



# What Public Opinion Surveys Say About the Voluntary Sector

Presented to: Joint Awareness Table  
(Part of the Voluntary Sector Initiative)

Ottawa, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003



EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

[www.ekos.com](http://www.ekos.com)

# Outline

---

I.

Methodology

II.

Awareness, Imagery & Literacy

III.

Trust, Power & Performance

IV.

Broad Perception of Charities

V.

Priority, Role & Division of Labour

VI.

Voluntary Sector & Citizen Engagement

VII.

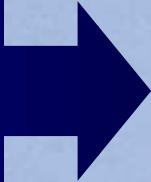
Profiling Voluntarism

---

*Presented to The Joint Awareness Table*

---

**I.**



**Methodology**

---

# Methodology

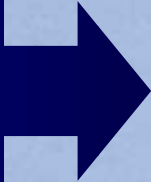
---

- Review all available polls conducted on the voluntary sector
    - ❖ Focus exclusively on the general public
    - ❖ Review research back to late 1980s
  - Major public opinion sources include
    - ❖ EKOS Research
    - ❖ Ipsos-Reid
    - ❖ Decima Research
    - ❖ Statistics Canada (National Survey of Giving)
  - Other reference includes
    - ❖ Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Scan of Research on Public Attitudes Towards the Voluntary Sector by A-J. McKeachie and Fleur Leslie, February 28, 2001
-

*Presented to The Joint Awareness Table*

---

**II.**



**Awareness,  
Imagery &  
Literacy**

---

# Awareness & Literacy Low and Declining (a)

---

- Awareness of voluntary sector relatively low
    - ✓ A majority of Canadians not familiar at all (56 per cent), 17 per cent somewhat familiar, 26 per cent very familiar
    - ✓ Level of familiarity declining over past 5 years (37 per cent very familiar in 1998 vs. 26 per cent in 2002)
    - ✓ More familiarity with "voluntary sector" than "third sector"
  - 2001 the International Year of the Volunteer?
    - ✓ A slim majority aware of this event
  - Voluntary Sector Initiative?
    - ✓ A mere 5 per cent of the public aware of the Initiative
    - ✓ Of those aware, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) had heard about it through the media (newspaper, television or radio)
    - ✓ Despite low levels of awareness, more than 8 in 10 Canadians think VSI is a good idea
-

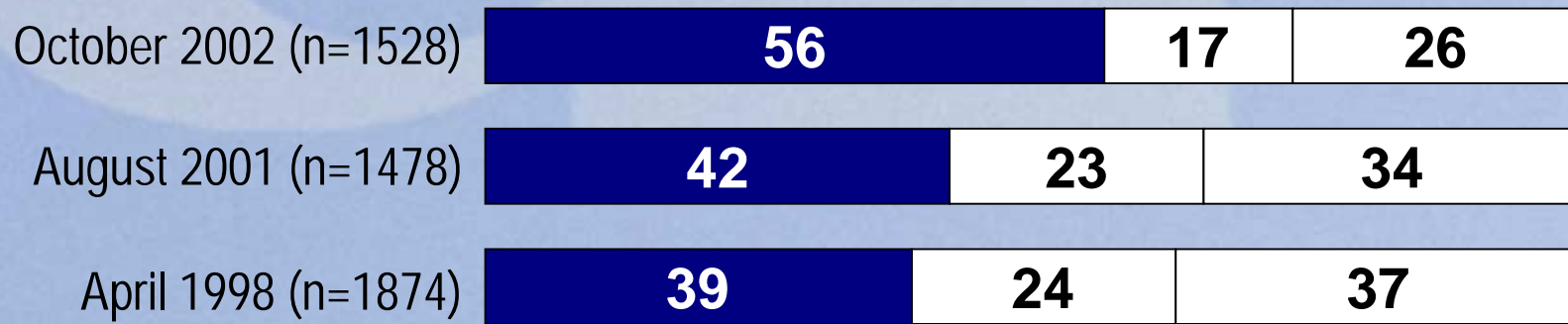
## Awareness & Literacy Low and Declining (b)

---

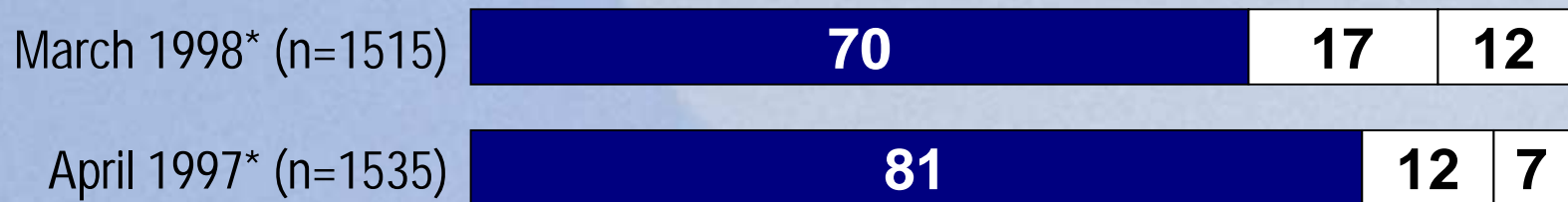
- But Canadians aware of a wide array of voluntary sector organizations
  - ✓ More than 20 different types of organizations named in an unprompted question
  - ✓ Voluntary sector overwhelmingly associated with health/social organisations
  
- Number of registered charities and non-profit organizations in Canada?
  - ✓ Only 19 per cent correctly identified right range (100,000-200,000)
  - ✓ Majority underestimates number of charities and non-for profit organisations

# Level of Awareness

**“How familiar are you with the term VOLUNTARY SECTOR?”**



**“How familiar are you with the term THIRD SECTOR?”**



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

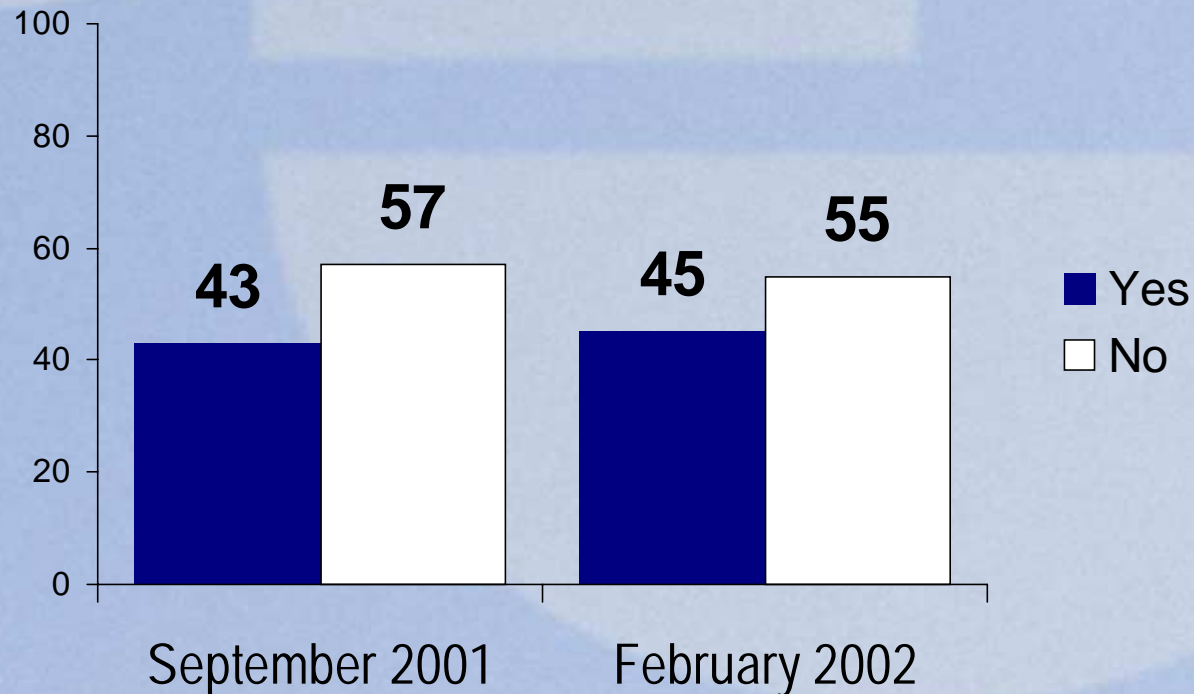
■ Not familiar      □ Somewhat familiar      □ Very familiar



## International Year of Volunteers: Awareness

---

“Were you aware that the United Nations has declared 2001 to be the International Year of Volunteers?”

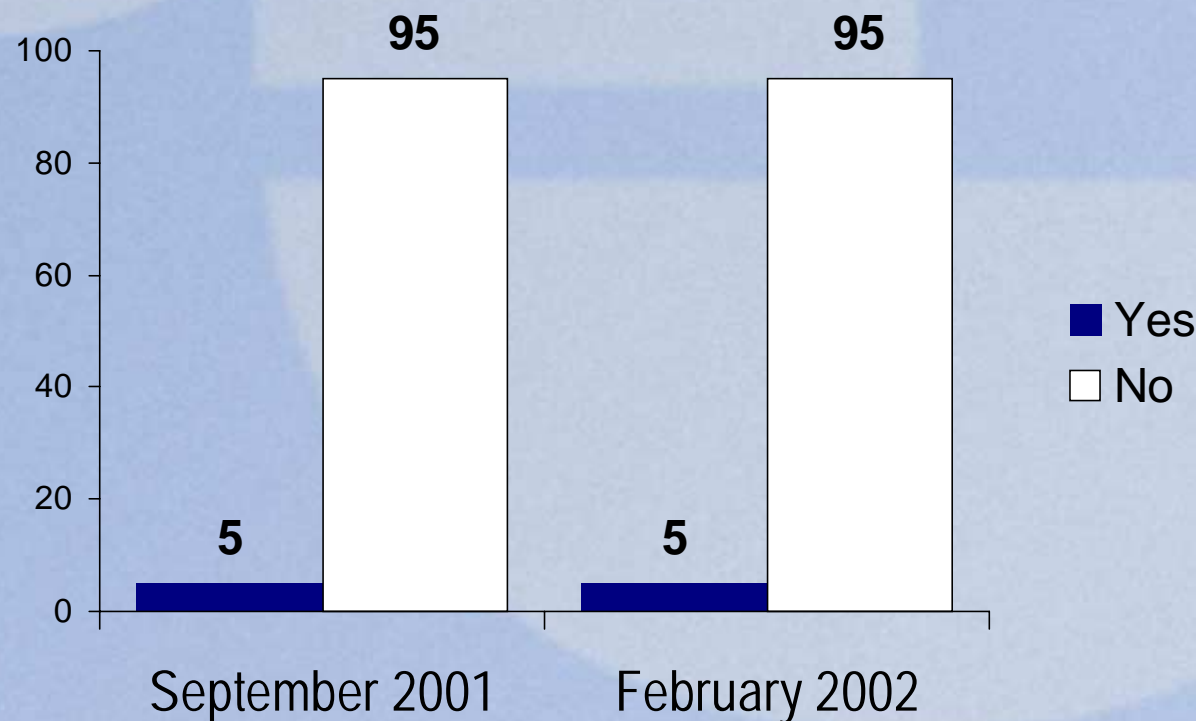


n=1000

*The Voluntary Task Force,*  
Ipsos-Reid Corporation

# Voluntary Sector Initiative: A wareness

“The Government of Canada is working on a project called the Voluntary Sector Initiative. The project is designed to strengthen its relationship with the voluntary sector and make the voluntary sector stronger. Were you aware of this project?”



n=1000

*The Voluntary Task Force,  
Ipsos-Reid Corporation*

# Voluntary Sector Initiative: Sources of Information

**“How did you hear about the Voluntary Sector Initiative?”**  
[Filter: only those aware of the Voluntary Sector Initiative]

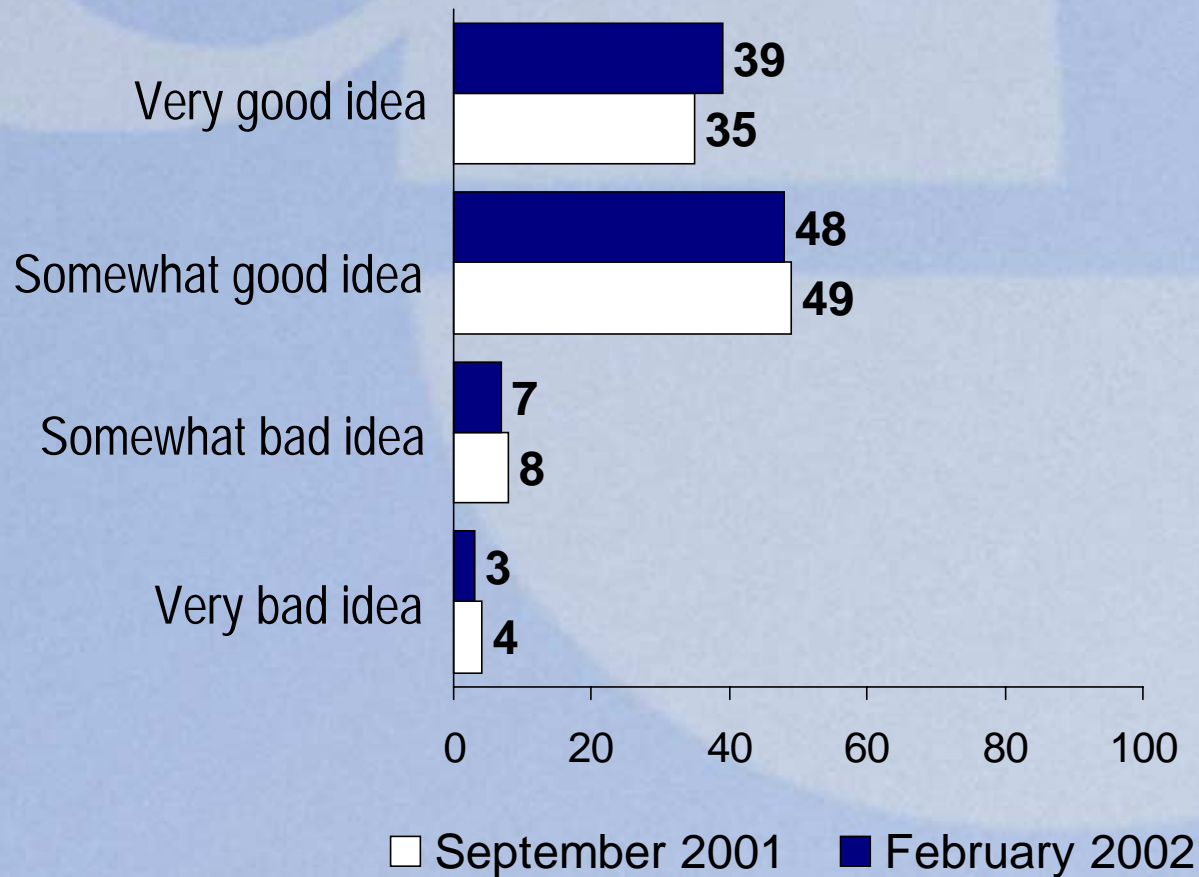


n=49

*The Voluntary Task Force,  
Ipsos-Reid Corporation, 2002*

# Voluntary Sector Initiative: Broad Attitudes

“What do you think of this idea?”

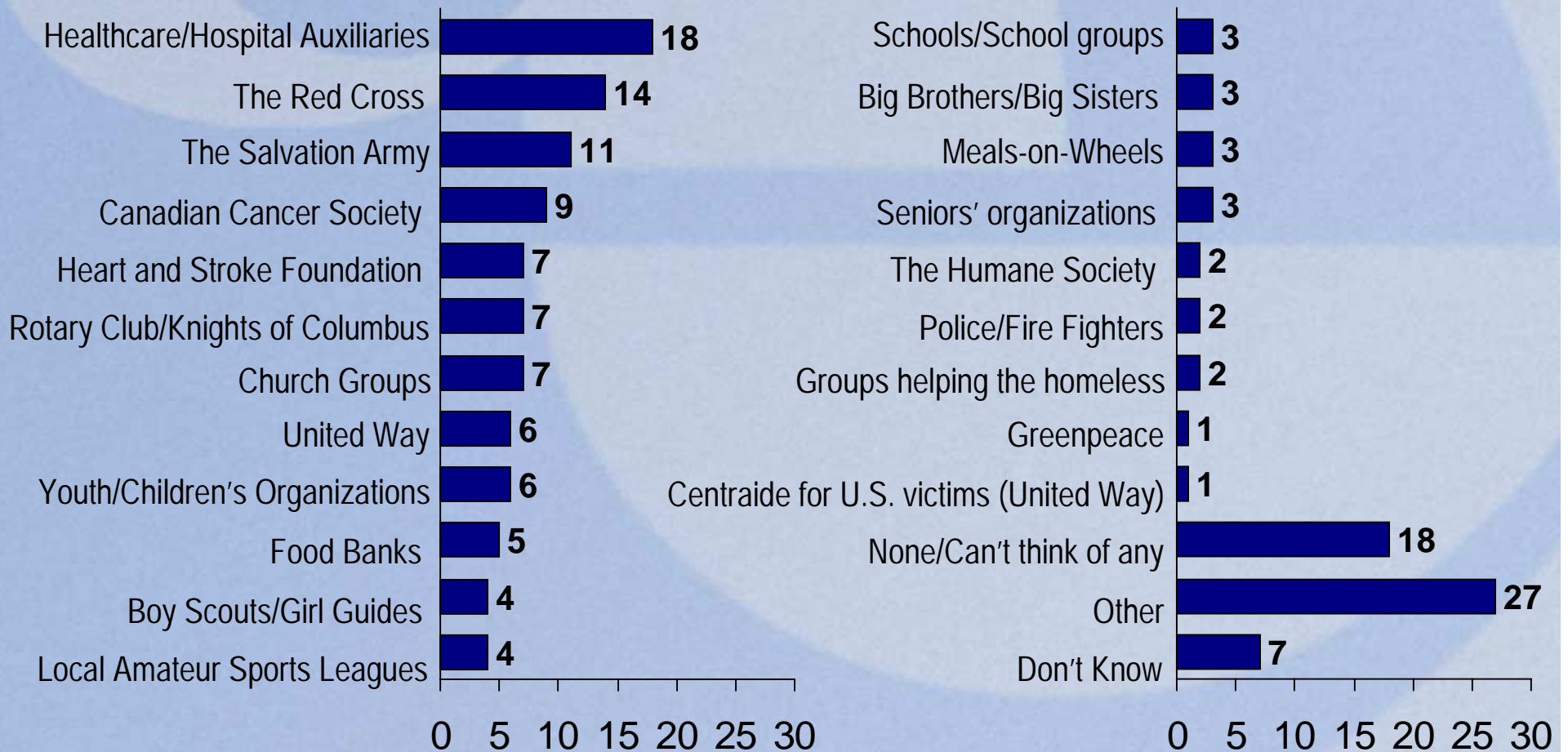


n=1000

*The Voluntary Task Force,  
Ipsos-Reid Corporation*

# Top-of-Mind Imagery

“What organizations do you think of when you hear the term voluntary sector?”



n=1000

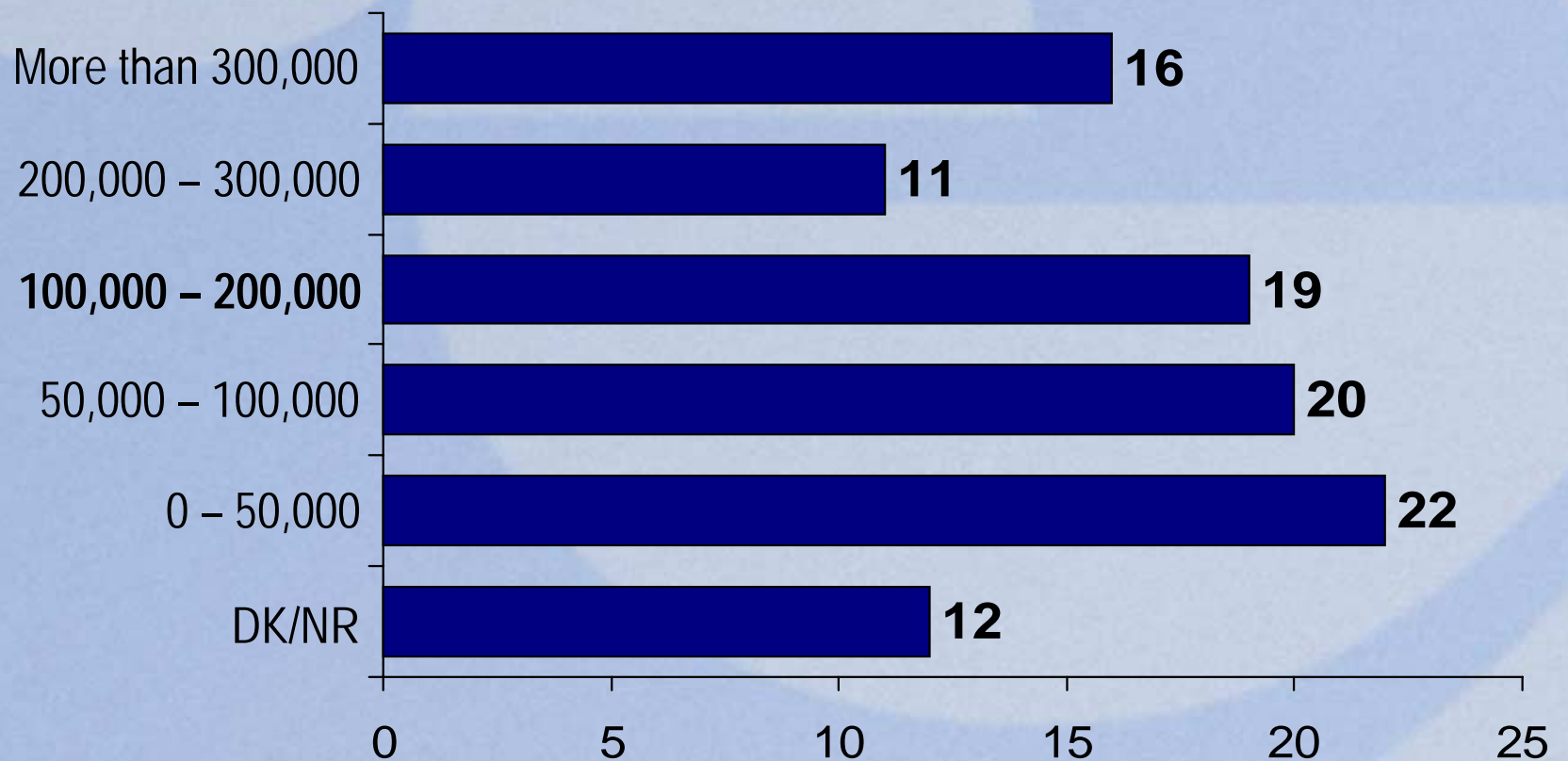
*The Voluntary Task Force,  
Ipsos-Reid Corporation, 2002*

# Literacy Test

---

“How many registered charities and non-profit organizations do you think the country has?”

