor?”

“Overall, how would you rate the performance of CBC television in serving the Canadian public...(ROTATE)... on a Canada-wide level, in your part of the country...excellent, very good, good, only fair, poor, very poor?”

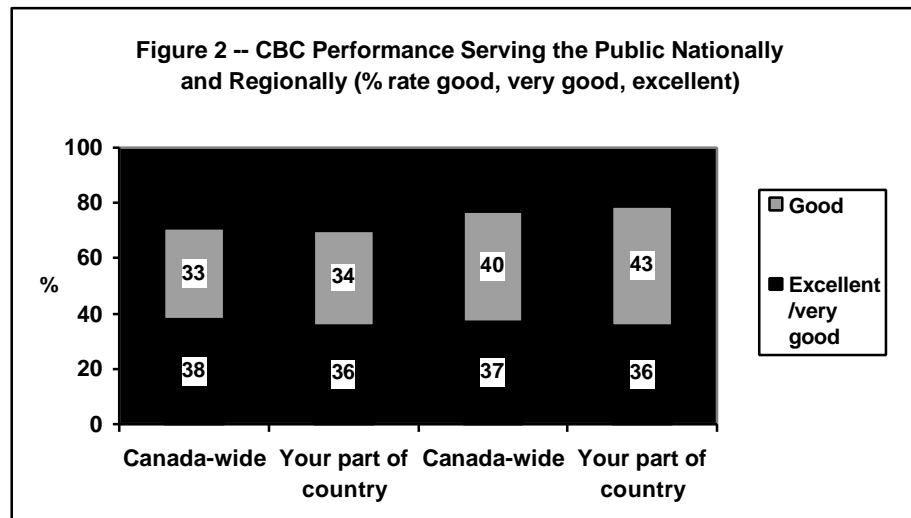


Figure 1 shows that a full 82% of Canadians believe that the CBC has done a good or better job in meeting its mandate in providing “radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains.” This includes 42% who rate the CBC very good or excellent. Assessments of the CBC’s performance are currently higher than they have been in previous FCB/COMPAS surveys stretching back to 1995.



Positive perceptions of the CBC’s overall performance are based, in part, on Canadians’ beliefs that it does well in serving the public on both a national and regional level.

Figure 2 shows that seven-in-every-ten Canadians rate CBC radio good or better in serving the public nationally and in their part of the country.



This despite the fact that a minority, albeit a sizeable 38%, say that they had listened to CBC radio in the last seven days.

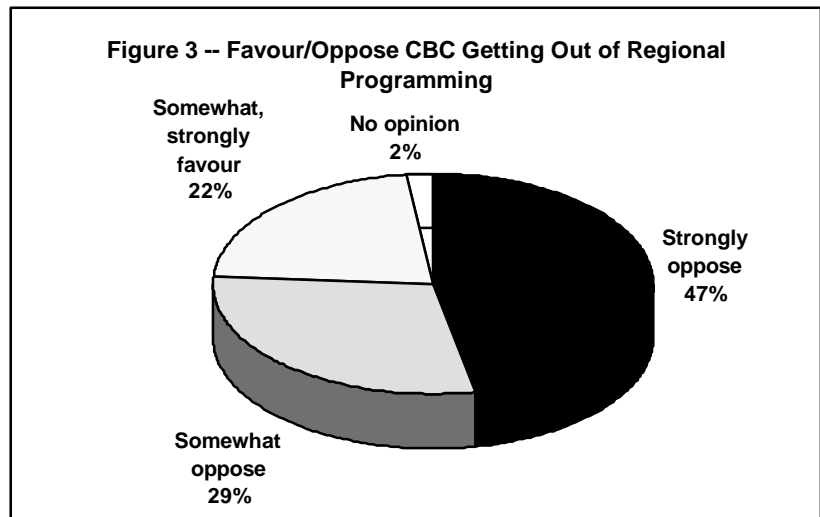
Even more Canadians, almost eight-in-every-ten, rate CBC TV good or better in serving the public nationally and in their part of the country. This corresponds more closely with the 81% reported viewership of CBC in the last seven days.

On delivery to regions, Table 1 shows that all regions of the country feel that programming made in and about their area of the country is important and rate the CBC positively in delivering to their part of the country.

