



Canadian Labour Congress

Congrès du travail du Canada

Canadians talk about unions

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Canadians talk about unions

Introduction: trends moving in our direction

There is much that is encouraging in the Canadian Labour Congress poll, *Canadians Talk About Unions*, conducted by Vector Research. A number of currents or themes present themselves. Some of the more noteworthy are:

- The social, economic and political climate is turning more in favour of organized labour than has been the case in recent years;
- The public increasingly sees a valid role for unions, both in the workplace and in the community;
- While union members are markedly more supportive of labour's agenda than the general populace, there is still much work to be done to expand levels of internal support; and
- Youth and young workers are particularly open to unions and, by extension, union membership.

All of these findings offer strong support for continued membership education and a redoubling of efforts to organize non-union employees.

This introduction explores some of these themes with reference to specific results from the Canadian Labour Congress poll. It is not meant to substitute for the full poll report.

A shift away from the corporate agenda

Compared to 2000, when a Canadian Labour Congress poll asked identical questions, it appears that public opinion is consistently swinging towards labour's position on a number of key issues.

Poll respondents were presented with a number of trends, then asked if these trends were moving in the "right direction" or the "wrong direction". The percentages of agreement that these trends were moving in the "right direction" are as follows:

- "increasing global competition" – 55% agreement (a drop of seven per cent from 2000);
- "more free trade agreements like NAFTA and the WTO" – 49% agreement (a drop of seven per cent);
- "corporate mergers" – 24% agreement (a drop of two per cent);

- “the downsizing and privatization of public services” – 22% agreement (a drop of six per cent), and
- “the declining power and membership of unions” – 34% agreement (a drop of four per cent).

While some of these movements in public opinion are admittedly less significant than others, there is a consistent, perceptible shift towards labour’s stance. The trend, as they say, does appear to be our friend.

One explanation for this move away from the corporate agenda is that more and more Canadians are experiencing the actual impact of globalization, privatization and downsizing. They’ve tried it, and they don’t like it.

While there is no reason to suppose, as witnessed by the re-election of the Doer government in Manitoba, the defeat of the neo-conservative Eves government in Ontario and the continued success of the NDP in Nova Scotia, that this trend will not continue to run in our favour, these results are no excuse for complacency. Rather, they point to the need for labour to continue to promote our ‘agenda for working families’ to augment and amplify this trend.

Union members are much more likely than are non-union employees to oppose the corporate agenda. When compared to the general public, they are also twice as concerned over declining union power and membership. However, with a level of concern of only 53%, one in two union members still fails to see a problem in declining union power and membership.

Our work must be focused as much internally as towards the broader Canadian public.

Unions are seen as helping people

While our adversaries often portray labour as narrow and selfish, the Canadian Labour poll shows that the public overwhelmingly sees unions as helping broad segments of the population.

Asked if unions have helped or hurt certain identifiable groups, the respective percentage responses were:

- women (68% vs. 4%);
- people with physical disabilities (58% vs. 5%);
- visible minorities (55% vs. 4%);
- immigrants (51% vs. 6%);
- pensioners (49% vs. 6%); and
- youth and young workers (40% vs. 12%).

In the light of the above, it is not surprising that other poll responses reveal that women, visible minorities, immigrants and youth are more open to unions than is the population as a whole.

An appreciation of unions as workplace advocates

Two-thirds of Canadians believe it is worthwhile to belong to a union, even if such membership does not result in a wage increase. This remarkable result is partially explained by the 52% of poll respondents who see unions as being able to solve workplace problems when all other avenues have been exhausted.

Indeed, 40% believe most employees need a union to get fair treatment from the employer. (However, it is worth noting that almost half our members agree that employees don't need a union to obtain fair treatment.)

These numbers have not moved since the questions were last asked in 2000 by the Canadian Labour Congress. This suggests that public appreciation of the value of unions as workplace advocates is deep set. Again, the fact that two-thirds of respondents believe that unions are worthwhile even in the absence of the promise of higher pay is emblematic of a substantial level of public goodwill.

All this points to the importance of unions stressing their day-to-day workplace advocacy role, in addition to promoting the direct economic benefits derived from collective bargaining.