*Correct Answer: 180,000 organizations*

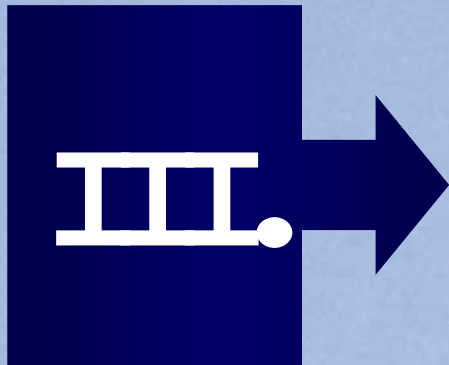


n=1528

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,*  
EKOS Research Associates, Inc. September-October 2002

*Presented to The Joint Awareness Table*

---



**Trust, Power &  
Performance**

---

# High on ethical stds, serving public interest and trust

---

- Non-profit and voluntary organizations among the most trusted organizations in Canada
  - ✓ Canadians are twice as likely to trust voluntary organizations than private companies or governments
  - ✓ But trust in government is declining in 2002 after increase in the 1990s
- NGO volunteers perceived as having the highest ethical standards
  - ✓ Trailing doctors, farmers, scientists and police officer
  - ✓ Highest advantage over other professions on the "ethical" front (e.g. health care professionals more trusted but lower than NGO on ethical standards)
- Non-profit and voluntary organizations seen as better able to serve the public interest and contribute to quality of life in Canada



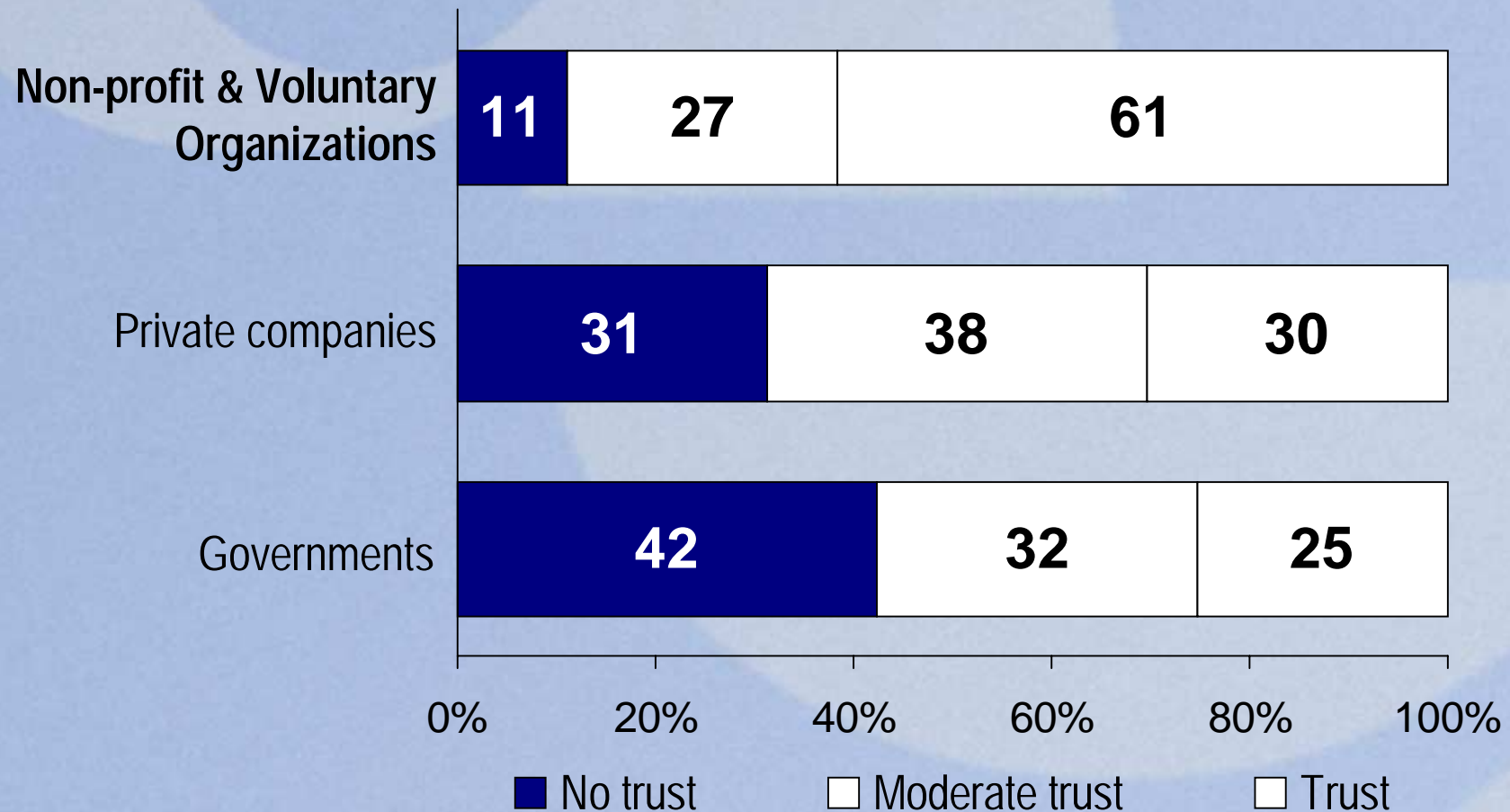
# Performance seen positively too

---

- Community groups seen with an influence deficit
    - ✓ 42 per cent think they do have influence on public policies issues in Canada, 68 per cent think they should have
    - ✓ Average citizens, small businesses, local government, experts and academics are also seen to suffer from an influence deficit
  
  - Performance of voluntary organizations rated very highly
    - ✓ Performance of the voluntary sector rated more favourably than performance of schools, private companies, media, public employees, governments and religious organizations
    - ✓ Majority (57 per cent) also believe the performance of the voluntary sector has improved in recent years
  
  - Other interesting link is with national identity
    - ✓ Non-profit and voluntary organizations identified by more than two-thirds of the public as having positively impacted their sense of Canadian identity
-

# Trust in Different Sectors

“How much trust do you have in...?”



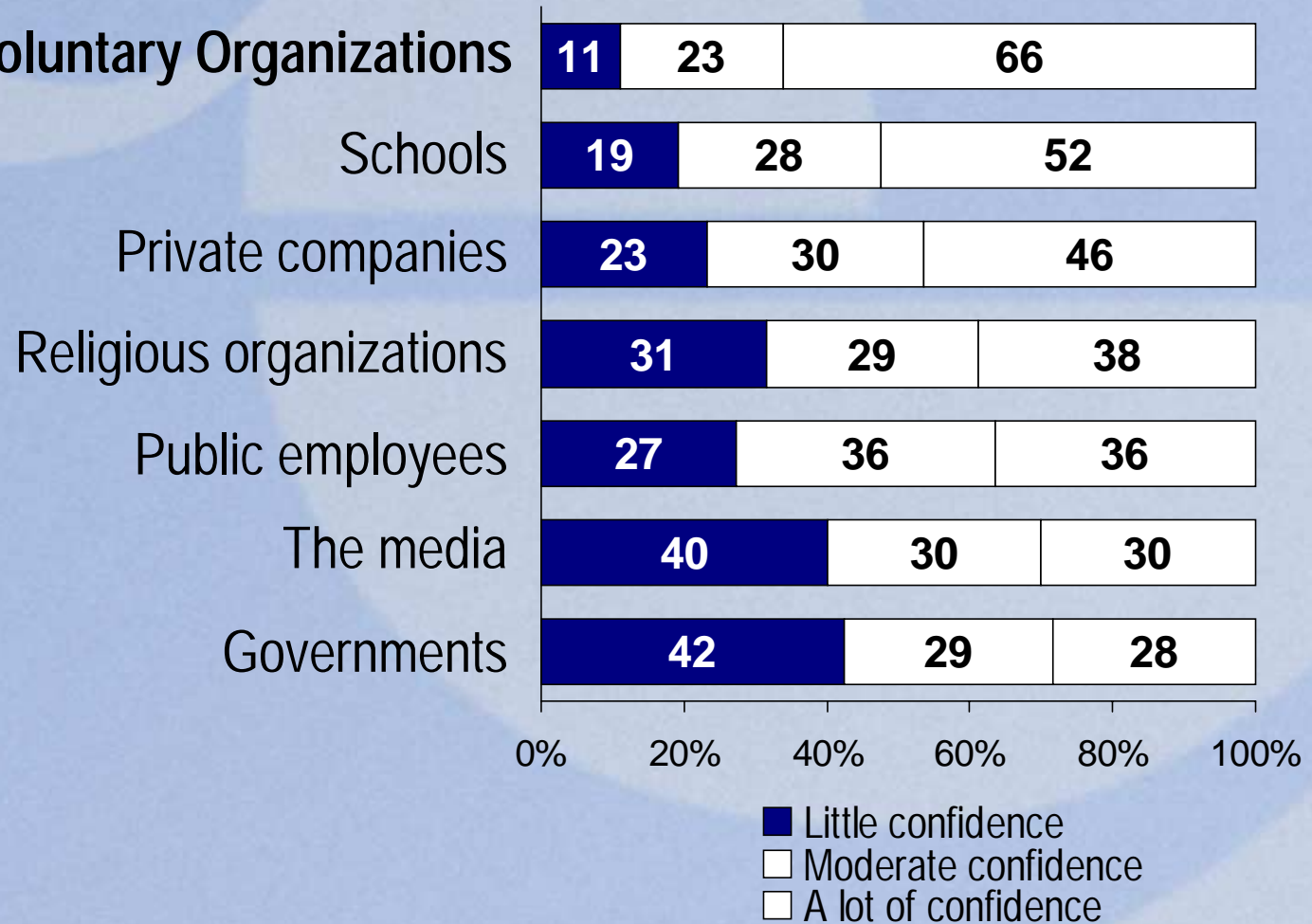
n=1528

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,*  
EKOS Research Associates, Inc., 2002

# Confidence in Institutions

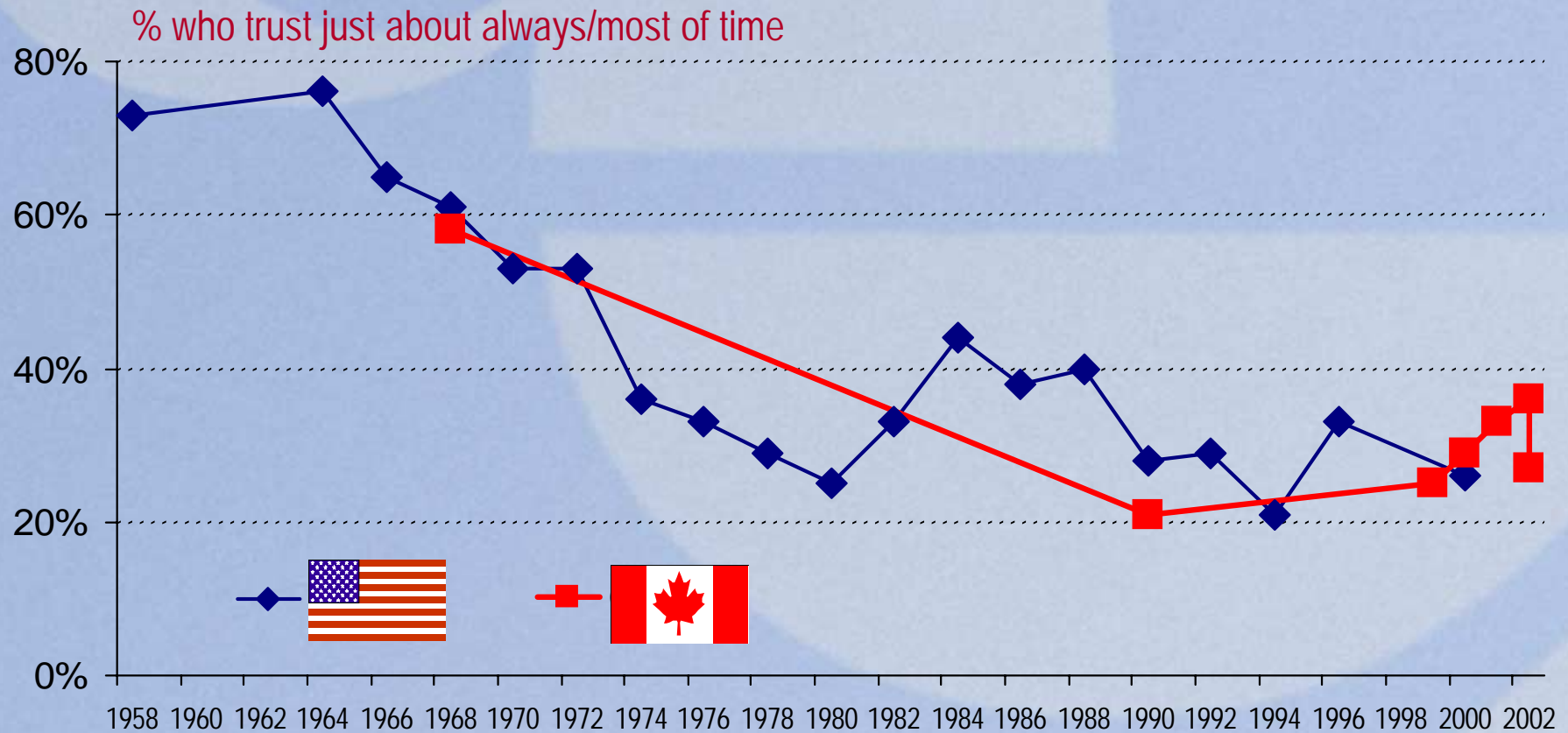
“Please rate how much confidence you have in each of these institutions”

## Non-Profit & Voluntary Organizations



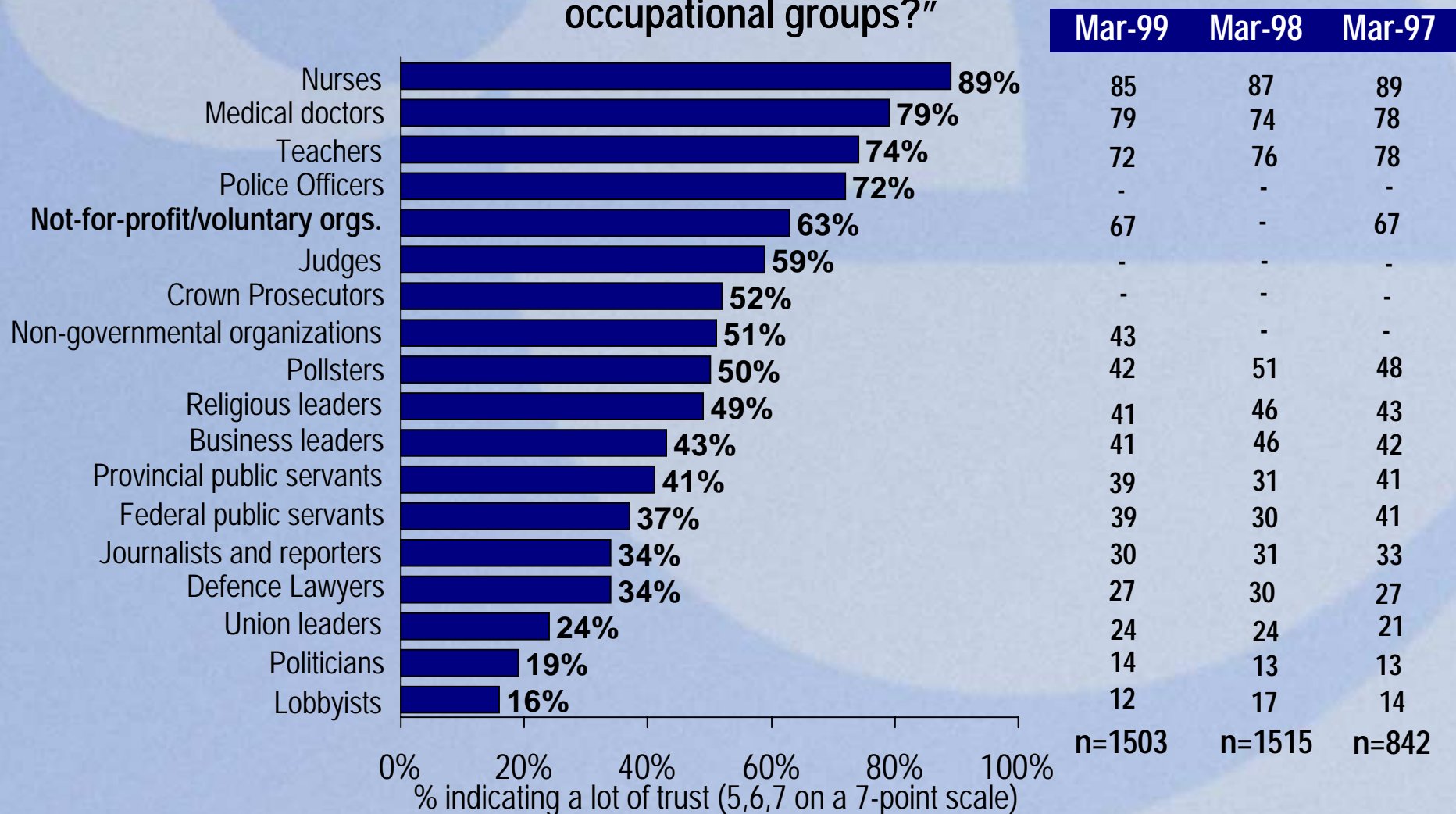
# Trust in Government: Canada and U.S.

"How much do you trust the government in Ottawa/Washington to do what is right?"



# Trust in Occupations

“Using a scale from 1, no trust at all, to 7, a great deal of trust with 4 meaning a moderate amount of trust, please rate how much trust you have in the following occupational groups?”