Table 1– Importance and CBC Performance on Regional Issue

	<b>Regional % some/very important</b>	<b>CBC Radio performance to part of country % good or better</b>	<b>CBC TV performance to part of country % good or better</b>
BC	89	70	70
Alberta	84	64	77
Sask./Manitoba	91	62	79
Ontario	85	70	82
Quebec	84	70	83
Atlantic	100	80	71

There is also strong and intense opposition to any idea of the CBC moving away from regional representation. Respondents were asked, “Some private broadcasters are urging the federal government to get the CBC out of making television news programs in your part of the country. Would you strongly support...strongly oppose this idea?” Figure 3 shows that a full 76% of Canadians oppose this idea, including almost half (47%) who strongly oppose.



Demographic, regional and political analysis summarized in Table 2 shows that the CBC is rated positively across all subgroups of Canadians in terms of its overall performance and delivery on both radio and TV.

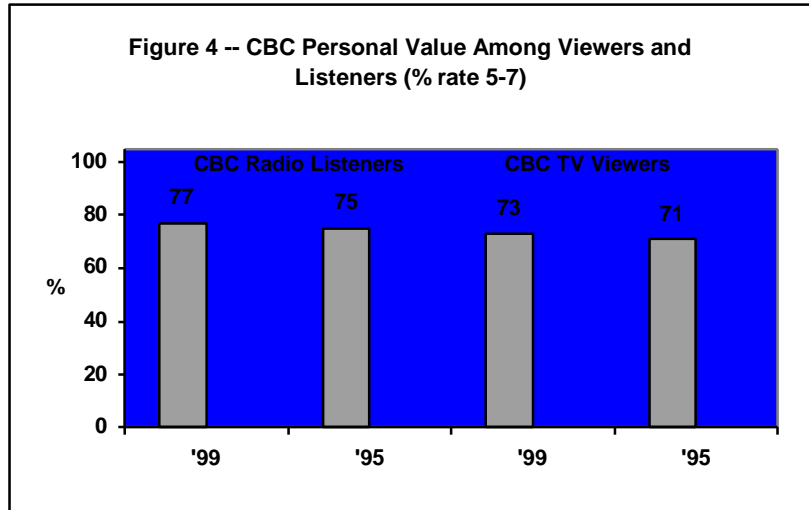
Table 2 -- CBC Performance (% good/very good/excellent)

	Overall	CBC Radio	CBC TV
Men	77	65	76
Women	86	75	78
BC	80	74	77
Alberta	77	68	69
Sask./Manitoba	85	65	81
Ontario	80	67	75
Quebec	85	73	81
Atlantic	81	78	72
18-24 years	86	69	88
25-34 years	81	68	82
35-44 yrs	81	72	76
45-54 yrs	80	72	71
55 yrs/older	81	71	73
English	80	69	75
French	87	74	83
Less \$30,000	81	73	81
\$30,000-\$49,999	83	73	79
\$50,000-\$69,999	81	65	77
\$70,000/more	78	74	73
Liberal voters	87	73	79
PC voters	83	77	74
NDP voters	87	71	82
Reform voters	69	56	67
Bloc voters	81	71	83

## CBC is associated with high personal value among its viewers and listeners

Contributing to CBC's positive overall image in serving the public are strong "personal value" assessments among its audiences.

The 81% of Canadians who said that they had watched CBC TV in the last seven days gave a high average rating of 5.1 when asked, "Compared to other channels you watch on TV, how would you rate the overall value that you feel you get from what you watch on CBC" (scale 1 very low personal value to 7 very high personal value). Figure 4 shows that this translates into a strong 73% giving a decidedly positive value rating of 5-7. This assessment is up marginally since 1995 where the average value rating was 5.0, representing 71% rating 5-7.



Similar findings emerge among the 38% of Canadians who said that they had listened to CBC radio over the last seven days. They gave an average value rating of 5.3 (same as 1995), representing 77% giving a decidedly positive value rating of 5-7 (vs 75% in 1995).

## Balanced Reporting

Another measure of value is found in what all Canadians say regarding the objectivity and balance provided by the country's main television networks. English respondents were asked, "Which of the following TV networks, if any, has the most balanced reporting of news about Canada's federal political parties...(ROTATE)...CTV, Canwest Global, CBC?" Francophone respondents were asked about SRC, TVA and TQS.