Unions are understood to broadly improve job satisfaction

The public also believes that unions make a considerable improvement to job satisfaction. Three-quarters or more poll respondents believe unions help 'a little' or 'a lot' with matters of health and safety, job security, pay, supplemental health care benefits and pensions.

More than half of Canadians are of the opinion that unions help a little or a lot in such areas as training, discrimination and favouritism, supervisor response to employee complaints, work pressures, prospects for advancement and the ability to balance work and family.

All this points to the fact that, even in such non-traditional areas as the balancing of home and work responsibilities, the union is seen as able to use its advocacy role to improve job satisfaction.

Powerful support for "social unionism"

As social unionism increases, public support for these activities has also risen. Despite the neo-conservative assault on labour's social and economic agenda, support for our actions has increased virtually across-the-board over the three-year period ending 2003.

Three-quarters or more of Canadians believe labour should be more involved in such non-bargaining activities as promoting equality for women, campaigning to ban imports made by child labour or in sweatshops, fighting to stop racism and lobbying to increase social spending on health and education, all activities that can positively affect people both in the workplace and their community. Support for these activities has increased in the three years since the Canadian Labour Congress last polled on these issues, indicating our activities over the past few years are having an impact.

Of the dozen non-bargaining activities suggested to poll respondents, only the promotion of global peace and “marches and protest” against globalization failed to win 50% backing. The former may be explained by a perceived lack of labour legitimacy on matters of war and peace; the latter by Canadians’ traditional respect for ‘peace, order and good government’.

The public seems to indicate that our efforts would be better spent on working to improve conditions at the work place and in the community through collective bargaining, education, advocacy and getting our message out.

Finally, the Canadian Labour Congress poll reveals two extremely encouraging signs for those of us who believe unions have a major role to play on the wider community and national scene:

- three-quarters of our members prefer a socially active union, while less than one in five does not; and
- seven in ten unorganized employees would prefer to join a union that is “active in community issues”.

A cynicism regarding labour’s motives

As comforting as this support for social unionism may be, it is tempered by the fact that only one in three Canadians believes our non-bargaining issues are pursued through genuine concern. A quarter of those polled believe we undertake these activities solely to benefit our members (hardly a bad end in itself), while 29% believe we care only about the attendant publicity.

The good news is that, compared to responses in 1991, more people are willing to give us the benefit of the doubt. While the trend again seems to be moving our way, much cynicism remains to be overcome.

Unions are consistently bad-mouthed

When it comes to major lifestyle decisions – such as cars, appliances and...joining a union – most people place a high premium on ‘personal testimonies’. Here, the results of the Canadian Labour Congress poll are less encouraging for labour.

While Canadians hear fewer anti-union comments than three years ago, only 28% are privy to positive comments on labour. Nearly half of unorganized workers hear mostly negative comments about unions. The good news, it could be suggested, is that 27% of this target group – a sizable population in numbers – hears mostly positive buzz about labour.

Disturbingly, 45% of union members hear predominantly negative comments about unions. A priority should be placed on turning this around through more effective communication and advocacy in the workplace itself.

A place to start would be with the 10% of our members identified by the poll as not only satisfied with their union, but vocal about their satisfaction. Unions should better identify and

harness these strong supporters as internal “missionaries” to convert their co-workers.

Membership satisfaction with leadership varies

The poll shows that, overall, union members’ satisfaction with their national and local leadership has not changed over the decade ending in 2003. However, these general figures conceal some significant shifts.

Public sector union members are considerably more satisfied with their national leadership today than in 1993 – an increase in ‘satisfied’ responses from 60% to 69%. Satisfaction with local public sector union leadership is essentially unchanged at 68%.

However, private sector union members have registered a significant drop in satisfaction with both national and local leadership. For national leadership, “satisfied” responses have dropped from 73% in 1993 to only 61% today. Views on local leadership among private sector workers have shown an even sharper drop – from 76% a decade ago to 61% today.

Roughly three in ten union members, in both the public and private sectors, told the poll that they were ‘dissatisfied’ with their leadership at the national and local levels.