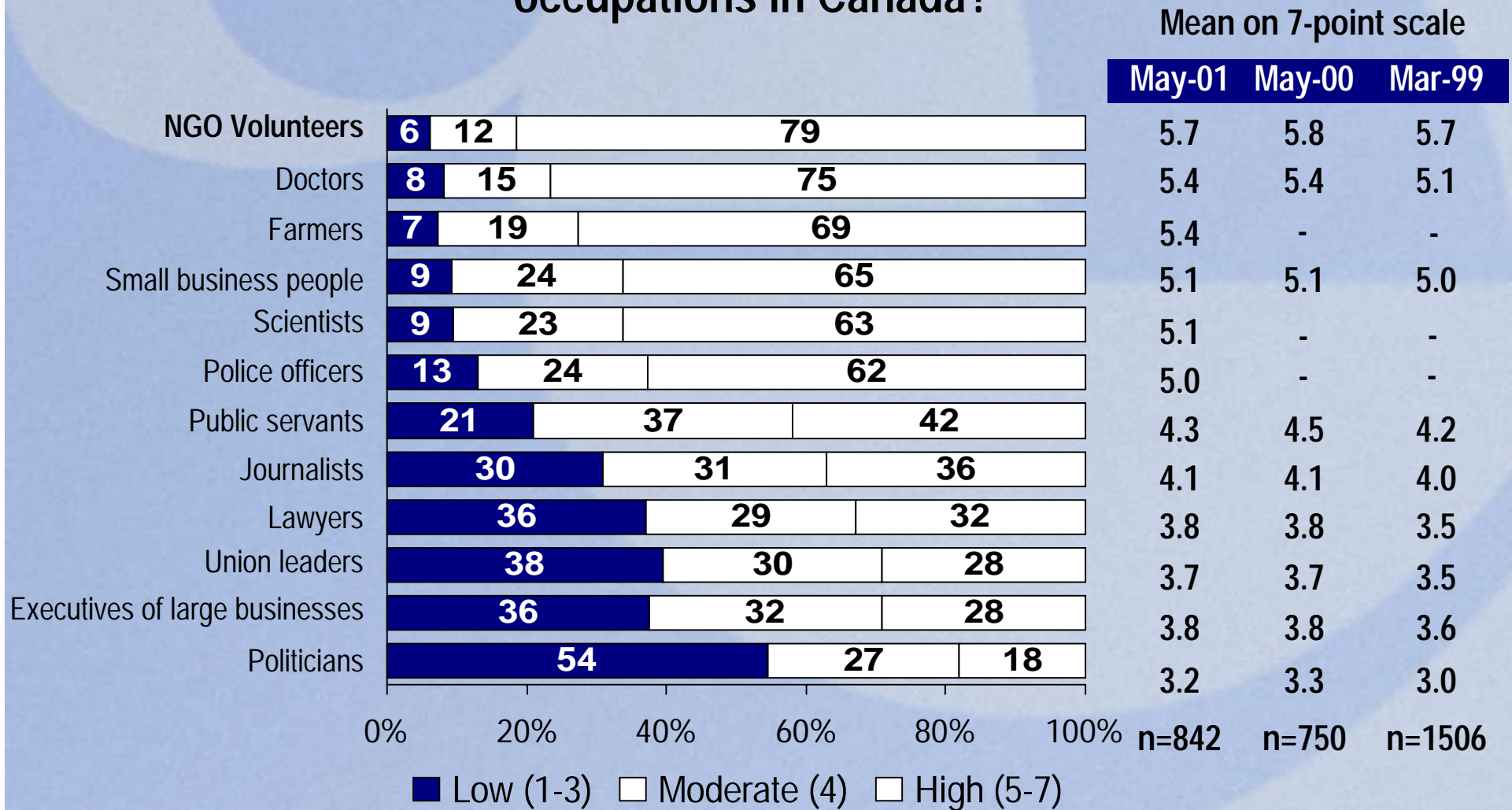


Average n=763

EKOS Research Associates, Inc., 2000

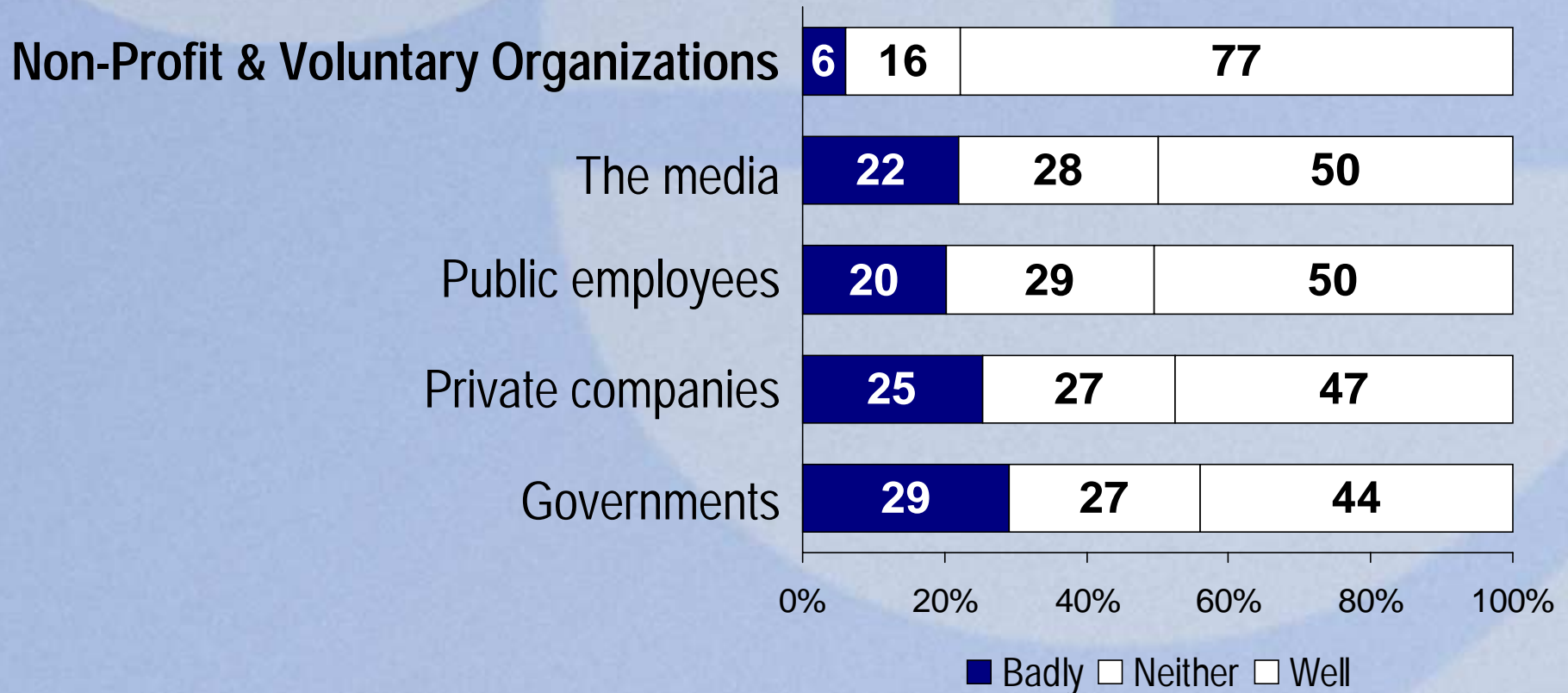
# Ethical Standards of Occupations

“How would you rate the ethical standards of each of the following occupations in Canada?”



# Serving Public Interest?

“How well do each of the following institutions serve the public interest?”



# Quality of Life

“Do you agree or disagree that ... in Canada are contributing to our overall quality of life?”

Non-Profit & Voluntary Organizations



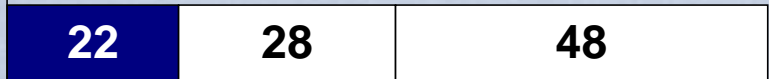
Schools



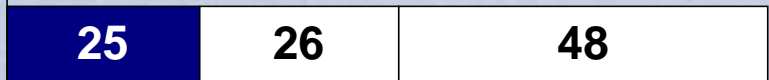
Private companies



Religious organizations



Governments



The media



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

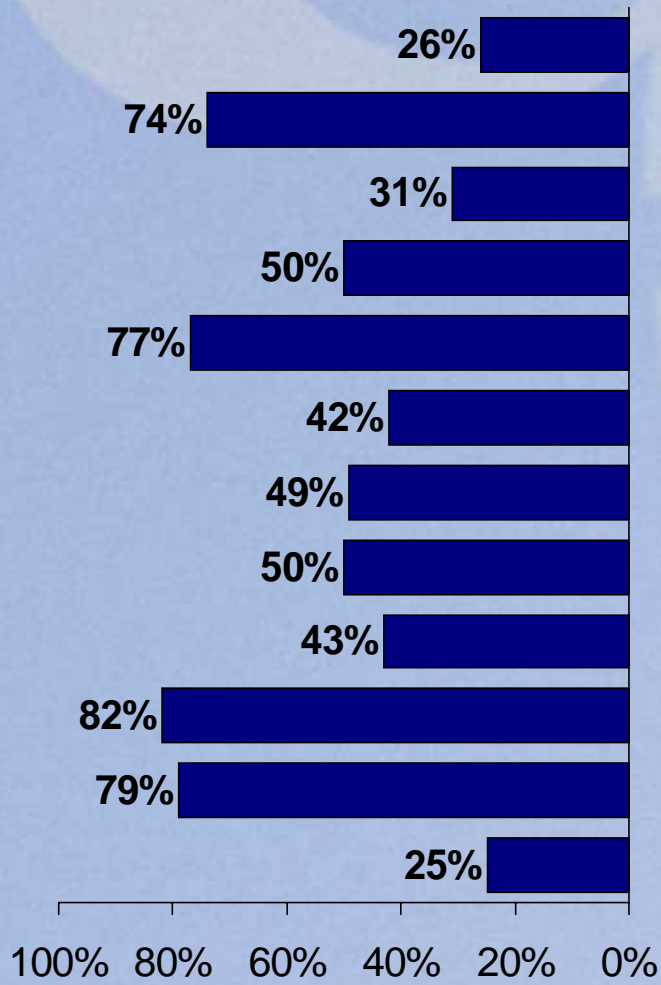
■ Disagree    □ Neither    □ Agree



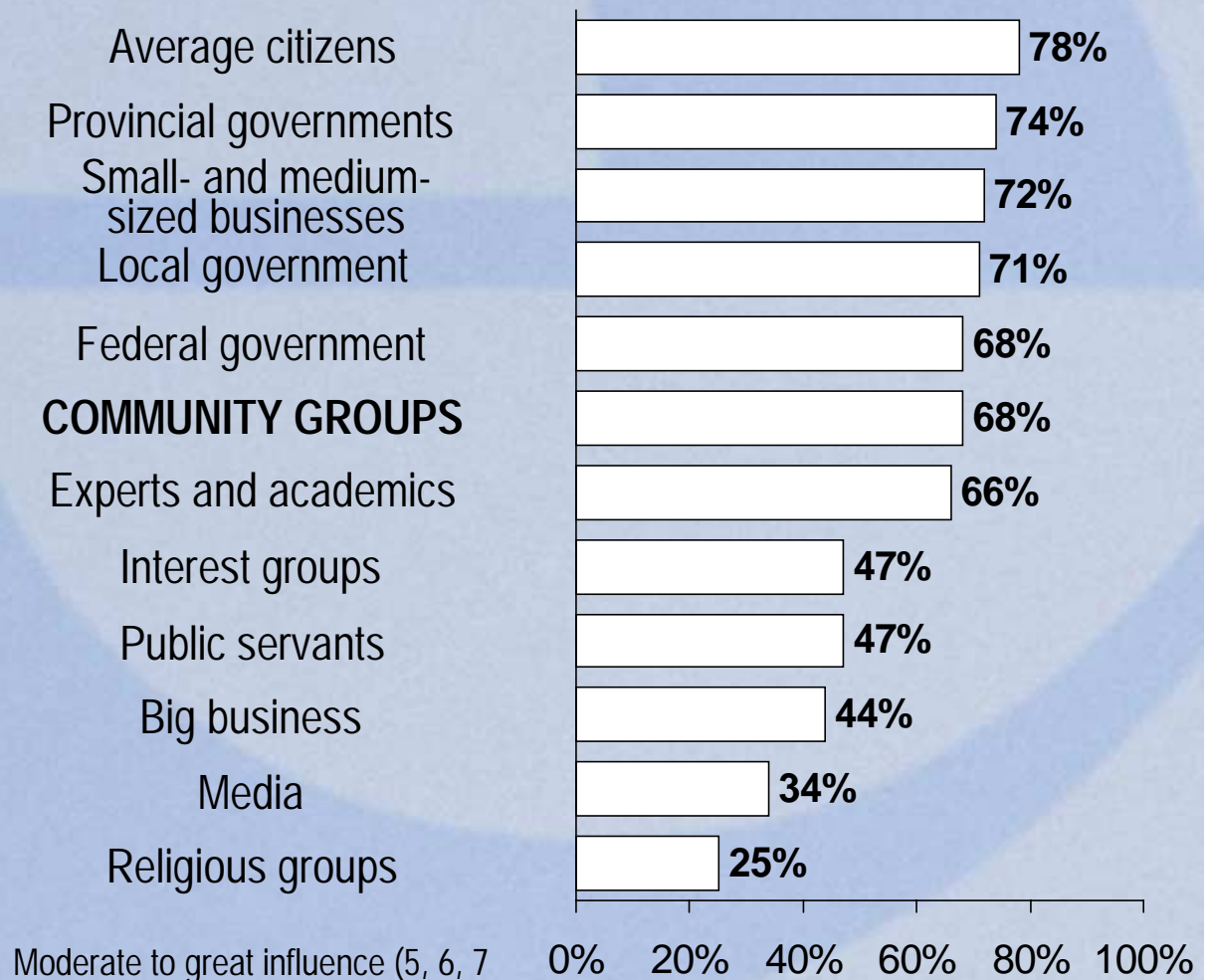
# Influence of Various Actors

"How much influence do/should each of the following have?"

## DO HAVE



## SHOULD HAVE



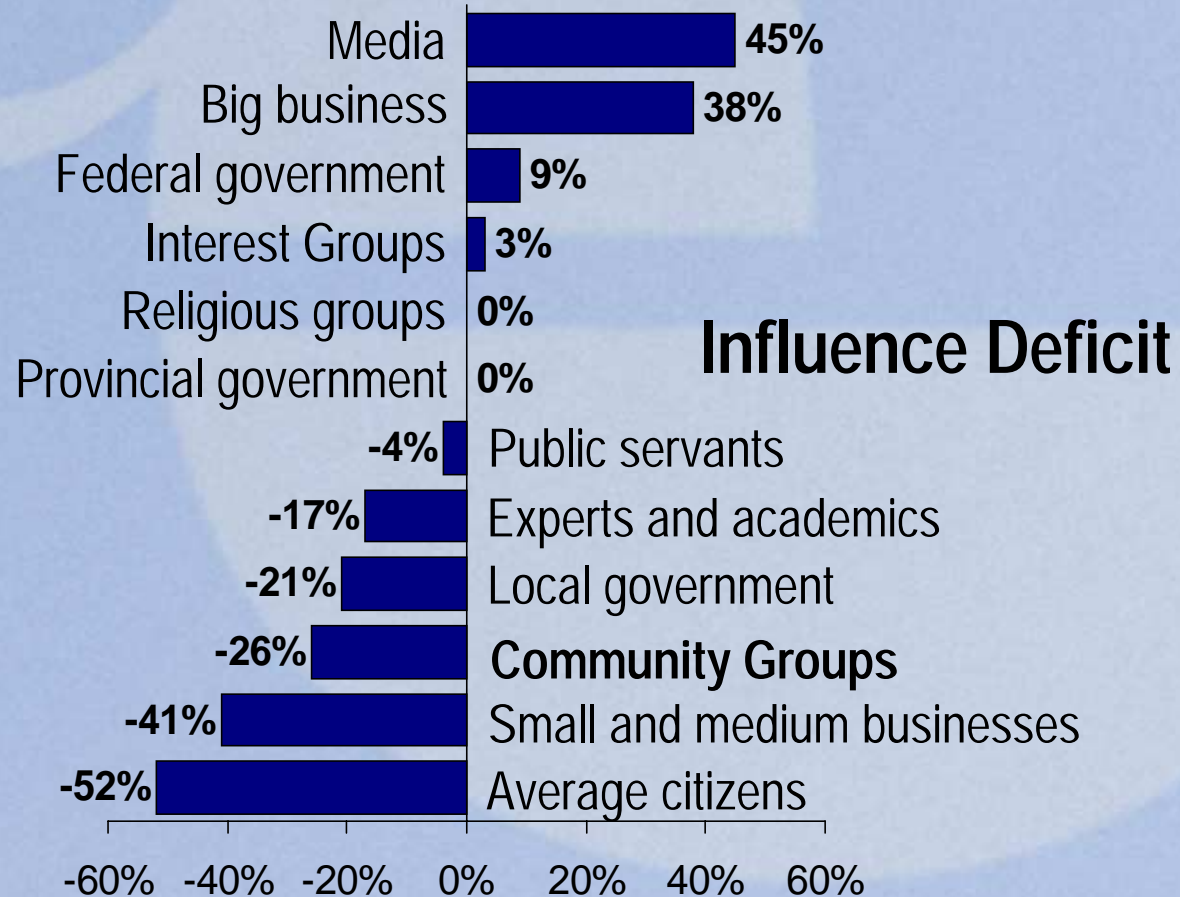
n=2042

Moderate to great influence (5, 6, 7 on a 7-point scale)

EKOS Research Associates, Inc., 1998

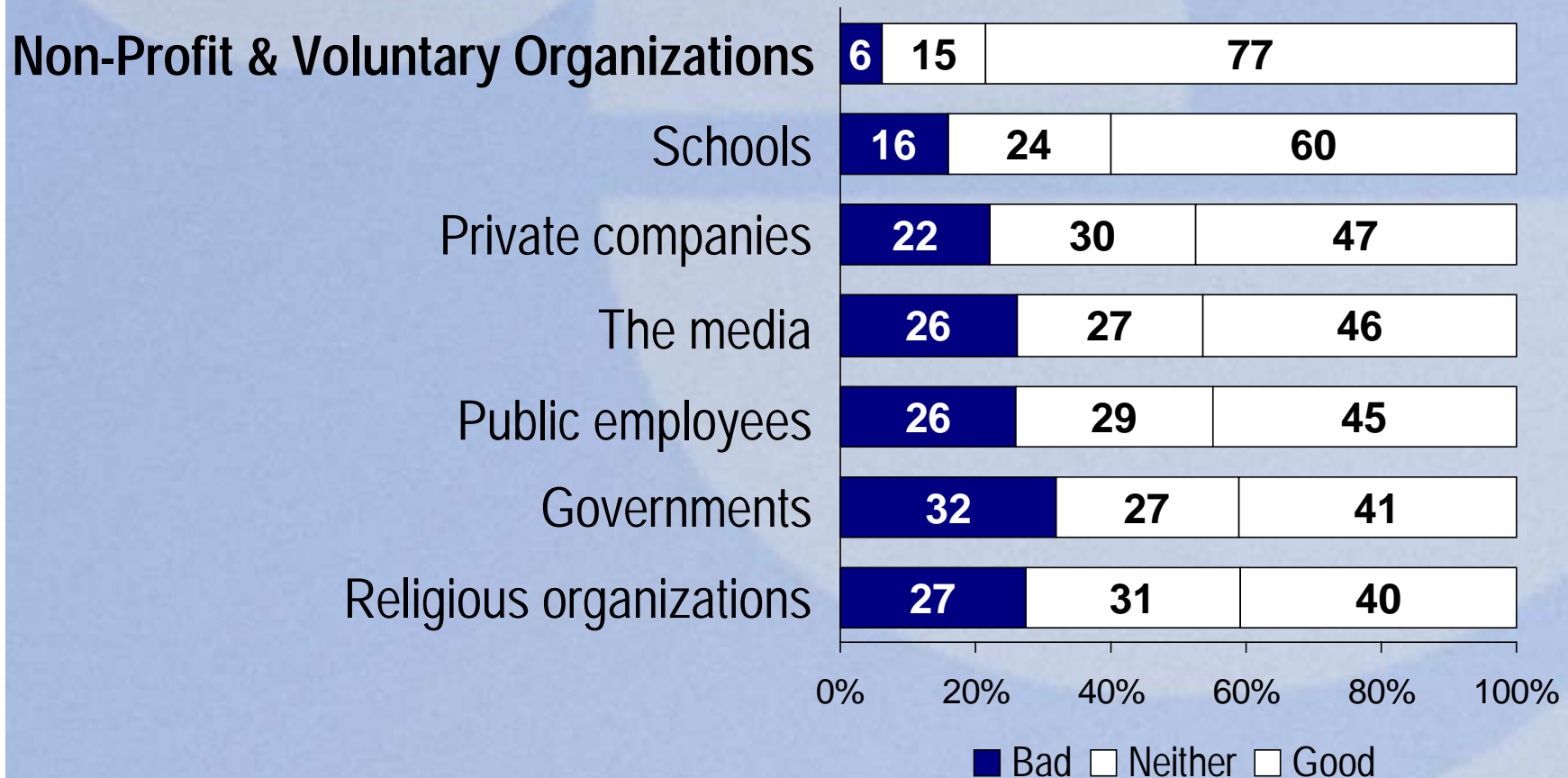
# Influence Gap

## Influence Surplus



# Performance of Institutions

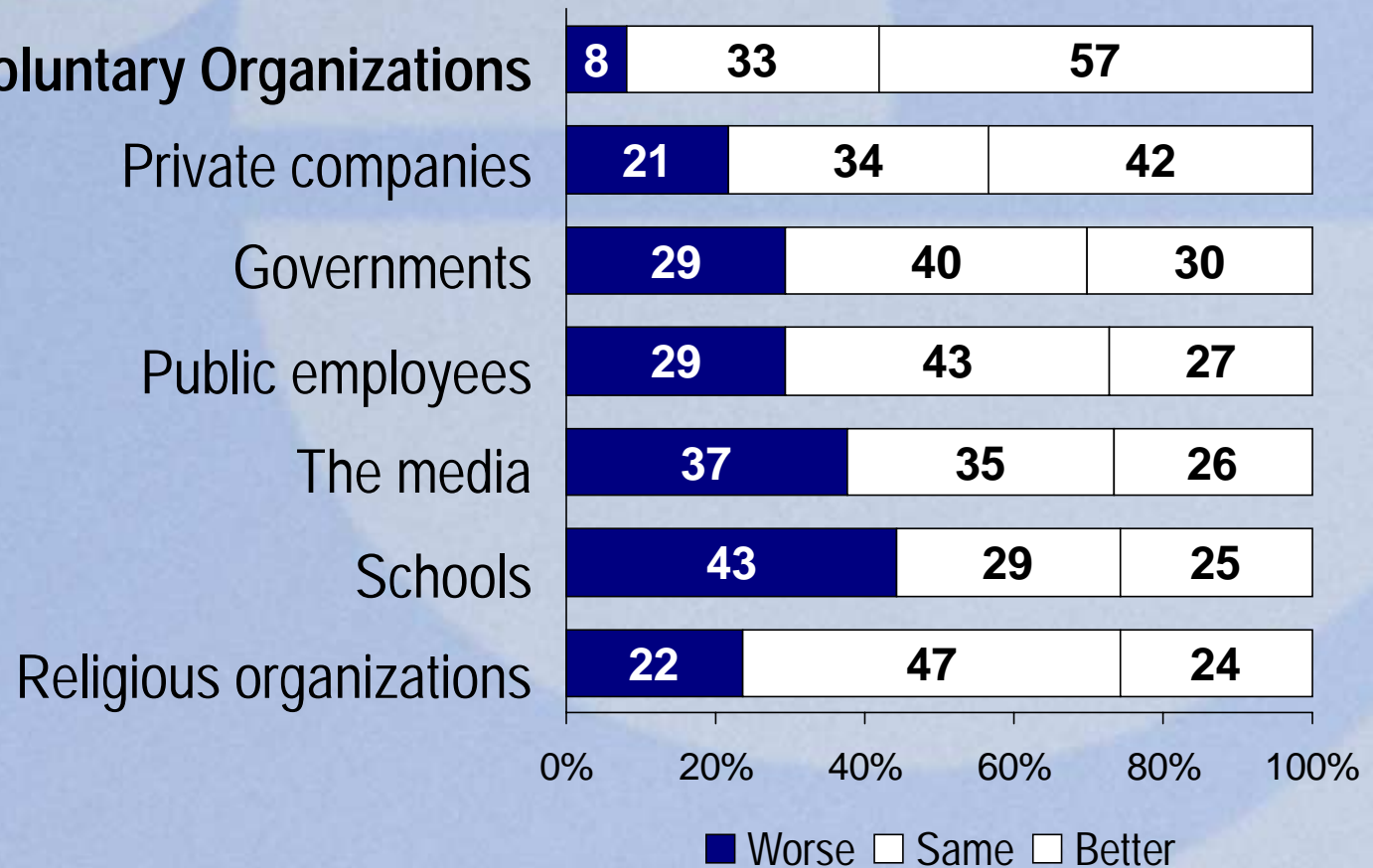
“How would you rate the performance of each of the following institutions?”