Results in Tables 3a and 3b show that CBC is chosen by far and away as the first network with the most balanced reporting among both English and French Canadians. Half of both linguistic groups (52%) identify the CBC/SRC in their first response, almost double the number who chose CTV or TVA.

Table 3a -- Network with the Most Balanced Reporting – English Respondents

	1 <sup>st</sup> mention	2 <sup>nd</sup> mention	Total
	%	%	%
CBC	52	24	76
CTV	28	41	69
Canwest Global	9	17	26
All the same	3	0	3
None	1	0	1
No opinion	8	0	8

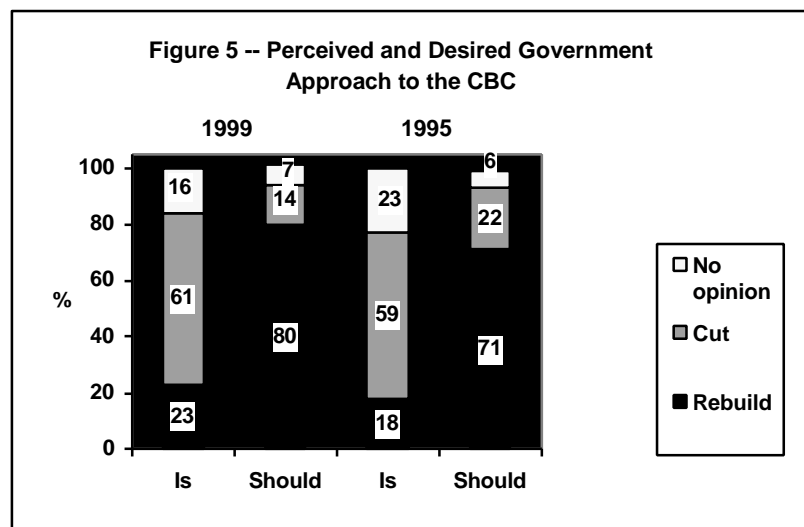
Table 3b -- Network with the Most Balanced Reporting – French Respondents

	1 <sup>st</sup> mention	2 <sup>nd</sup> mention	Total
	%	%	%
SRC	52	20	72
TVA	27	47	74
TQS	7	14	21
All the same	4	0	4
None	1	0	1
No opinion	8	0	8

## CBC and the Federal Government

In addition to the pundits and commentators, the FCB/COMPAS polling program suggests that the federal government is also out of sync with Canadians in how it approaches the CBC.

Respondents were asked, “Is it your sense that the federal Liberal government is more committed to preserving and rebuilding the CBC or budget cutting and downsizing the



CBC?” They were then asked what they think the government’s approach should be.

Results in Figure 5 show that whereas 80% of Canadians think that the federal government should be more committed to preserving and building the CBC, only 23% think that this is in fact how the government is approaching the situation. Consistent with other trends in the survey, Canadians are more likely to think that the CBC should be preserved and rebuilt in 1999 than in the 1995 survey.

## CBC Governance

On issues of governance for the CBC, Canadians were asked, “Based on what you’ve seen and read, which of the following two statements most closely reflects your opinion...(ROTATE)...?” Table 4 shows that a majority of Canadians believe the power of the Prime Minister to appoint to the CBC gives the government too much influence over the corporation.

Table 4 – Opinion on CBC Appointments

	%
The Prime Minister’s power to appoint the CBC President and Board of Directors gives the government too much influence over the nature and content of programs broadcast on the CBC	55
The CBC is independent and it doesn’t matter who appoints the Board of Directors and President	35
No opinion	10

Canadians were asked further, “The Prime Minister of Canada has an important responsibility to appoint men and women to manage Crown corporations like the CBC. Based on what you’ve seen and read, which of the following two opinions is closest to your own...(ROTATE)?” Table 5 shows that a majority of Canadians think that patronage exists.

Table 5 – Opinion on the Use of Appointments

	%
The Prime Minister understands the importance of appointing the best qualified people to run crown corporations like the CBC, and that’s what he does	33
The Prime Minister has been using appointments to crown corporations like the CBC as rewards for political friends and financial supporters	51
No opinion	16

## Impact of Commercial Sponsors on CBC Radio

Finally, one of the issues being discussed regarding the mandate of the CBC is commercialization. Attitudes toward this were measured by asking Canadians, “As you may know, CBC radio currently does not have any commercials. To help raise money, CBC has asked the CRTC for permission to have commercial sponsors for its programs...in your opinion, would...(ROTATE)...commercial sponsors change the nature of programs on CBC radio, or would the introduction of commercial sponsors have no effect on CBC radio programs?”