Efforts to investigate and counter the causes of this dissatisfaction would help immeasurably in labour’s effectiveness in moving our agenda forward. Organizing efforts would also be reinforced, as a higher number of satisfied members means increased and better ‘word of mouth’ advocacy for unions – on the job, and in the community.

A third of the unorganized would unionize

One in three unorganized workers would be ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ likely to vote for a union in a secret ballot. Given the level of discontent and cynicism noted above, and considering the pervasive anti-union bias amongst employers and media, this finding should be seen as very encouraging. This statistic represents millions of potential new members. The jar isn’t two-thirds empty; it’s already one-third full.

As well, it must be remembered that this Canadian Labour Congress poll question was asked ‘cold’ in a general, non-specific way. Most new members join a union around some specific workplace incident, or in the ‘heat’ of a union drive.

Also noteworthy is the impact that removing risk of employer reprisal has on the willingness to support unionization. Eliminating this risk boosts the percentage of those very likely to vote for a union by half – from 14% to 21% of all unorganized workers.

Overall, there is a rise from 33% to 43% in willingness to vote for unionization once “fear of the boss” is removed. This “fear factor” has nonetheless widened over the past three years, likely in part due to weakened labour laws in neo-conservative provinces. This points to the need for unions to continue to push for more balanced labour laws that diminish the corrupting power of employers in organizing activities.

Overcoming barriers to greater organization

No surprises here: among unorganized workers who would ‘not very likely’ join a union, the poll found that “no say in how the union operates”, “dues are too high” and “promotions based on seniority, not just initiative and merit” were most often cited as reasons supporting an anti-union stance.

Interestingly, these same reasons were offered by those existing union members who would ‘not very likely’ join a union if now asked.

The fact that almost half (45%) of union members believed they had no say in how their union operates shows the need for major internal education on the democratic basis of local union structures and leadership.

As well, in the absence of any fear of employer retaliation, twice as many unorganized workers would opt to join an employee association over a union. This would seem to speak to the widespread misunderstanding – among both unionized and non-unionized workers – about the nature of unions. By continuing to raise the profile of the Canadian labour movement, we can deal with this issue head-on by campaigning on the strengths of a union with many members and resources.

The poll also suggests that organizing drives also concentrate on empowerment of workers. Specifically, the unorganized need to hear what can be done for the individual worker’s sense of dignity and ability to stand up to boss. Labour should also target those areas identified as generating the most dissatisfaction in non-union workplaces: pensions, benefits, training, advancement opportunities and general stress and pressure.

Given that unionized members better appreciate the benefits of unionization, organizing drives should use organizers from similar workplaces. Another alternative is to make use of testimonials from such workers in organizing materials.

A growing interest in e-organizing

Eight per cent of poll respondents stated they were ready to “go to a Web site on the Internet and sign a union membership card”. Given that there are approximately nine million unorganized workers in Canada, this opens up an “e-organizing” pool of some three-quarter-of-a-million prospective members.

Put in a more interesting way, these potential Internet recruits total the combined populations of Halifax, Regina and Victoria. Furthermore, it should be noted that these respondents were willing to act proactively – to sign themselves up on the Internet.

Young workers interested in organizing

Youth and young workers are ripe for organizing. For example, a significantly smaller percentage of youth (27%) believe declining union power and membership is a step in the ‘right direction’ than does the general public (34%). As well, the number of youth who believe unions generally help people has shot up from 27% in 1992 to 40% in 2003.

Of course, the transitory nature of young workers, and their concentration in such sectors as retail, present significant organizing challenges. However, this demographic is particularly open to e-organizing through the Internet. The Canadian Labour Congress poll identified that nearly three-quarters (72%) of youth are connected to the Internet – a prime constituency for e-organizing.

The labour movement should consider innovative ways to attract membership through the offering of services that follow young workers as they move from job to job. As such, they would also serve as recruiters for new co-workers.

We should also endeavour to tailor our messaging and materials to the particular views of this young generation. Unlike most of us reading this report, young people have come to maturity in a period when public service were denigrated and diminished, and the idea of a ‘national’ economic strategy was ridiculed by pundits and politicians alike. It should come as no surprise, then, that past polling by the Canadian Labour Congress shows that young people more readily support globalization and privatization.