# Change in Performance

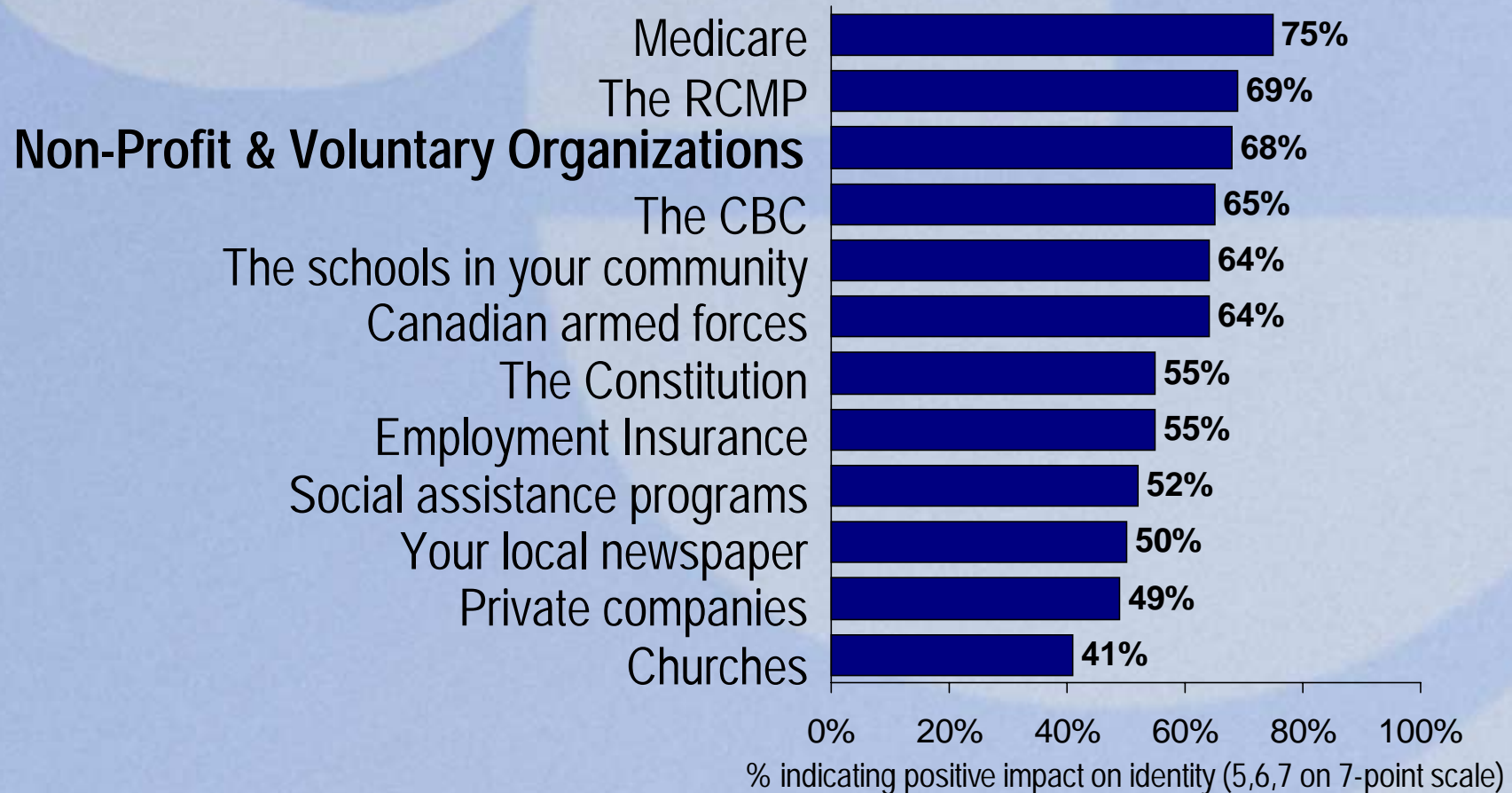
“How has the performance of each of these institutions changed in the past five years?”

## Non-Profit & Voluntary Organizations



# Key in Canadian Identity

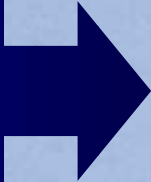
“How strongly do you think each of the following contributes to your sense of Canadian identity?”



*Presented to The Joint Awareness Table*

---

**IV.**



**Broad  
Perception of  
Charities**

# Charities seen as important and honest

---

- Charities seen with an important role at the community level
  - ✓ Strong majority see their role as important, contributing positively to the community and playing a major role in making communities better places to live
  - ✓ About 80 per cent think charitable organizations understanding needs of average Canadians better than government
- Charities seen as honest
  - ✓ More than 8 in 10 feel that charities are generally honest about the way they use of donations

# But concerns expressed on three fronts

---

- Greater transparency/accountability

- ✓ Three quarters would like to see charities provide more information about how donations are used
- ✓ Just under half say that they are reluctant to give money to charities because of stories about corruption

- Lack of funds

- ✓ Slightly less than 60 per cent think that charities have too little money to do their work

- Too many charities

- ✓ Nearly 3 in 4 state that there are "too many charities trying to get donations for the same cause"
  - ✓ Almost two-thirds think that there are so many organizations seeking donations, that sometimes they do not feel like giving to any organizations
  - ✓ About 4 in 10 think that there are "too many charitable organizations in Canada"
-



# Charities: Key Role at Community Level?

---



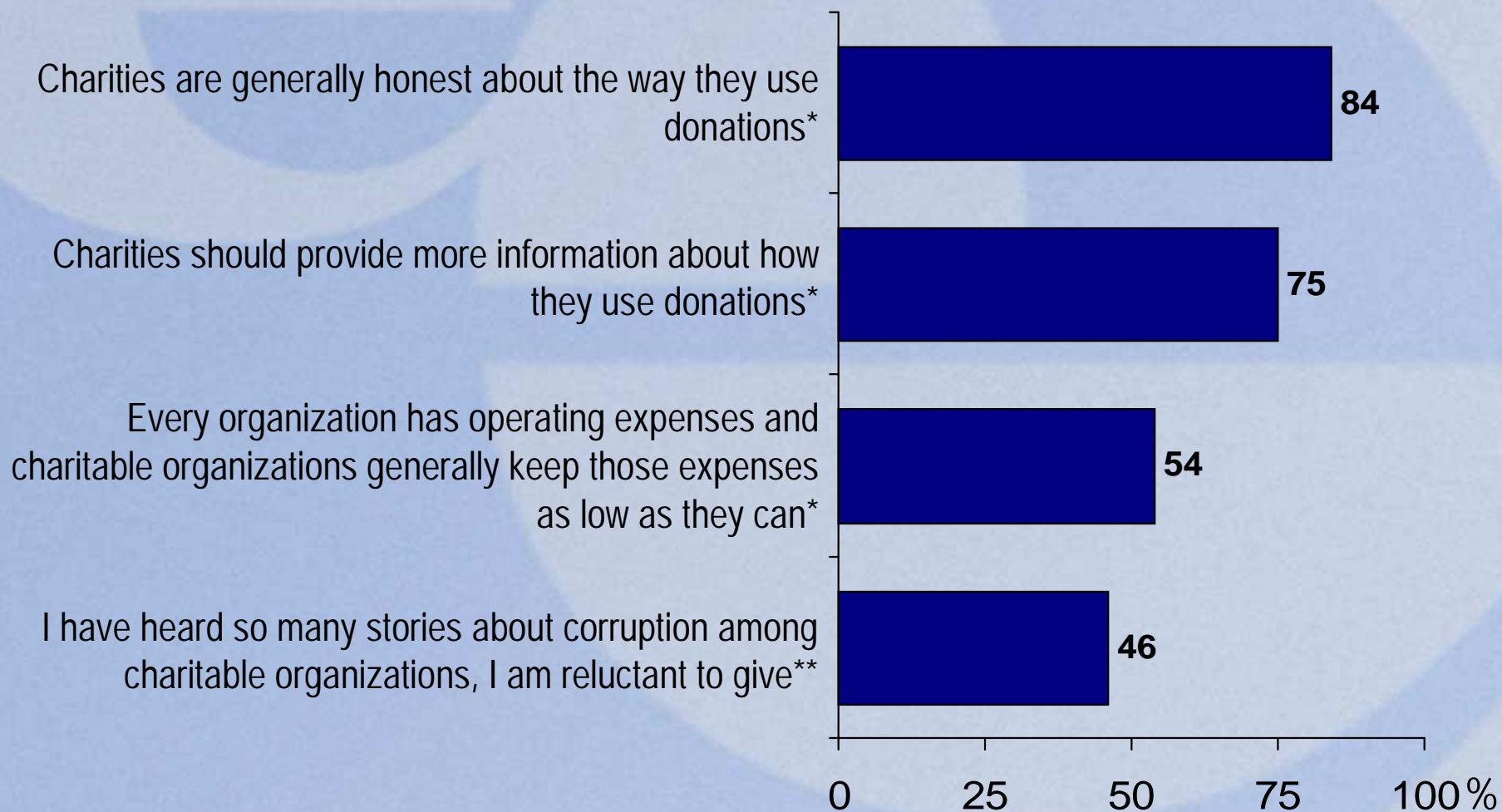
\*Decima Research, 1987 (n=1000)

\*\*The National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1999 (n=14,724)

\*\*\*Muttart-CPP Study of Public Attitudes, 2000 (n=3863)

# Charities: Accountability & Transparency

---

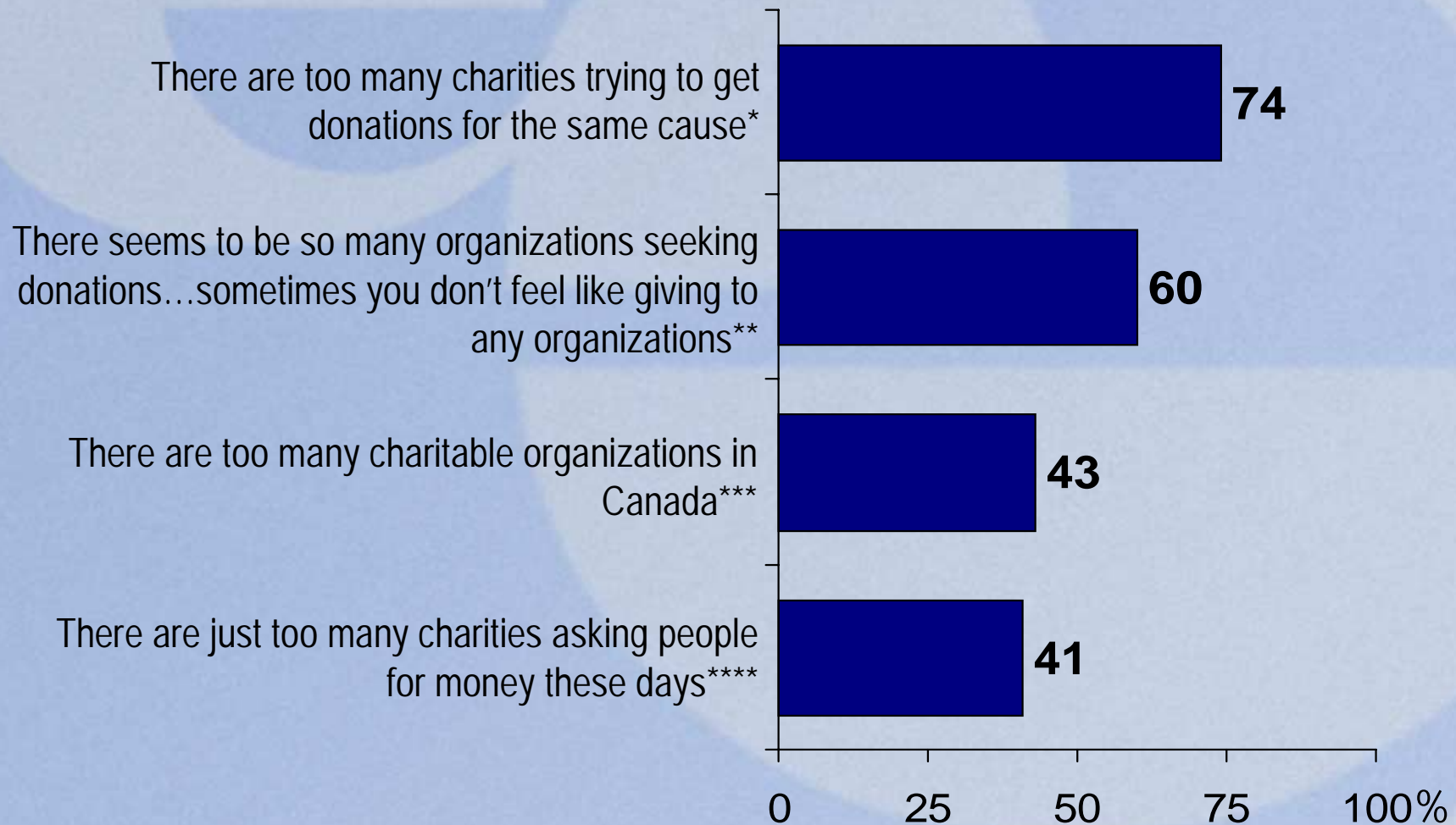


\*Muttart-CPP Study of Public Attitudes, 2000 (n=3863)

\*\*Angus-Reid, 1997 (n=598)

# Charities: Too Many?

---



\*Muttart-CPP Study of Public Attitudes, 2000 (n=3863)

\*\*National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1999 (n=14,724)

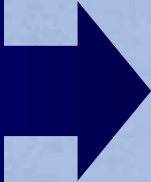
\*\*\*Cooperative Health Consortium Study, 1998 (n=1525)

\*\*\*\*Angus-Reid, 1997 (n=598)

*Presented to The Joint Awareness Table*

---

**V.**



**Priority, Role  
& Division of  
Labor**

# Voluntary Organizations Seen as a Partner, not a Substitute to Government

---

- Non-profit and voluntary organizations recognized as playing a vital role in Canadian life
  - ✓ Most important is their role in building a country which can be a source of pride and promoting tolerance and understanding
  - ✓ 90 per cent would like to see the voluntary sector maintain or increase its involvement in public programs and policies (more than for any other sector)
- Voluntary organizations not a substitute for government
  - ✓ A strong majority say that the work of voluntary organizations should not be a substitute for government's responsibility to provide services to the public
  - ✓ More than half of Canadians feel that increased use of the voluntary sector is a way to offload traditional government responsibilities
  - ✓ Approximately one-third believe that voluntary sector is highly capable of assuming increased responsibility for areas traditionally under government jurisdiction
- Public demands greater political role for voluntary sector
  - ✓ Nearly half agree that the voluntary sector should be participating in decision-making at all political levels

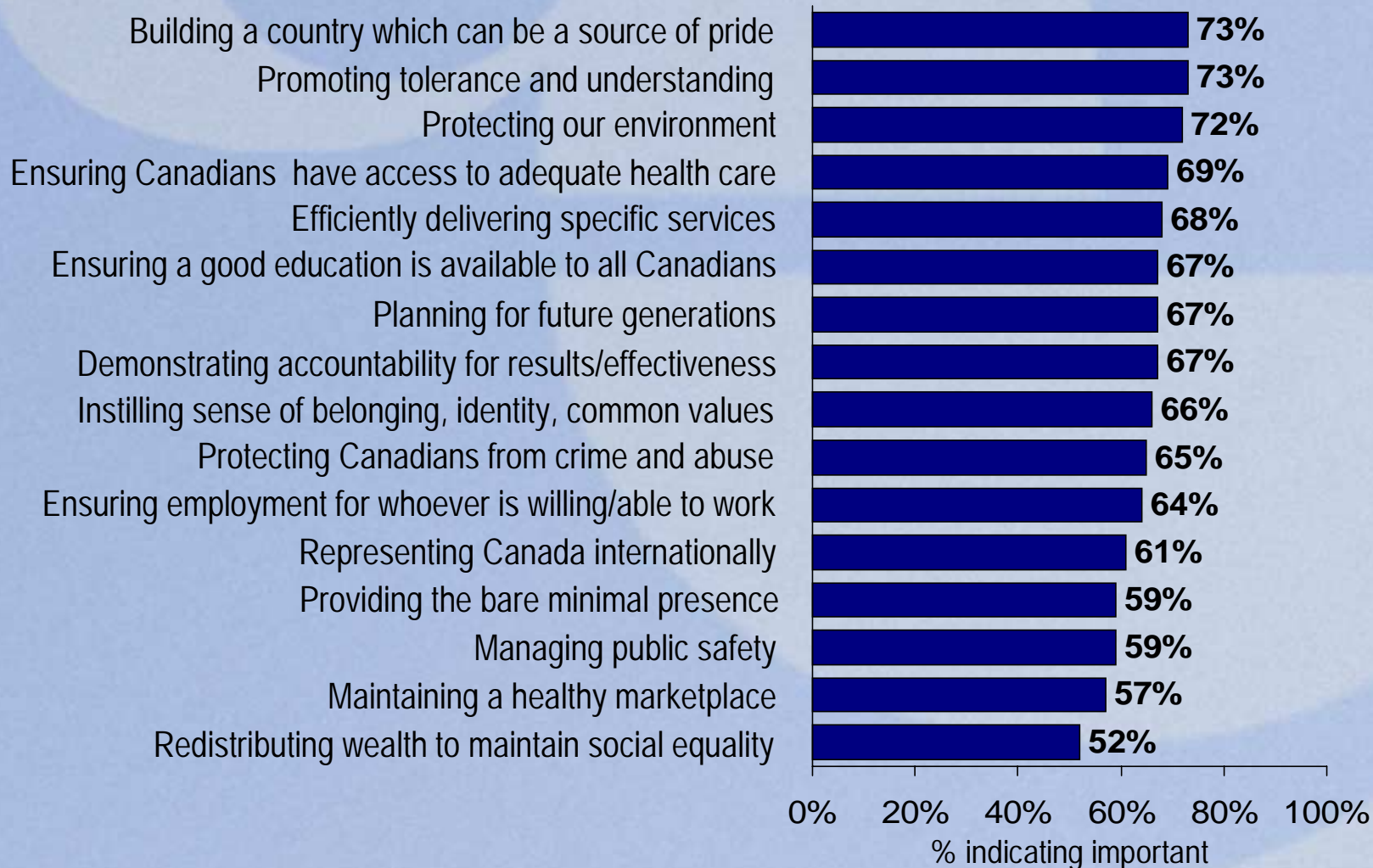
## A Supporting Role is expected from federal government

---

- Support for voluntary sector expected to come from federal government
  - ✓ The vast majority believe that the federal government should encourage people to engage in volunteer activities
  - ✓ About four in five agree that the federal government also expected to do more to help the voluntary sector recruit and retain volunteers
  
- Broad sense that the voluntary sector will be more influential
  - ✓ About five in ten believe that voluntary sector will be more influential in the life of citizens in the future

# Perceptions of Public Institutions

**“How important a role should NON-PROFIT and VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS play in ...?”**

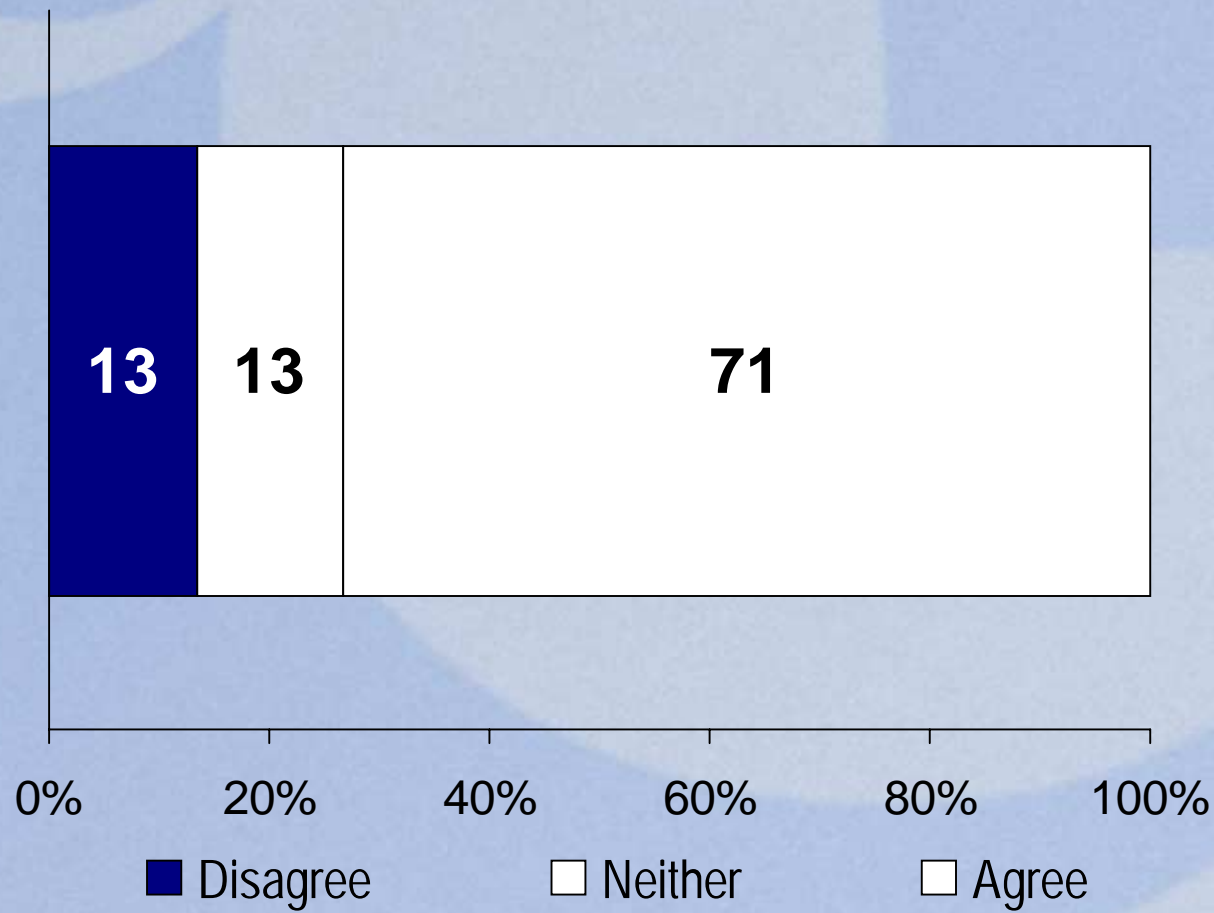


n=609

EKOS Research Associates, Inc., 1998

## Substitute for the Government?

“The work that voluntary organizations do should not be a substitute for government’s responsibility to provide services to the public.”