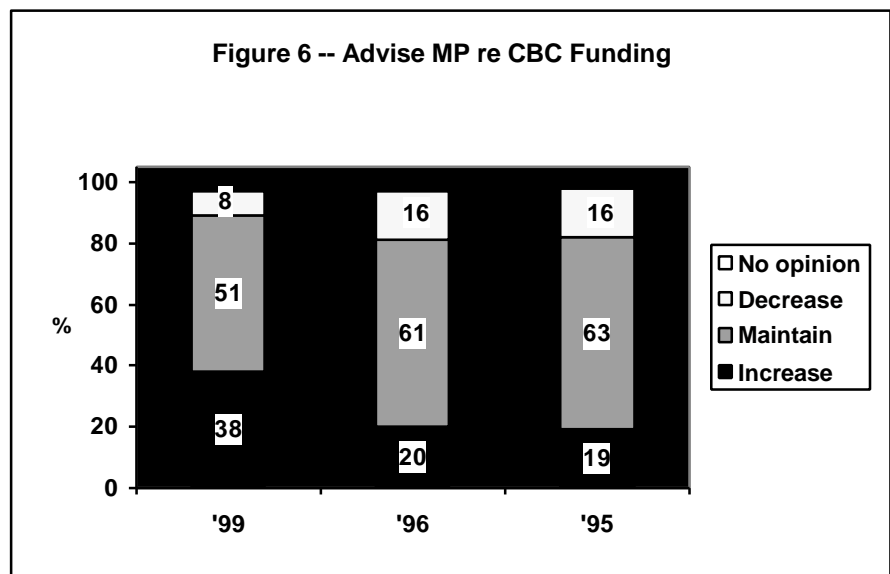
Results in Table 6 show that over half of all Canadians believe that commercial sponsors would change the nature of the programs on CBC radio. Six-in-ten (59%) of those who say that they have listened to CBC radio in the last seven days believe that this would be the result.

Table 6 – Impact of Commercial Sponsors on CBC Radio Programs

	All Canadians %	CBC Radio Listeners %
Would change nature of programs	53	59
No effect	40	36
No opinion	7	5

## Funding Advice

Given the findings of this survey, it is not surprising to find that Canadians want adequate and strong funding for the CBC. This is reflected in the results from a question that asked, “Assume for a moment that your federal Member of Parliament asked for your advice on an upcoming vote in the House of Commons on what to do about CBC funding. Which of the following three options would you advise him/her to vote for...(ROTATE)...decrease funding for the CBC from current levels, maintain funding for the CBC at current levels, increase





funding for the CBC from current levels.”

Figure 6 shows that the vast majority of Canadians would continue to advise their MP to, at the very least, maintain CBC funding at current levels. Reflecting, in part, Canadians increasingly positive views on CBC’s performance, however, it is noteworthy that the percentage of Canadians who think funding should increase has itself increased to 38% from 20% in 1996.

Support for the CBC through maintained or increased funding is high across all demographic, regional and political groups. This is reflected in Table 7.

Table 7 -- Advise MP re CBC Funding by Key Subgroups (%)

	Increase	Maintain	Total maintain or increase
Men	37	51	88
Women	39	51	90
BC	31	56	87
Alberta	34	51	85
Sask./Manitoba	24	61	85
Ontario	42	48	90
Quebec	40	50	90
Atlantic	46	48	94
18-24 years	36	60	96
25-34 years	30	59	89
35-44 yrs	38	50	88
45-54 yrs	47	45	92
55 yrs/older	40	45	85
English	38	51	89
French	41	50	91
Less \$30,000	40	48	88
\$30,000-\$49,999	37	55	92
\$50,000-\$69,999	33	57	90
\$70,000/more	47	42	89
Liberal voters	42	49	91
PC voters	29	63	92
NDP voters	53	43	96

Reform voters	21	53	74
Bloc voters	41	51	92



## Protecting Canadian Culture and Identity

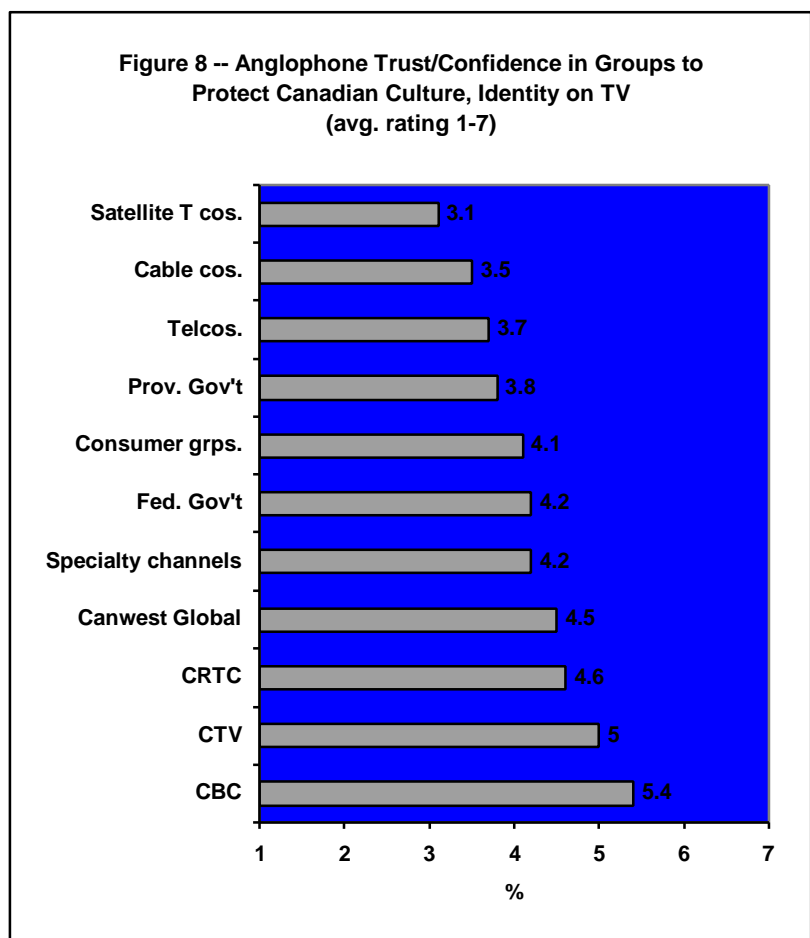
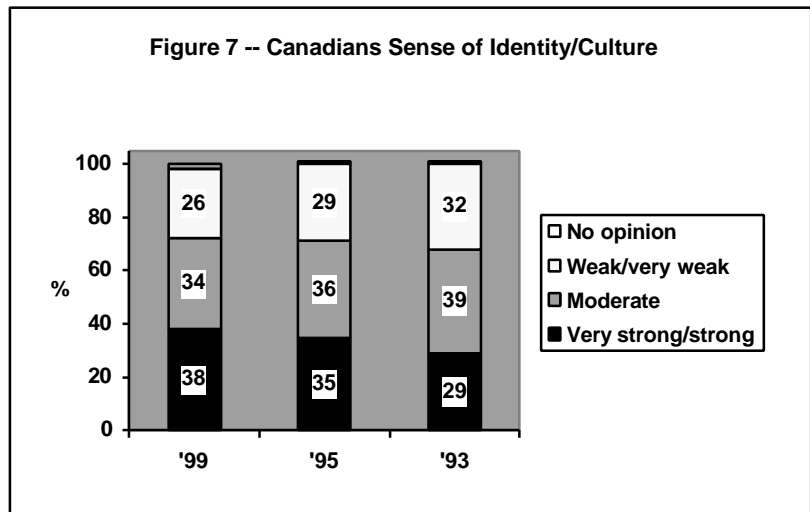
Past FCB/COMPAS polls have demonstrated the importance that Canadians place in public broadcasting on issues of culture and identity. The 1999 poll confirms and strengthens this link.

Canadians continue to have only moderate at best assessments of the strength of their identity and culture. However, Figure 7 shows that this has improved from previous surveys.