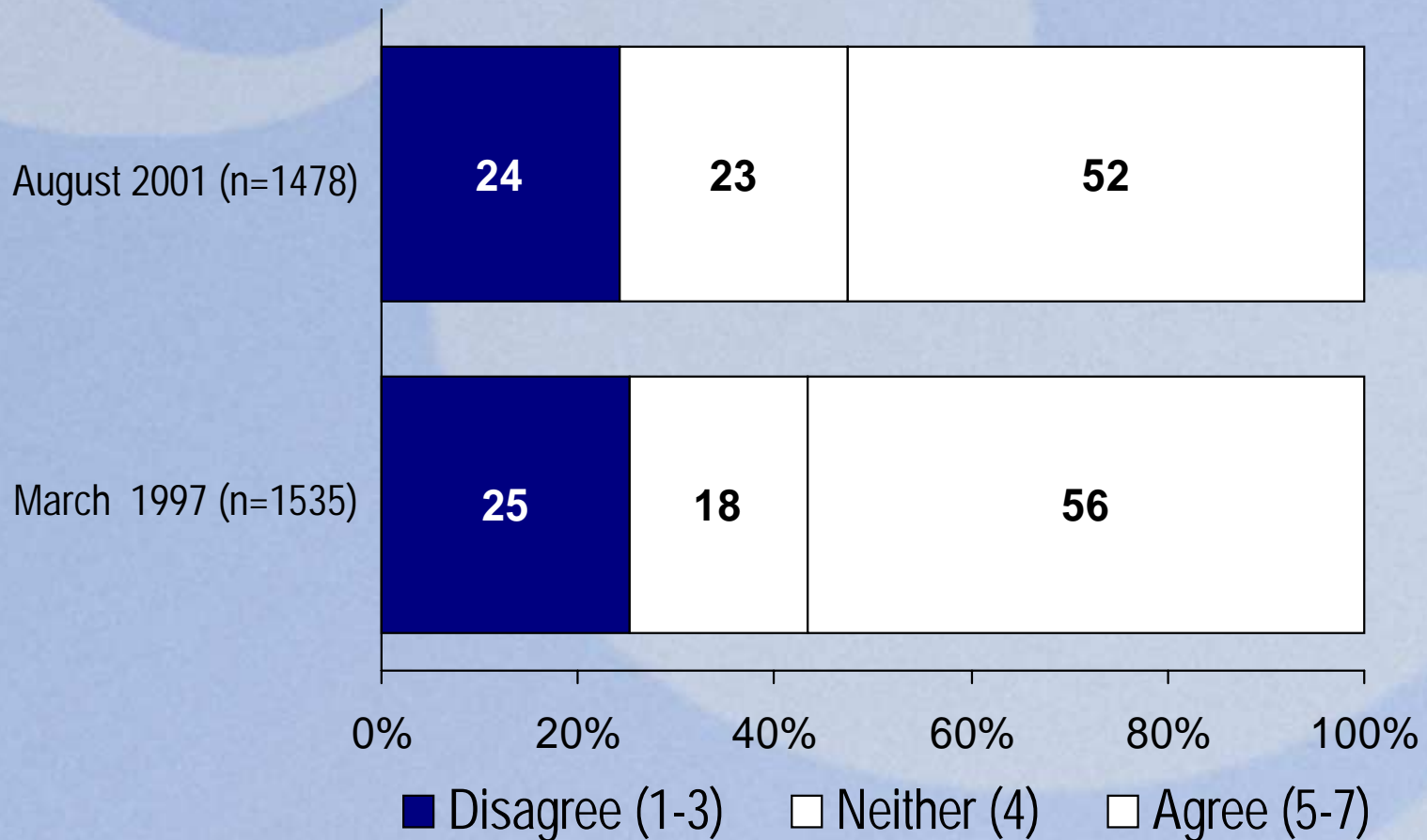
n=1528

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,*  
EKOS Research Associates, Inc., 2002



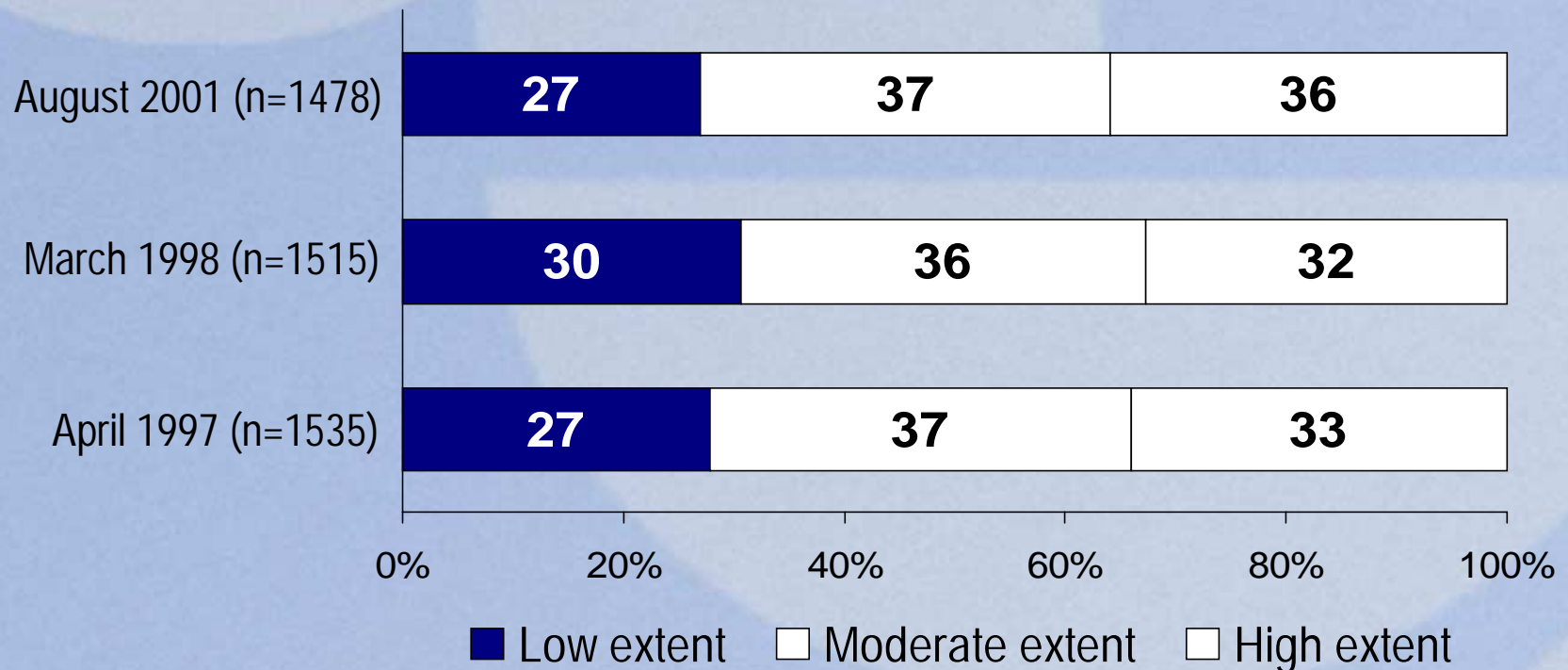
## Offloading Government Responsibilities (a)

“Increased use of voluntary sector is just a way of offloading traditional government responsibilities.”



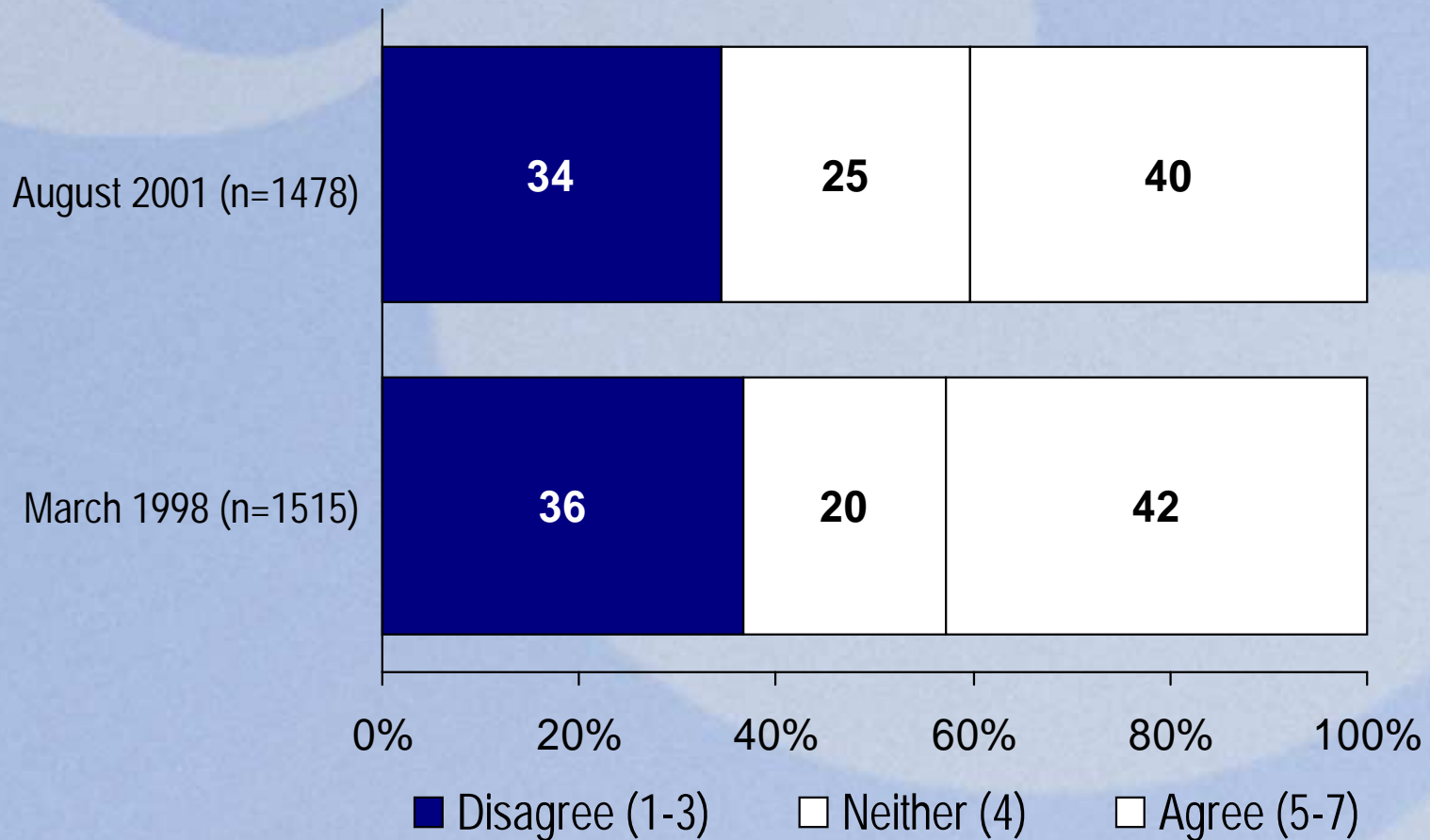
## Offloading Government Responsibilities (b)

“To what extent do you think the voluntary sector is capable of assuming increased responsibility for areas which have traditionally fallen under government jurisdiction?”



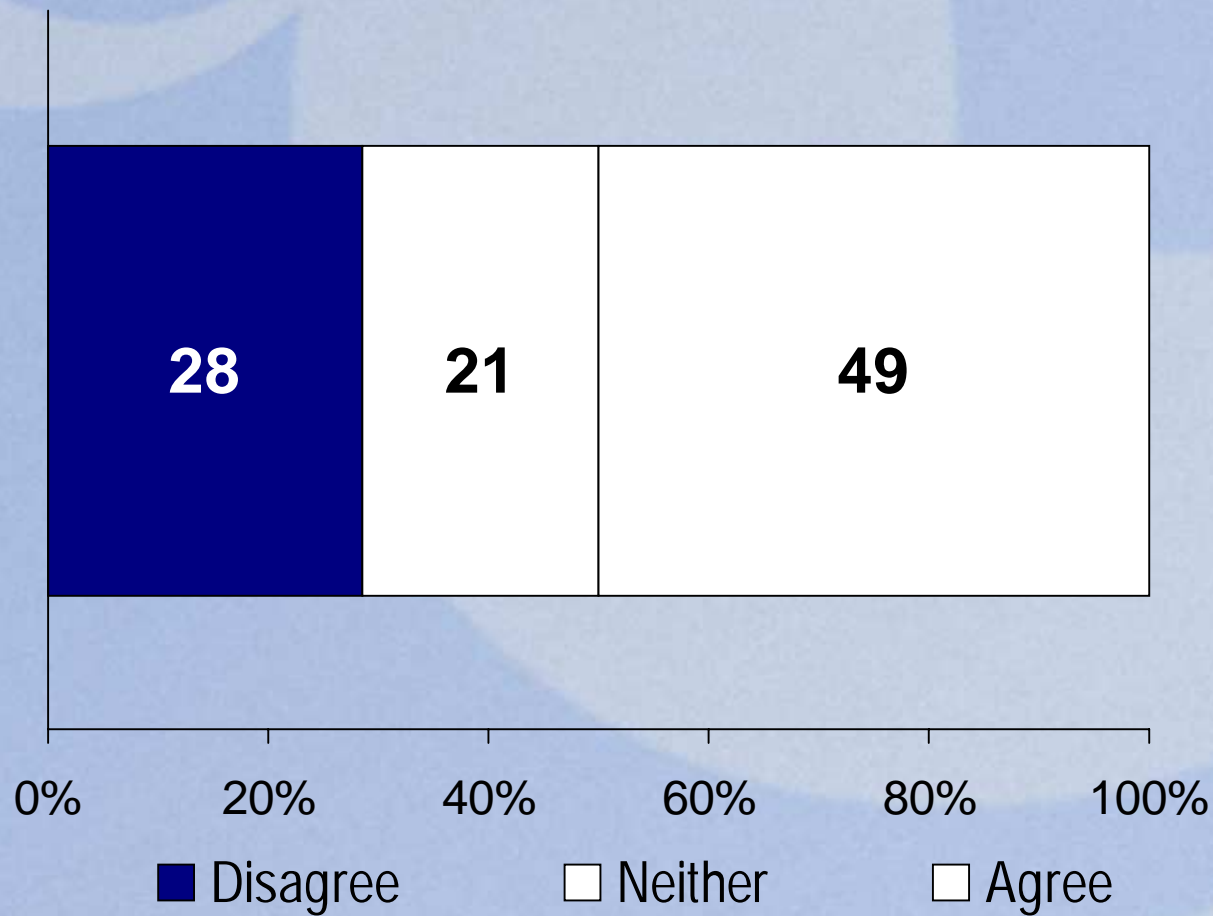
## Ability to Deliver Services

**"I don't think voluntary organizations have the knowledge or resources to efficiently deliver government services."**



# Involvement in Political Decision-Making

"The voluntary sector should be participating fully in decision-making at all political levels."

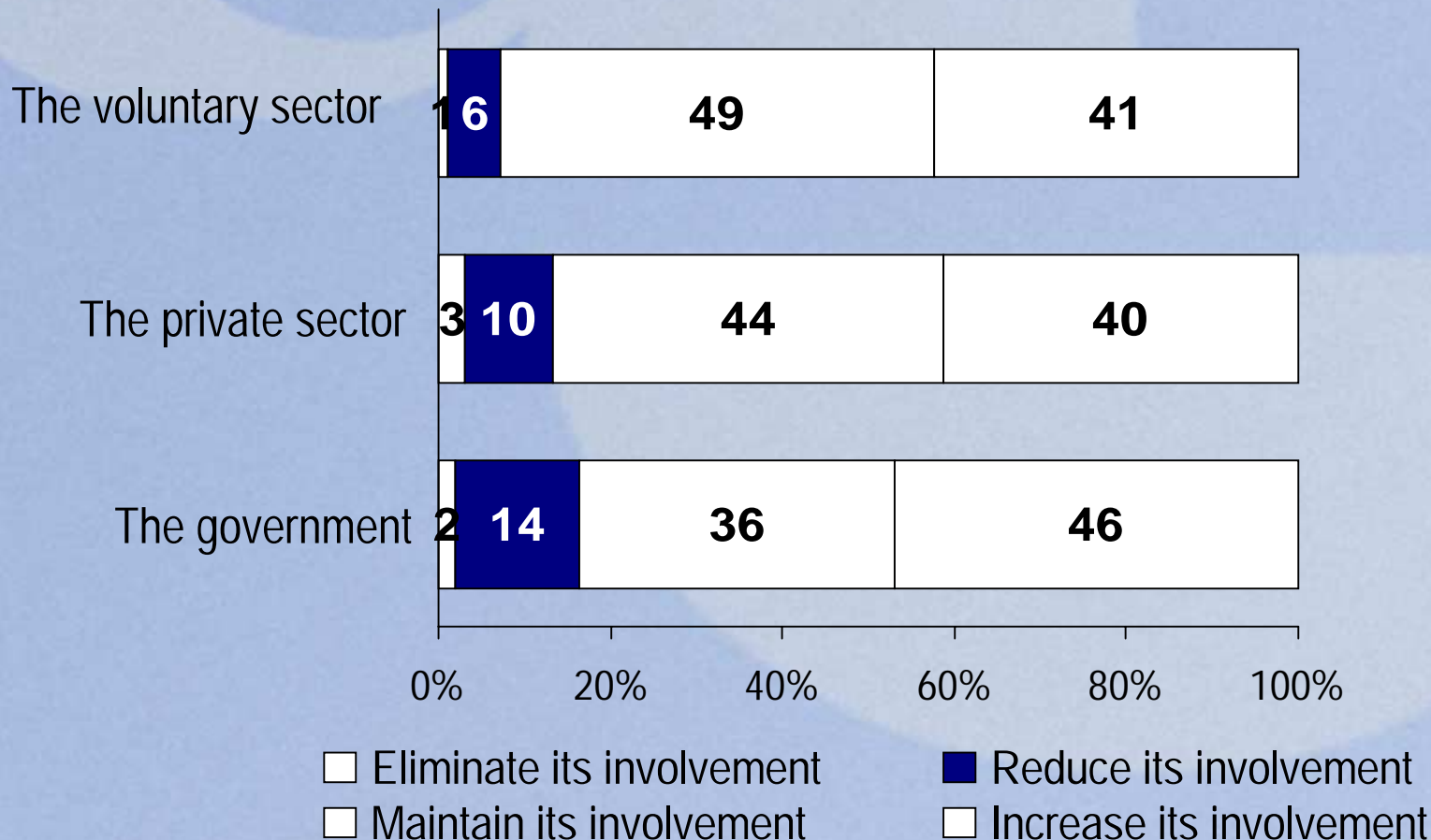


n=1528

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,*  
EKOS Research Associates, Inc., 2002

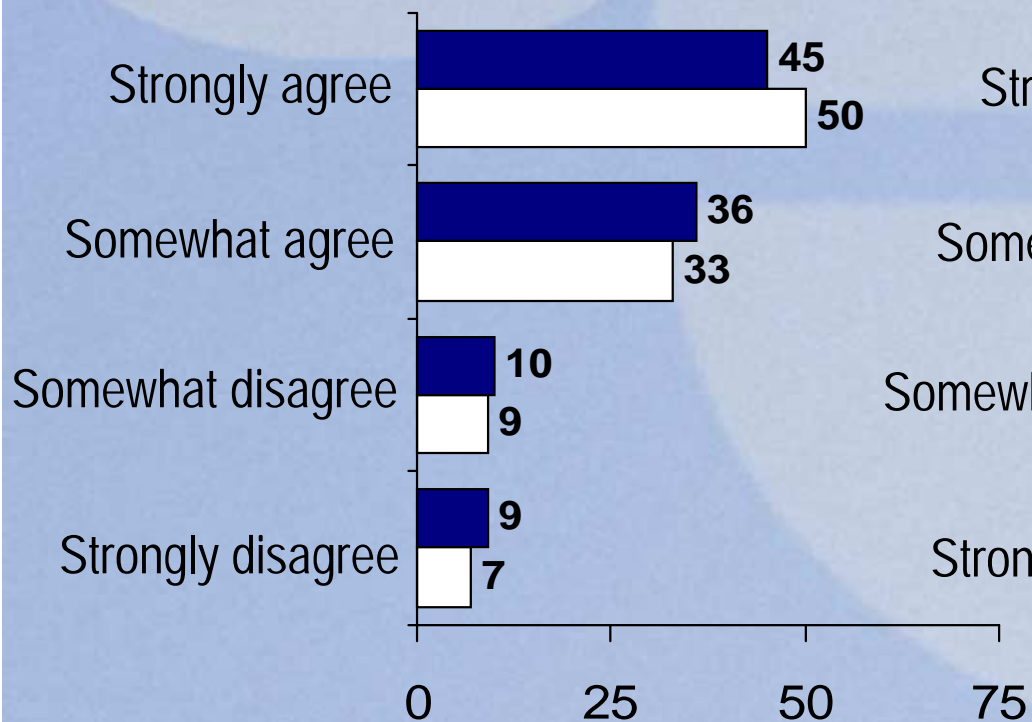
## Activism & Division of Labor

“In the area of public programs and policies, what would you like to see the government, private and voluntary sectors do in the future?”