When asked, "Do you think that currently Canadians as a whole have a very strong...very weak sense of Canadian identity and culture,?" 38% say strong or very strong, up from 29% in 1993. However, this leaves a substantial majority of Canadians who feel that Canadians have only a moderate at best sense of their identity and culture.

Since 1993 the FCB/COMPAS polling program has been tracking Canadians' trust in a variety of groups to protect Canadian culture and identity on TV.

The results from this year's measurement (Figures 8 and 9) show that CBC receives the highest trust/confidence ratings among English and French-speaking Canadians



alike. CTV and the CRTC round out the top three highest rated groups in English Canada, while TVA and the provincial government round out the top three among Francophones (“I am going to read you the names of several groups. Please tell me how much confidence or trust you personally have in each group to protect Canadian culture and identity on television. You can do this by giving me a rating on a scale of 1 meaning you have no trust or confidence at all to 7 meaning you have a very high level of trust or confidence...(ROTATE)...”)

Table 8 shows further that the CBC’s trust/confidence rating has increased since 1993. The only other two groups where ratings have improved are the federal government and provincial governments (CTV and Canwest Global, TVA and TQA are excluded from the table because they have not been probed in previous surveys).

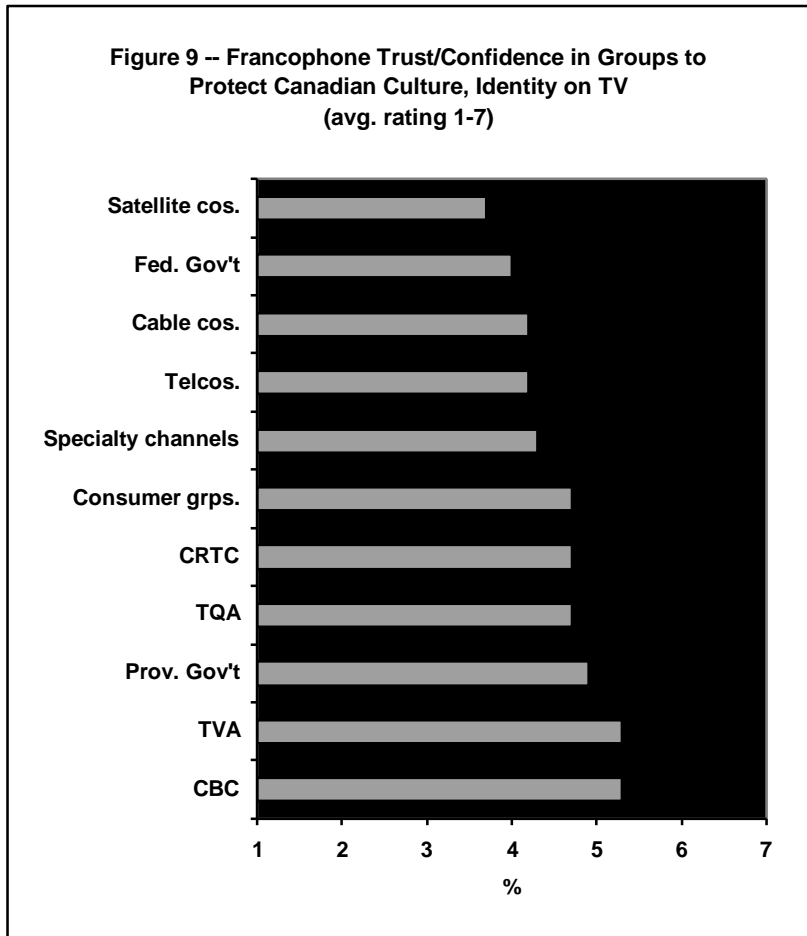


Table 8 – Tracking Confidence/Trust Ratings

	Avg. ratings		
	'99	'95	'93
The CBC	5.4	5.1	5.0
The CRTC	4.6	4.3	4.6
Specialty channels like Much Music/TSN	4.3	4.2	4.2
Consumer groups	4.2	4.2	4.4
The federal government	4.2	3.6	3.4
Your provincial gov't	4.1	3.5	3.5
Telephone companies	3.9	3.8	Na
Cable television cos.	3.6	3.5	3.8
Satellite television cos.	3.4	3.1	na

## The CBC's Role

Further questioning in the survey shows that half of Canadians (49%) believe that the CBC “should have a different role in the presentation of Canadian programming than that of other broadcasters” (44% said no, 7% no opinion). Those who said that it should were asked further (unaided, two mentions), “How should the CBC’s role in the presentation of Canadian programming be different from that of other broadcasters?”