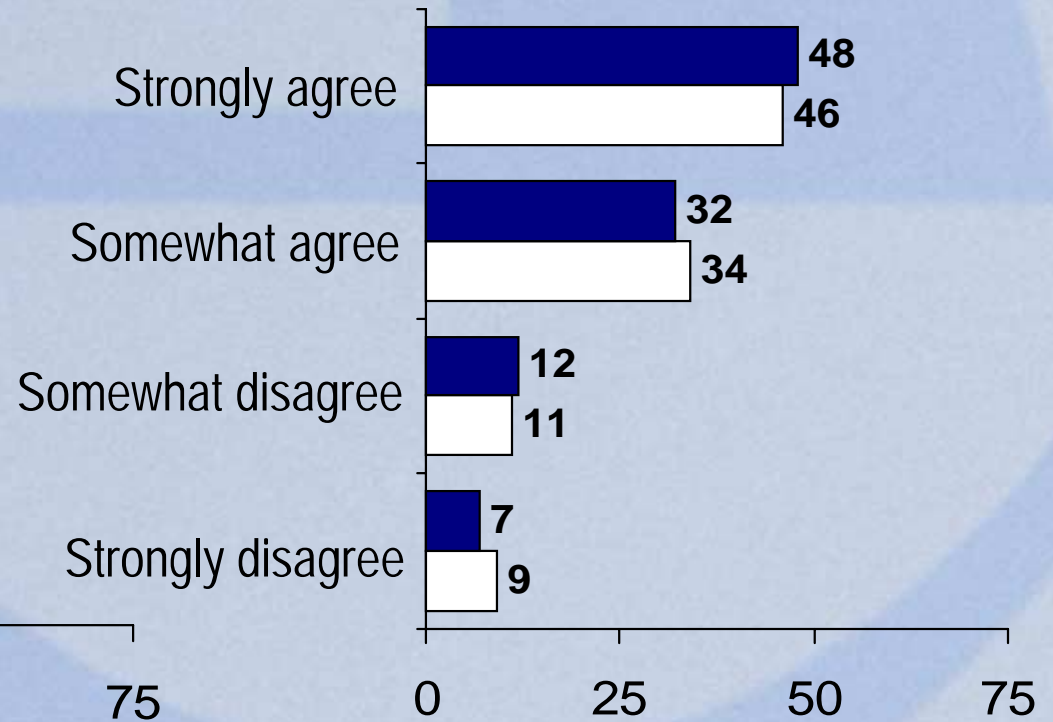


# Role for Government of Canada

"The Government of Canada should be encouraging people to do volunteer work."



"The Government of Canada should be doing more to help voluntary sector organizations recruit and retain volunteers."



■ February 2002  
□ September 2001

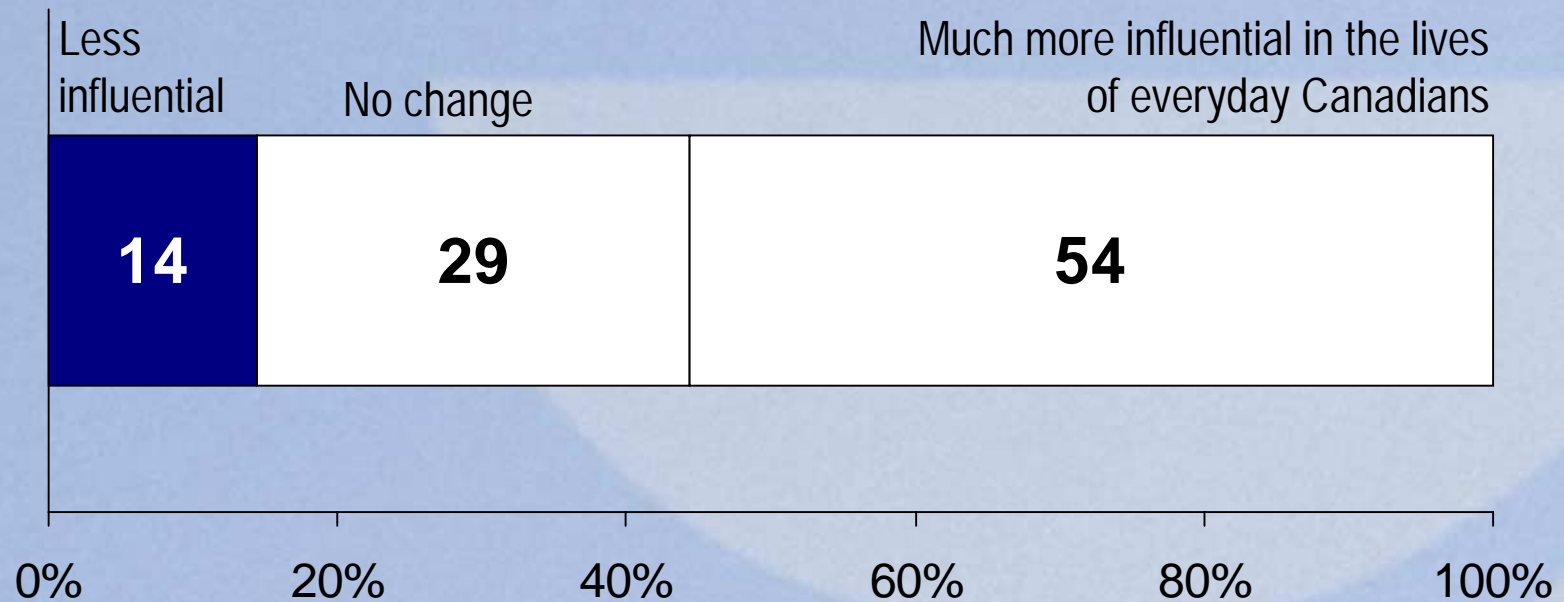
n=1000

*The Voluntary Task Force,  
Ipsos-Reid Corporation*

## Vision for the Future

---

“How do you think the voluntary sector in Canada will differ 10 years from now in the following areas?”

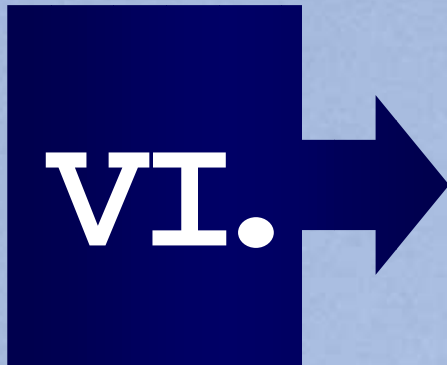


n=1528

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,*  
EKOS Research Associates, Inc., 2002

*Presented to The Joint Awareness Table*

---



**Voluntary  
Sector &  
Citizen  
Engagement**



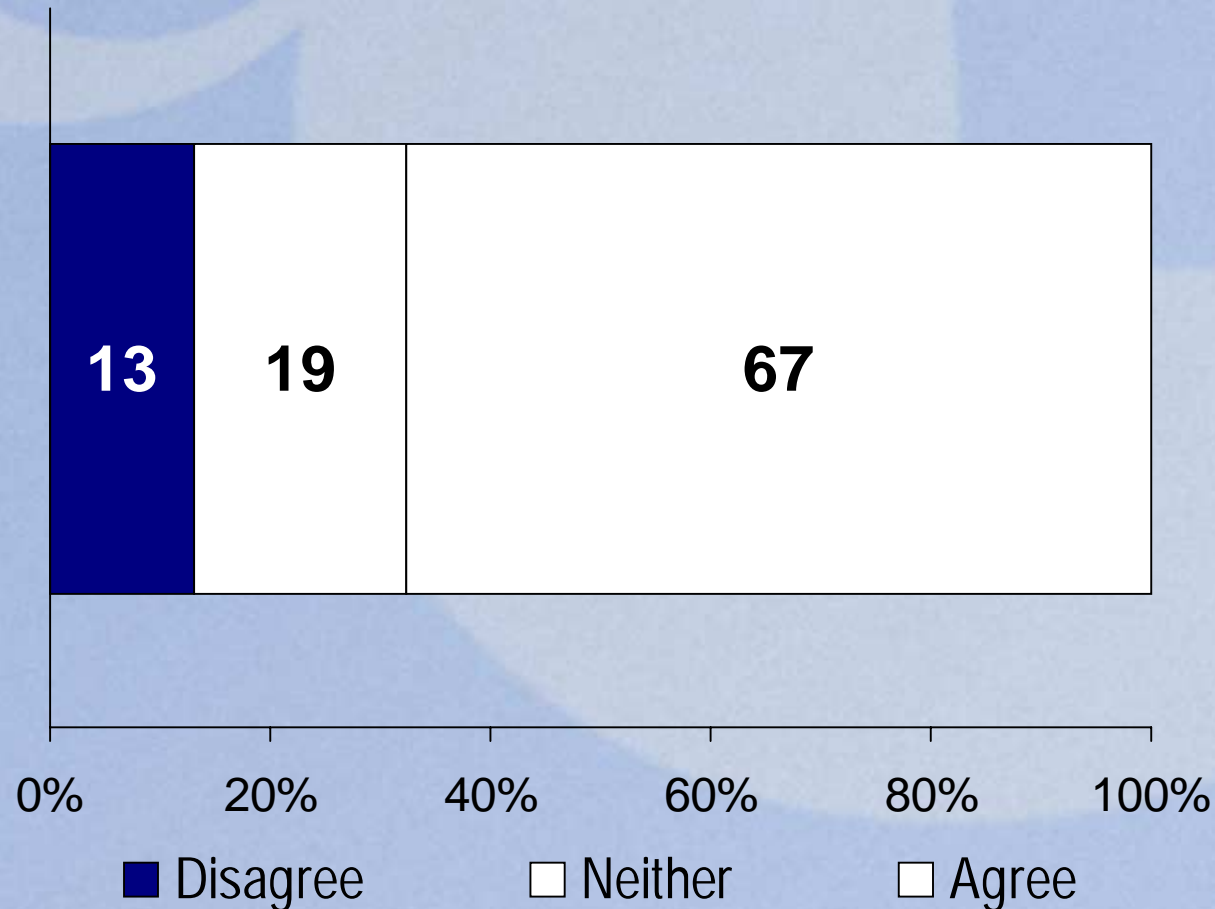
# Voluntary Sector: A Link Between Citizens and Decision-Makers?

---

- Voluntary sector seen as capable of assuming role in citizen engagement
  - ✓ More than 6 in 10 think that voluntary organizations understand the needs of average citizens better than the government
  - ✓ About two-thirds think that the voluntary sector is a positive way of expanding citizen involvement
  
- But primary responsibility should remain in the hands of government
  - ✓ When asked about who should be primarily responsible for running an engagement exercise, the public are twice as likely to suggest politicians or public servants over voluntary organizations

## Closer to Citizens?

"Voluntary organizations understand the needs of average citizens better than government."

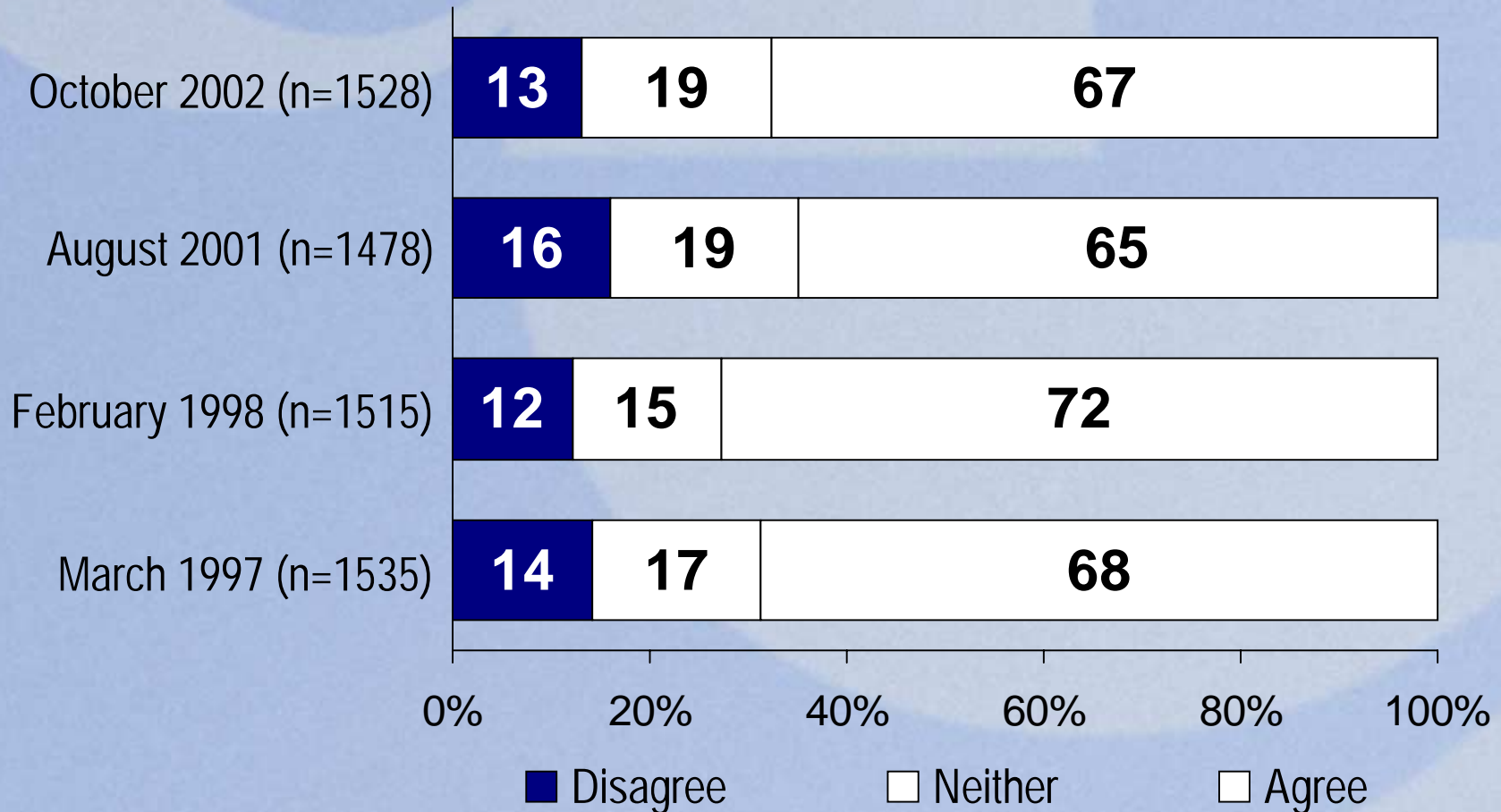


n=1528

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,*  
EKOS Research Associates, September-October 2002

# Expanding Citizen Involvement

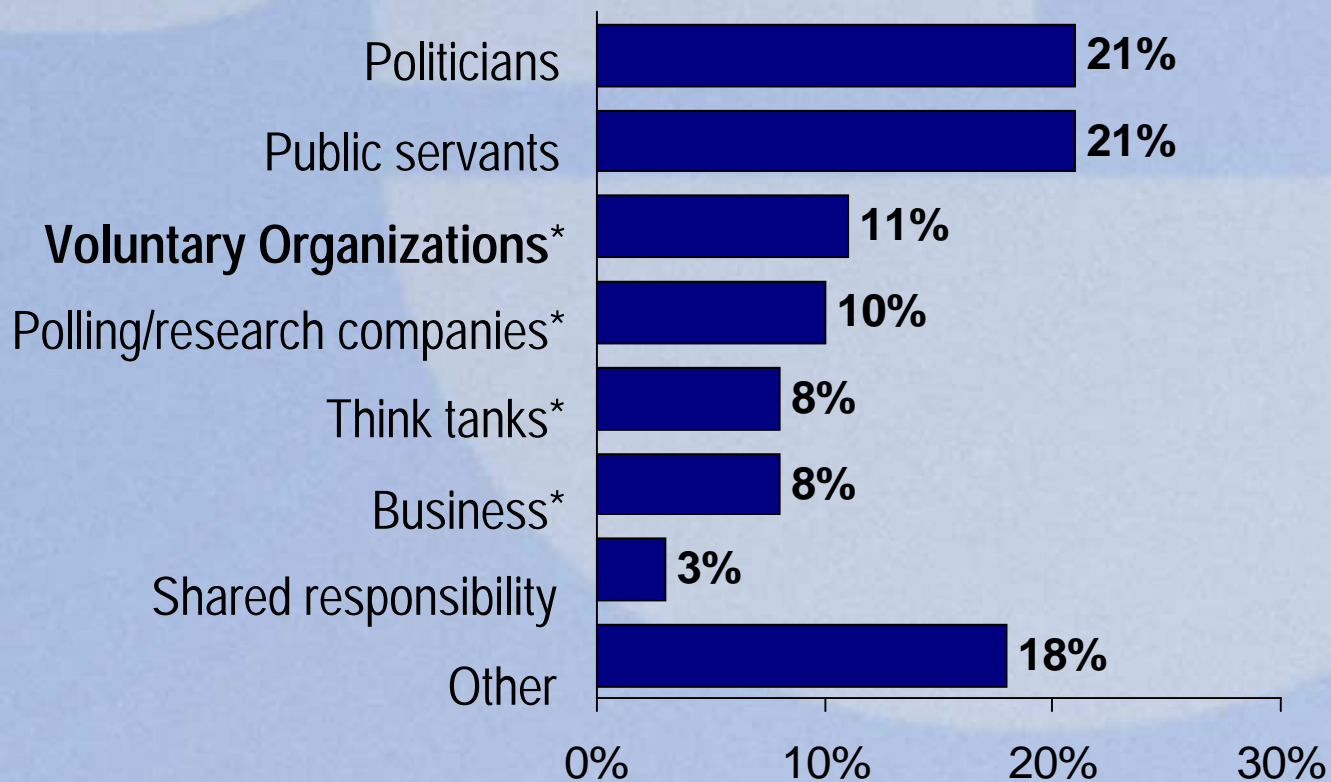
“Increased use of the voluntary sector is a positive way of expanding citizen involvement.”



## Division of Engagement Responsibilities

---

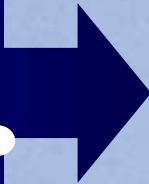
“Who should be primarily responsible for running an engagement exercise?”



*Presented to The Joint Awareness Table*

---

**VII.**



# **Profiling Voluntarism**

# Profiling Volunteerism (a)

---

- National rate of volunteering stable at about 27 per cent over past two decades
- Voluntarism highly segmented – key drivers include:
  - ✓ Upper socio-economic status (income and education)
  - ✓ Region (prairies higher and Quebec lower)
  - ✓ Age (if exclude the 35 and less, decline as getting older)
- Other demographics are poor predictors – gender and workforce status gap are closing
  - ✓ Men are almost as likely as women of volunteering in 2000
  - ✓ The gap between part-time and full-time workers went from now + 12 percentage points in 1997 to +6 percentage points in 2000
  - ✓ The most drastic decline includes citizens not in the workforce
    - Went from 35 per cent in 1987 to 27 per cent in 1997 to 24 per cent in 2000
  - ✓ Marital status poor predictor but married or common law more likely to volunteer than single or widowed

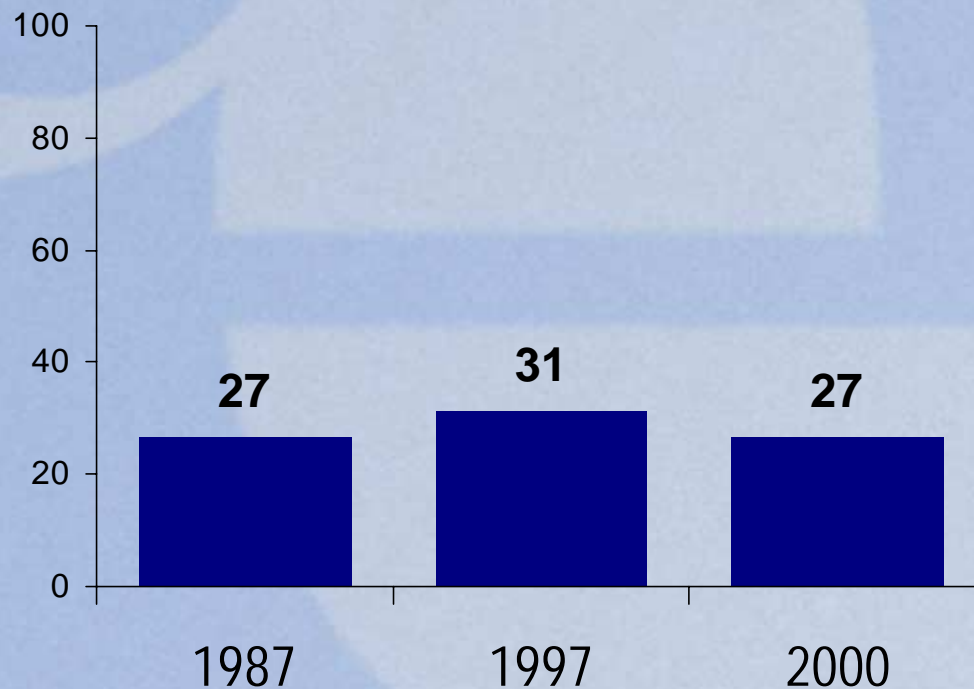
# Profiling Volunteerism (b)

---

- Voluntarism is an important part of a number of key sectors
  - ✓ The most commonly sectors where citizens volunteer include: culture, arts and recreation organizations (23 per cent), social services (20 per cent), religion (14 per cent), education and research (13 per cent) and health (13 per cent)
- Volunteers perform wide variety of activities
  - ✓ Organizing or supporting events (56 per cent), sitting as a board member (41 per cent) and canvassing, campaigning and fundraising (40 per cent) are the most common forms of volunteer activities
- Time and believing in a cause are key factor for participation
  - ✓ In 2001, 38 per cent say that their volunteering stayed the same, 37 per cent decrease and 25 stay the same
    - Among those who say "decrease", a strong majority said that they have less time
    - Among those who said "increase", the two dominant reasons included "believed in the cause" (41 per cent) and "time" (25 per cent)

# National Rate of Volunteering

---



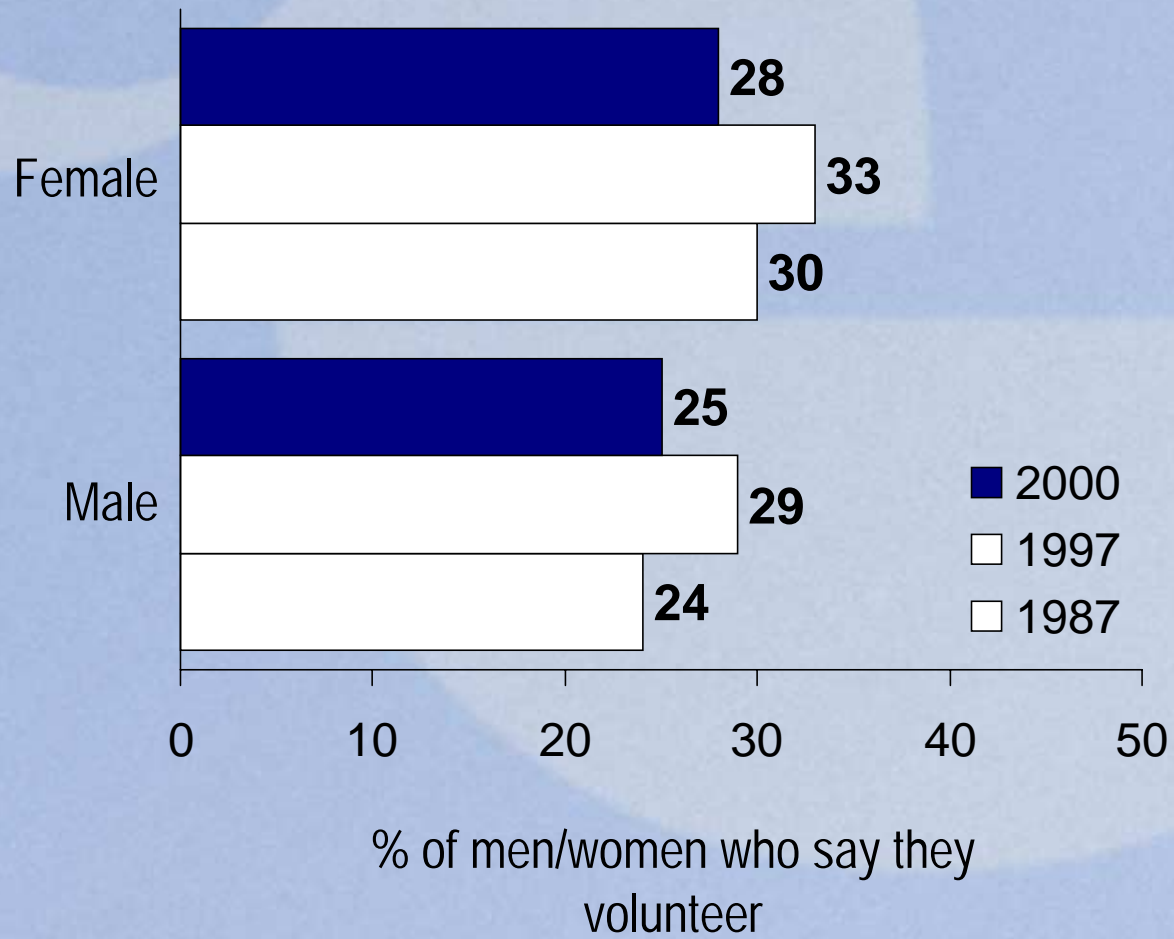
% who participated in at least one volunteer activity in the year prior to the survey

n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1997 and 2000  
Volunteer Activity Survey, 1987



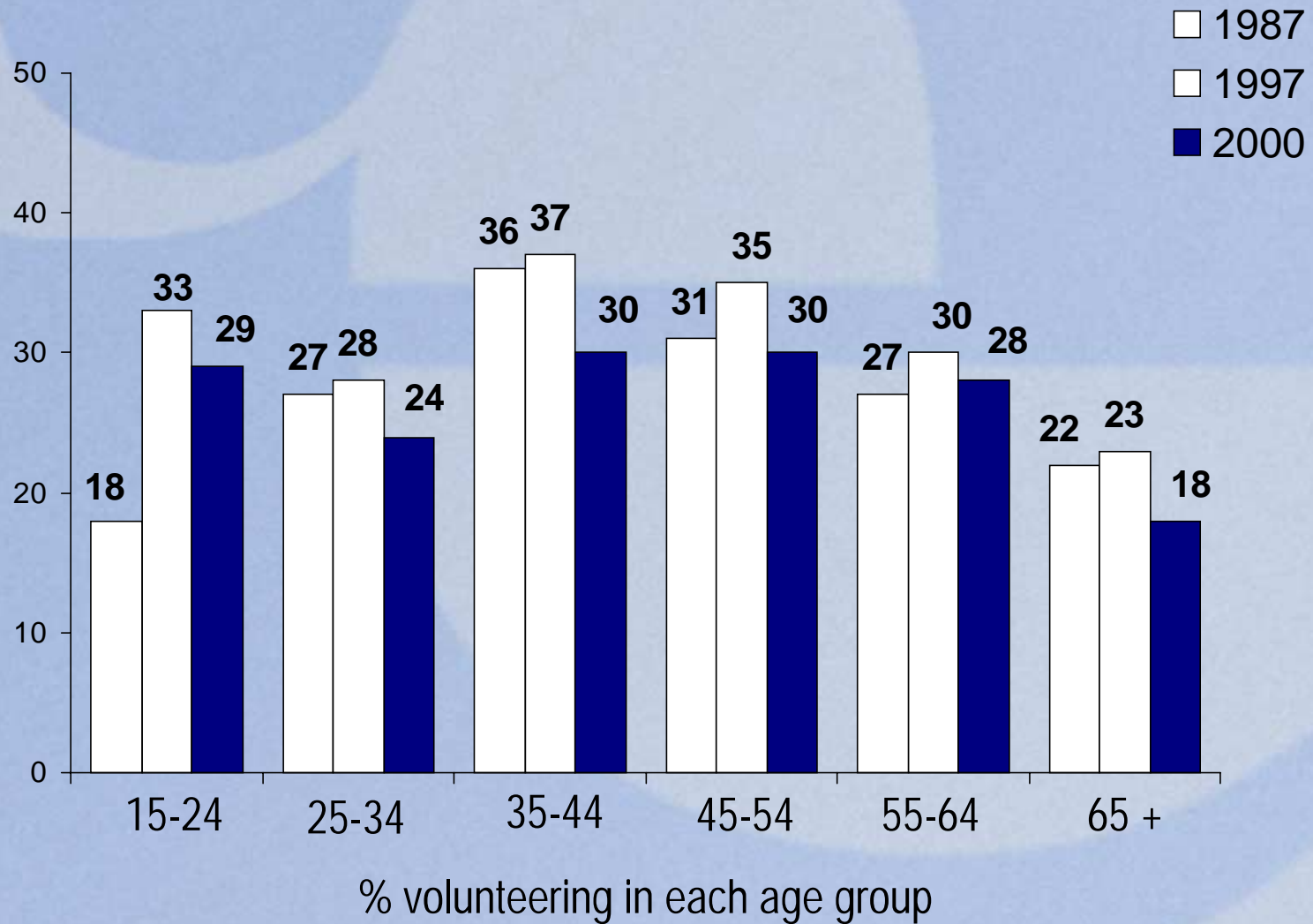
# Volunteer Participation By Gender



n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1997 and 2000  
Volunteer Activity Survey, 1987

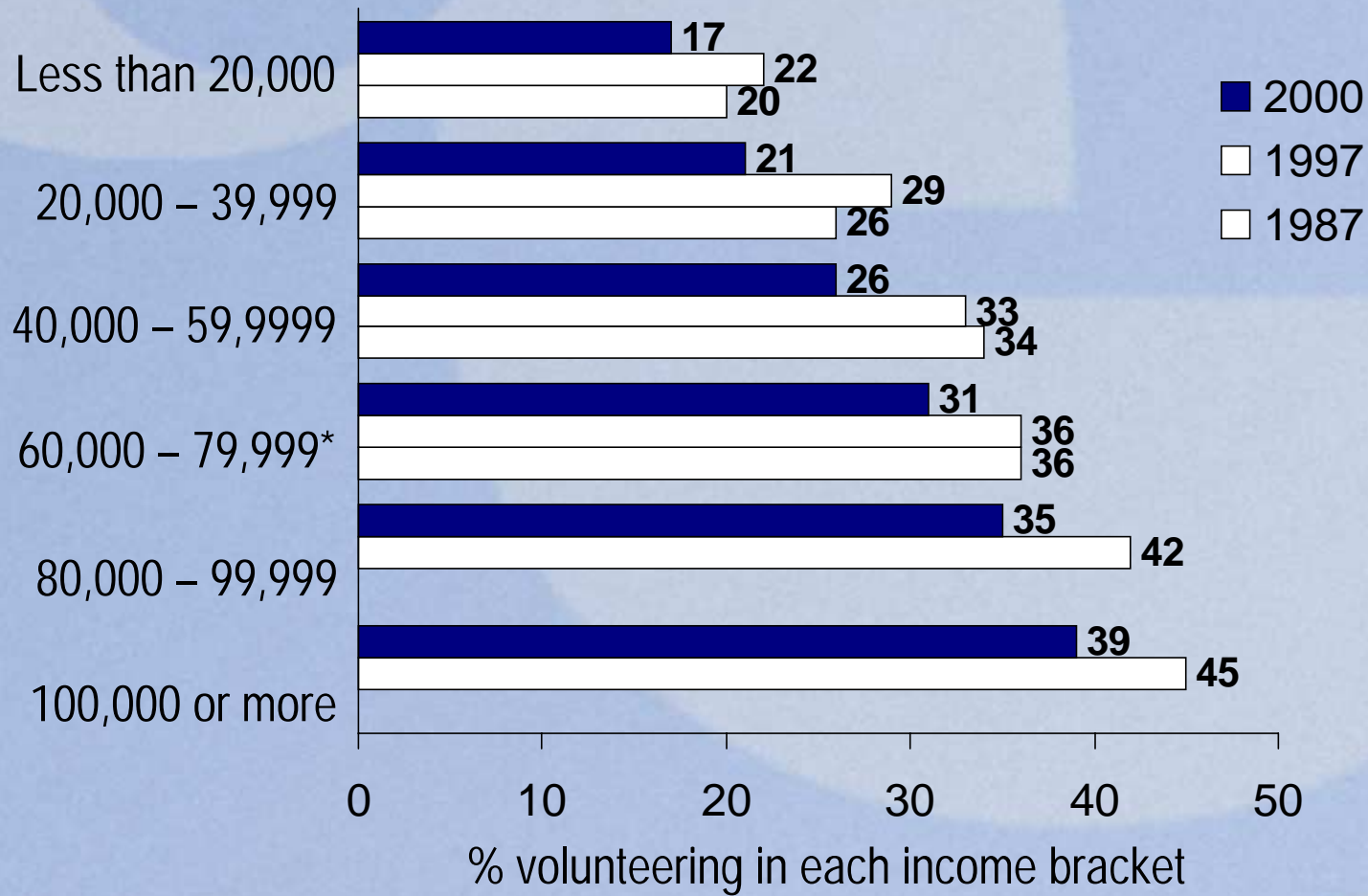
# Volunteer Participation By Age



n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1997 and 2000  
Volunteer Activity Survey, 1987

# Volunteer Participation By Income

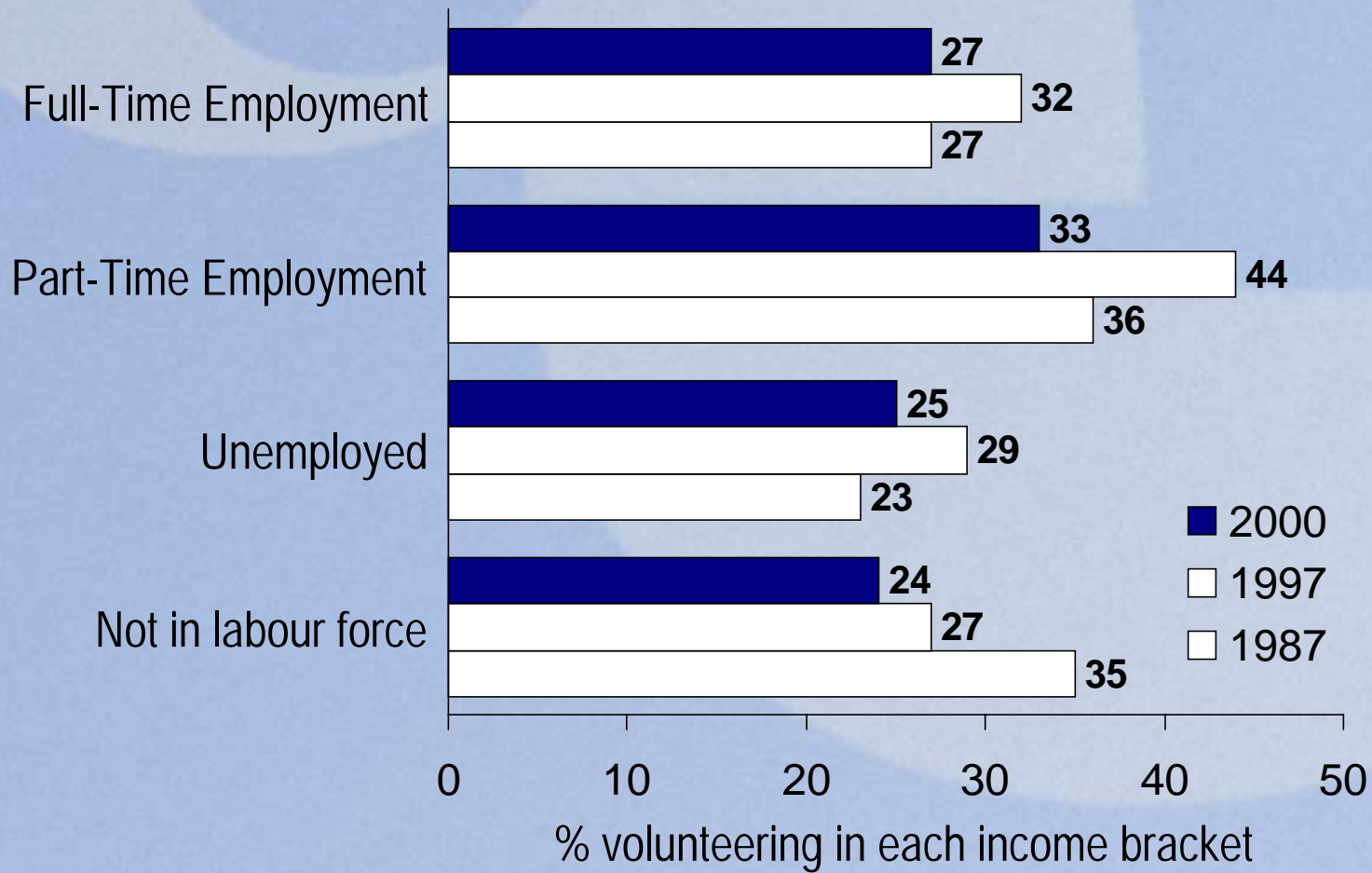


\*Note: This category was "60,000 and over" in 1987

n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1997 and 2000  
 Volunteer Activity Survey, 1987

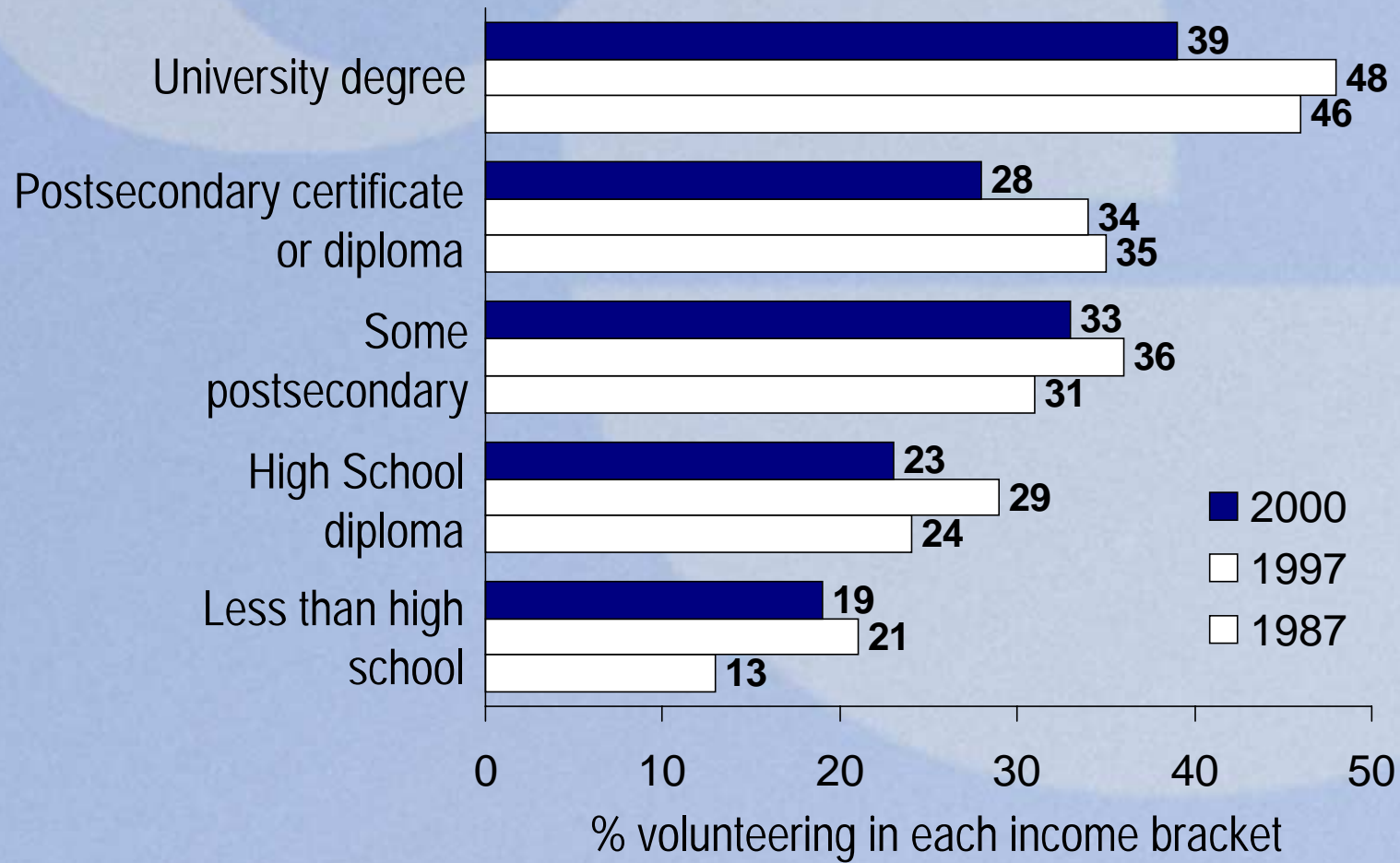
# Volunteer Participation By Labour Force Status



n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1997 and 2000  
Volunteer Activity Survey, 1987