Responses, summarized in Table 9, show that a variety of differences are mentioned by Canadians. The most frequent ways in which the CBC should be different from other broadcasters include that the CBC should have more Canadian content generally (18%), that programs should reflect Canadian culture (12%) and there should be more regional/local focus (12%).

Table 9 – How Should CBC’s Role in Canadian Programming be Different

	% total mentions		% total mentions
More Canadian content	18	More Canadian news	3
Programs reflecting Cnd. culture	12	Less commercials	3
More regional/local focus	12	Free from pressure of commercial sponsors	3
More Canadian produced/ owned content	5	Programs promoting Canadian identity	2
More educational/documentary programs	5	More variety/diversity	2
Better quality programming generally	5	Less US point of view/influence	2
100% Canadian content	4	More responsive public wants/interests	2
Programs reflecting Cnd. identity/personality	4	More government/public funding	2
More national/coast-to-coast coverage	4	More family-oriented	1
More information programs/ responsive Cnd.’s interests	4	Less government/CRTC involvement in CBC	1
Unbiased/more objective approach to programming	4	Promote Cnd. unity	1
Take lead in high quality/ modern programs	4	Other	6
More indepth news coverage	4	No opinion/no specific	18

	<b>% total mentions</b>		<b>% total mentions</b>
Keep own identity as a Canadian channel	4		

## Support for CBC Television

In terms of what part of CBC they believe makes the biggest contribution to Canadian culture and identity, Figure 10 shows that CBC television continues to be chosen over CBC radio by a margin of over 2 to 1.

Table 10 demonstrates that CBC radio is chosen more frequently by Anglophones than Francophones, while the reverse is true for CBC television.

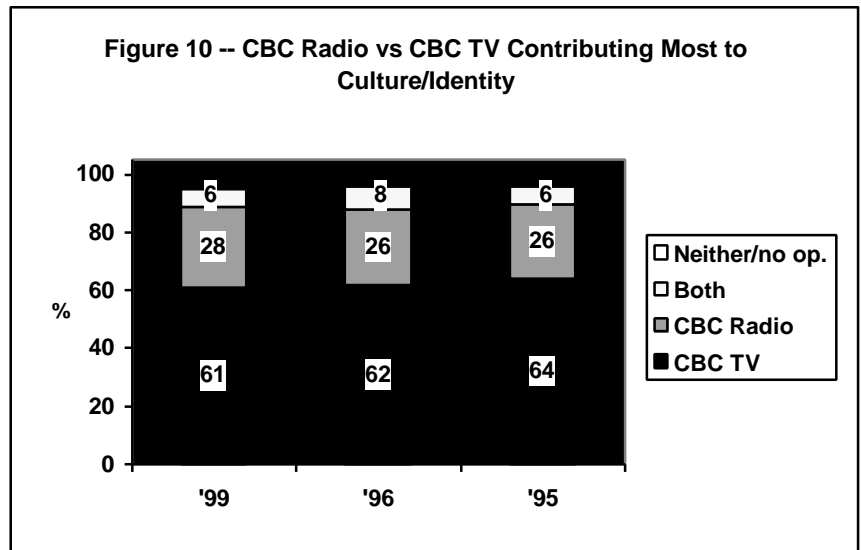


Table 10 – Anglophone and Francophone Opinions on Contributing Most (%)

	Anglophones	Francophones
CBC TV	60	64
CBC Radio	30	22
Both	5	8
Neither	1	1
No opinion	4	5

## Methodology

Interviewing was conducted by telephone between May 1-7, 1999. A total of 1,004 interviews were completed among a proportionately representative, random sample of Canadian residents, 18 years of age and older. The national sample produces results that can be considered accurate for the population of interest as a whole to within +/-3.1 percentage points or better, 95% of the time. Confidence limits for demographic and regional results vary according to the number of cases in each subgroup.

Questions about the survey can be directed to the principal COMPAS investigators, Mr. Chris Martyn, Senior Partner, or Mr. David MacDonald, Assistant Vice President.