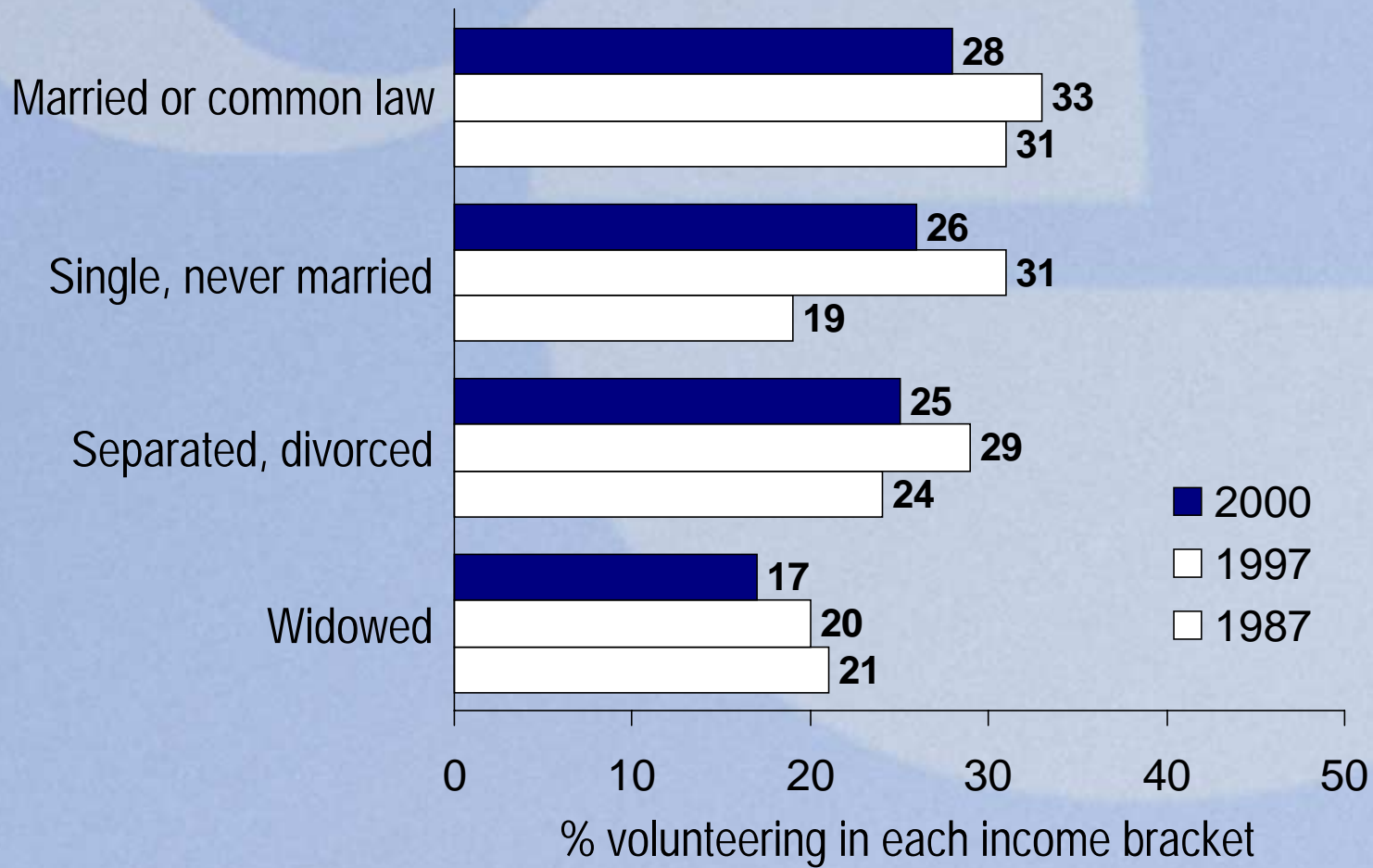
# Volunteer Participation By Education



n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1997 and 2000  
Volunteer Activity Survey, 1987

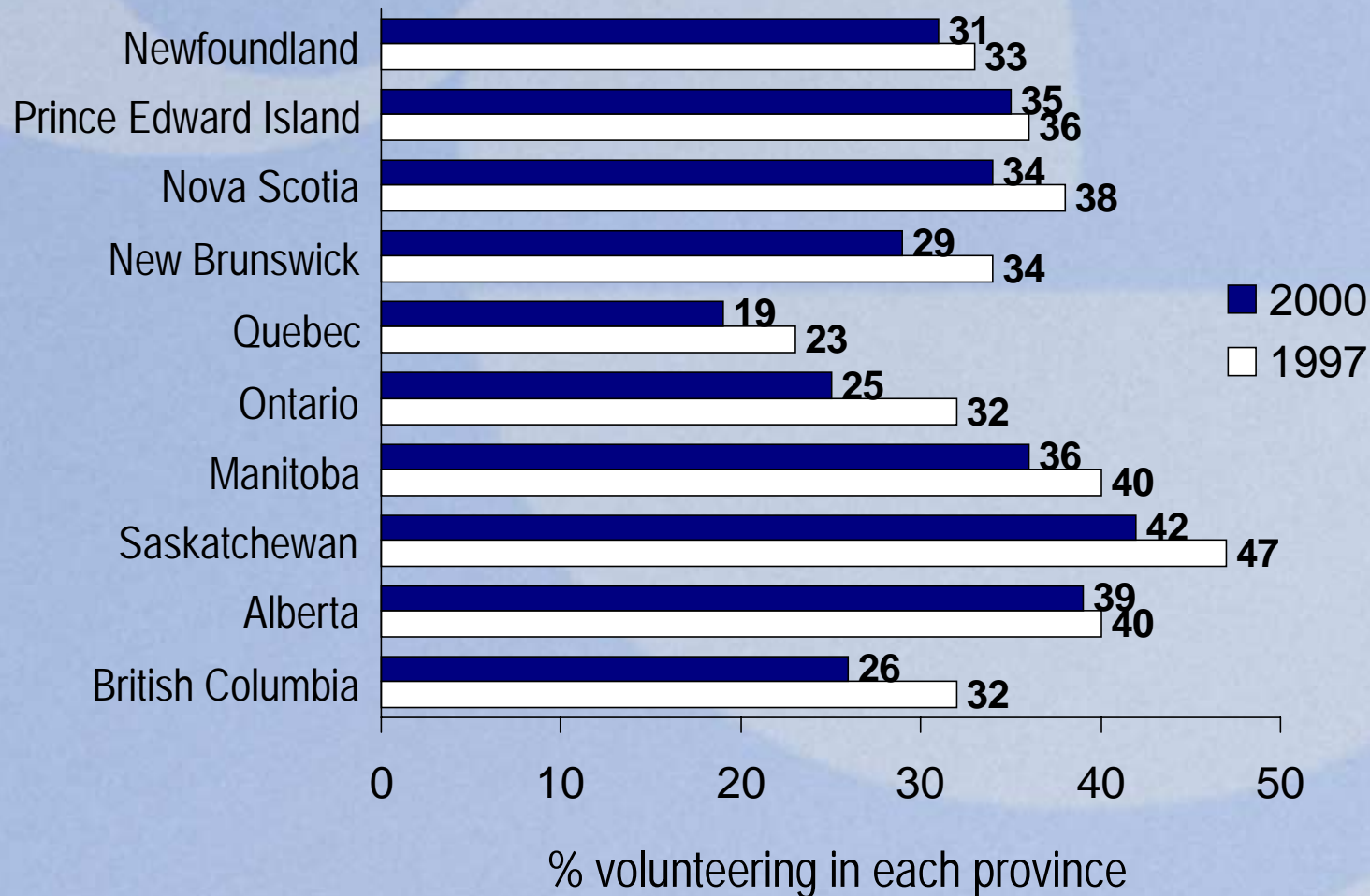
# Volunteer Participation By Marital Status



n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 1997 and 2000  
Volunteer Activity Survey, 1987

# Volunteer Participation By Province

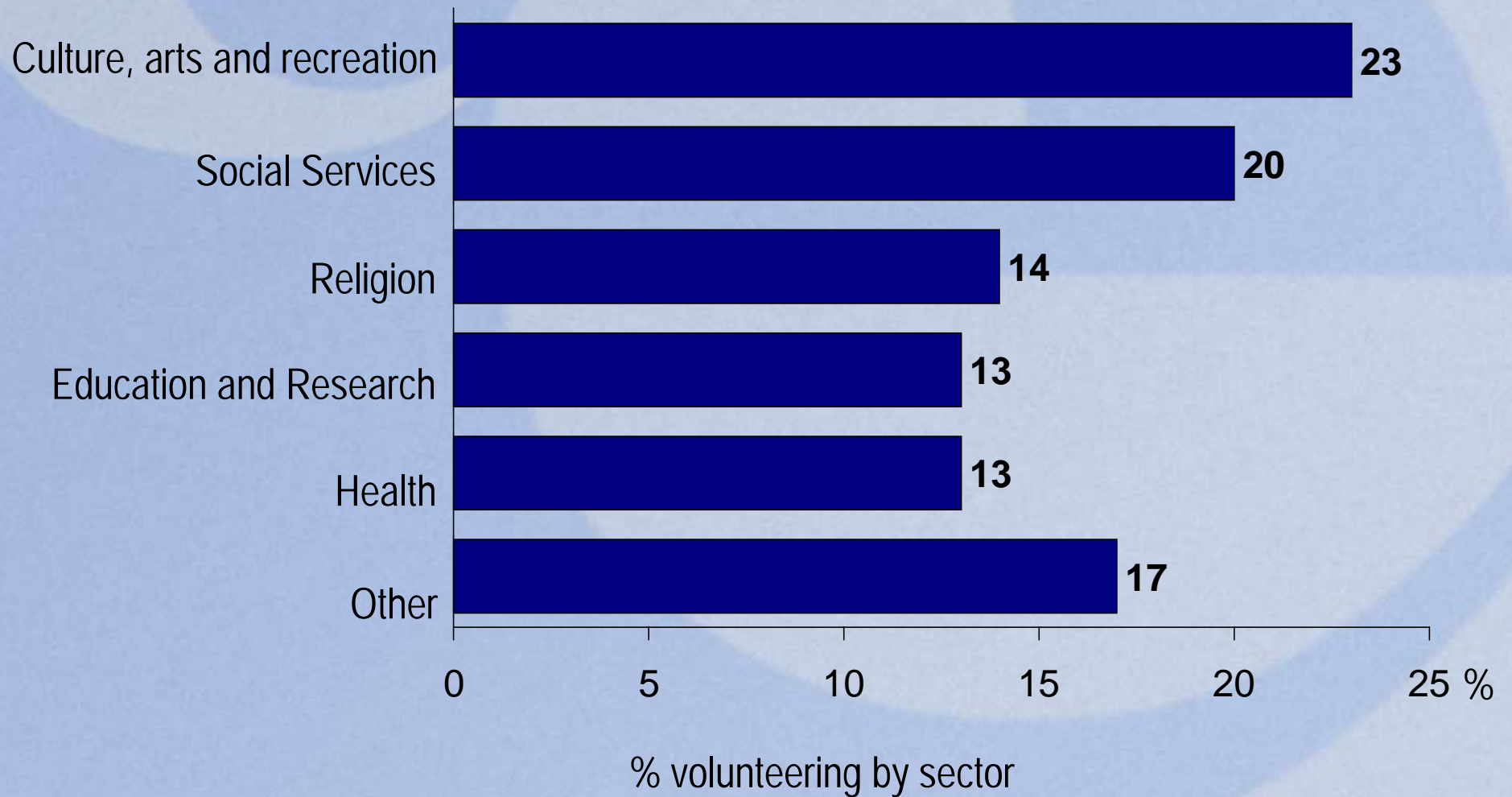


n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000

# Volunteer Participation By Sector

---

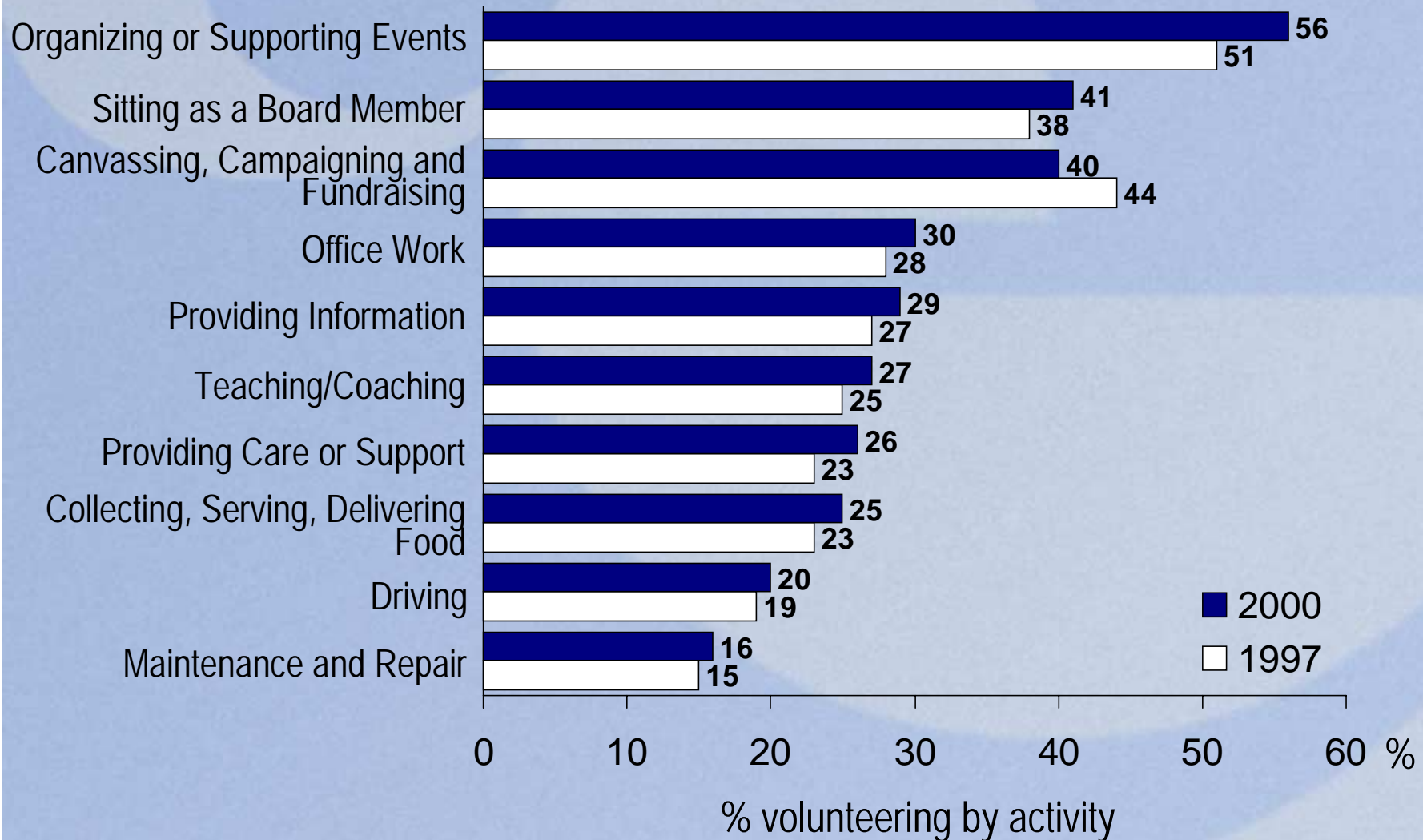


n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000



# Types of Volunteer Activities



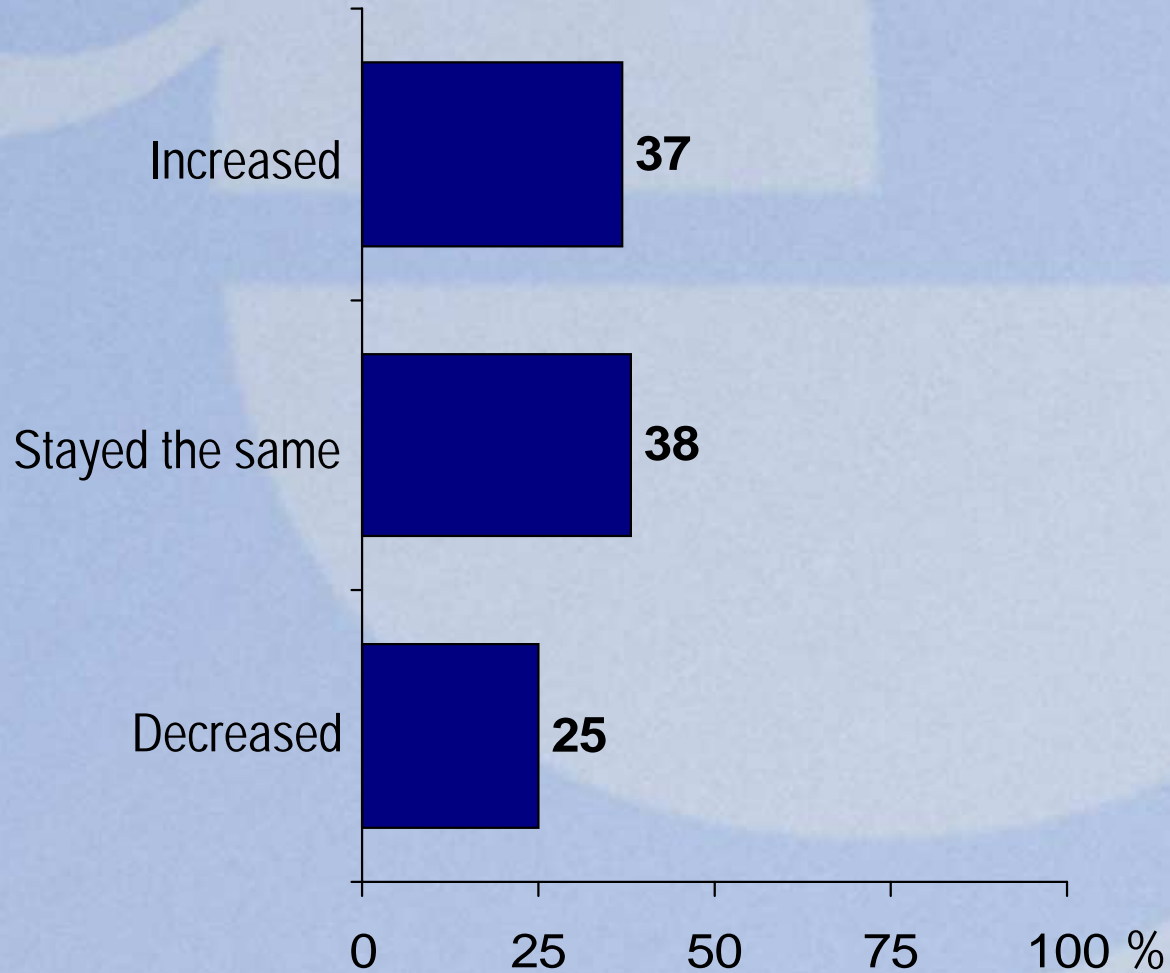
n=14,724

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000

# Changes in Volunteering Behaviour

---

“During the past three years, would you say that your volunteering has increased or decreased?”



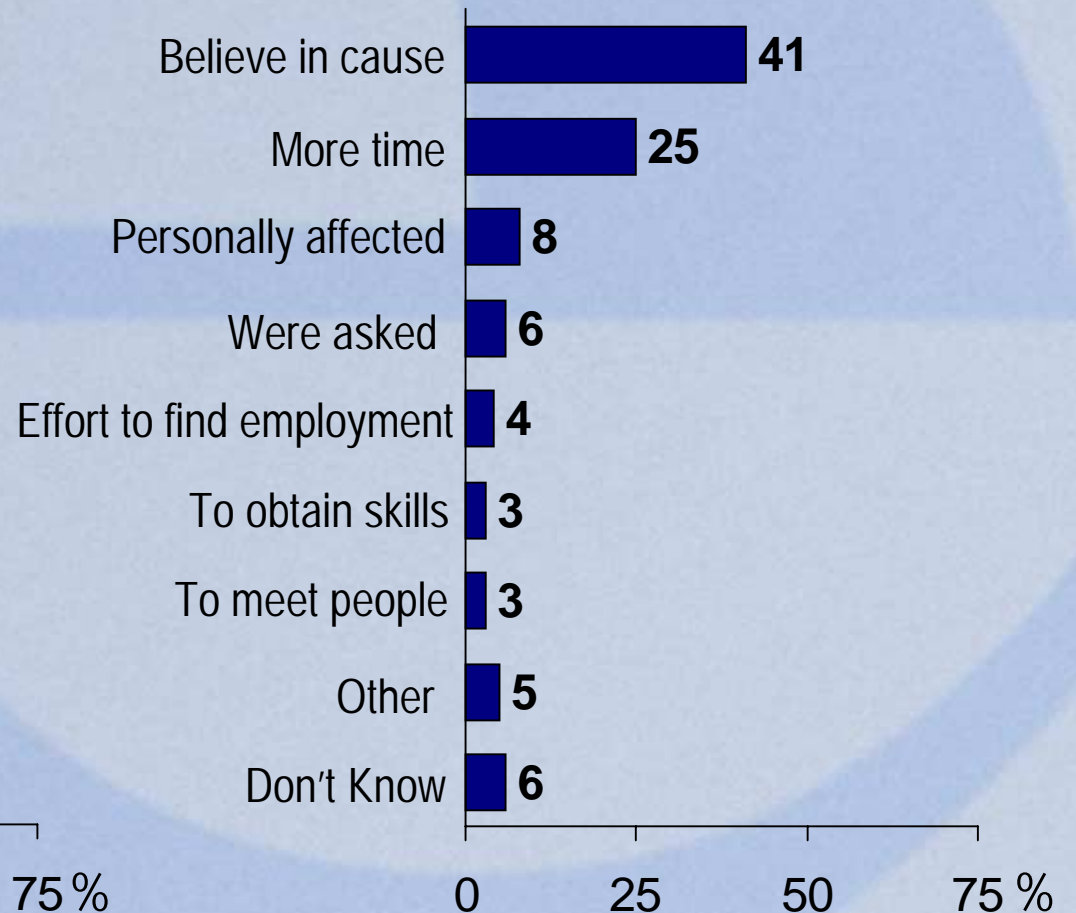
# Reason for Changed Volunteer Behaviour

“What would you say is the main reason that you volunteer LESS than you used to?”



n=221

“What would you say is the main reason that you volunteer MORE than you used to?”



n=226



For more information:

**Christian Boucher, Executive Director**  
**[cboucher@ekos.com](mailto:cboucher@ekos.com)**

t: 613 235 7215