Approaches and arguments aimed at youth and young workers require an exceptional level of sophistication. Without watering down our agenda, our methods and materials should be devoid of preconceived notions and better reflect the mind set of this important demographic group. We need to tailor our message and argument to the people we are attempting to recruit and to listen to them as well.

Conclusion

While largely encouraging, the results of the Canadian Labour Congress-Vector Research poll raise some major challenges for labour:

- Raising the profile of the labour movement:
 - working in the community through our labour councils, federations of labour and affiliates;
 - drawing the links between the generally positive feelings for the labour movement as a whole and individual affiliate organizing campaigns;
 - closing the gap between those who support what unions do, yet aren't willing to sign up.
- Motivating our existing membership:
 - to speak out publicly and positively about their union;
 - strengthening our internal ranks;
 - building more membership support for their union and its leadership (particularly at the Local level)?
- Attracting new members through Innovations in organizing:
 - developing innovative, portable benefits and membership programs;
 - maintaining ongoing links with the millions of workers who are interested in unions.
- Advocating for social and economic change:
 - working for legislative change and popularizing our legislative agenda;
 - ensuring our message is in the media on a consistent basis;
 - developing strong links with community organizations and civil society groups.

The Canadian Labour Congress poll is a valuable tool to apply to these necessary discussions. It can help us to understand our audience, why people support us and what their concerns are. While an opinion survey does not, and should not, tell us how to think or to change our principles, it is a useful analytical tool in considering how we convey those principles to the broader public.

Canadians talk about unions

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Two-thirds say unions are worthwhile (even minus higher pay)

Canadians remain generally positive about unions. While a third of non-union workers would vote for a union just by being asked, twice as many would join an association instead of a union.

In the new CLC poll, a strong majority of Canadians – 63% – agree that “even if a union doesn’t get employees higher pay, it is worthwhile belonging to a union to get advice and information about pay, benefits, pensions, safety, and your rights at work.”

While a 52% majority also agrees that “unions can solve workers’ problems on the job even when all other approaches have failed”, about the same number – 54% – also agree most employees don’t need a union to get fair treatment from their employer.

On the benchmark of solving worker problems (even when other approaches fail), the most pro-union people are in Vancouver and are visible minorities, immigrants, women and people under 30.

A majority of union members are supportive of their unions, too. Two thirds of union members agree that unions can solve problems when other approaches fail – an obvious testimonial on the value of a union. But some 44% think most employees don’t need a union to get fair treatment from their employer.

Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statements. Is that agree/disagree strongly or somewhat?

	Strongly + somewhat...	
	Agree	Disagree
Even if a union doesn’t get employees higher pay, it is worthwhile belonging to a union to get advice and information about pay, benefits, pensions, safety, and your rights at work	63%	32%
Most employees don’t need a union to get fair treatment from their employer	54%	39%
Unions can solve workers’ problems on the job even when all other approaches have failed	52%	40%

Union members		
	Strongly + somewhat...	
	Agree	Disagree
Even if a union doesn't get employees higher pay, it is worthwhile belonging to a union to get advice and information about pay, benefits, pensions, safety, and your rights at work	77%	22%
Unions can solve workers' problems on the job even when all other approaches have failed	64%	33%
Most employees don't need a union to get fair treatment from their employer	44%	50%

While overall a majority of workers think unions can solve worker problems (even when other ways fail), fewer than half of non-union workers feel this way. But, women, young workers, low-income people, visible minorities, and workers in small workplaces (with 20 or fewer employees) are more likely than average non-union workers, to think unions can help workers as a last resort.

For instance, 51% of non-union employees under 30 (compared with 44% of all non-union workers) agree that unions can solve worker problems even when other ways don't succeed.

- 53% of non-union visible minorities agree.
- 66% of visible minorities who have no union – compared with 54% of all non-union employees – feel it's worthwhile belonging to a union “even if a union doesn't get employees higher pay.”

These opinions show there is a great potential to organize employees by offering one-to-one services even in workplaces where unions cannot muster a majority in a certification vote.

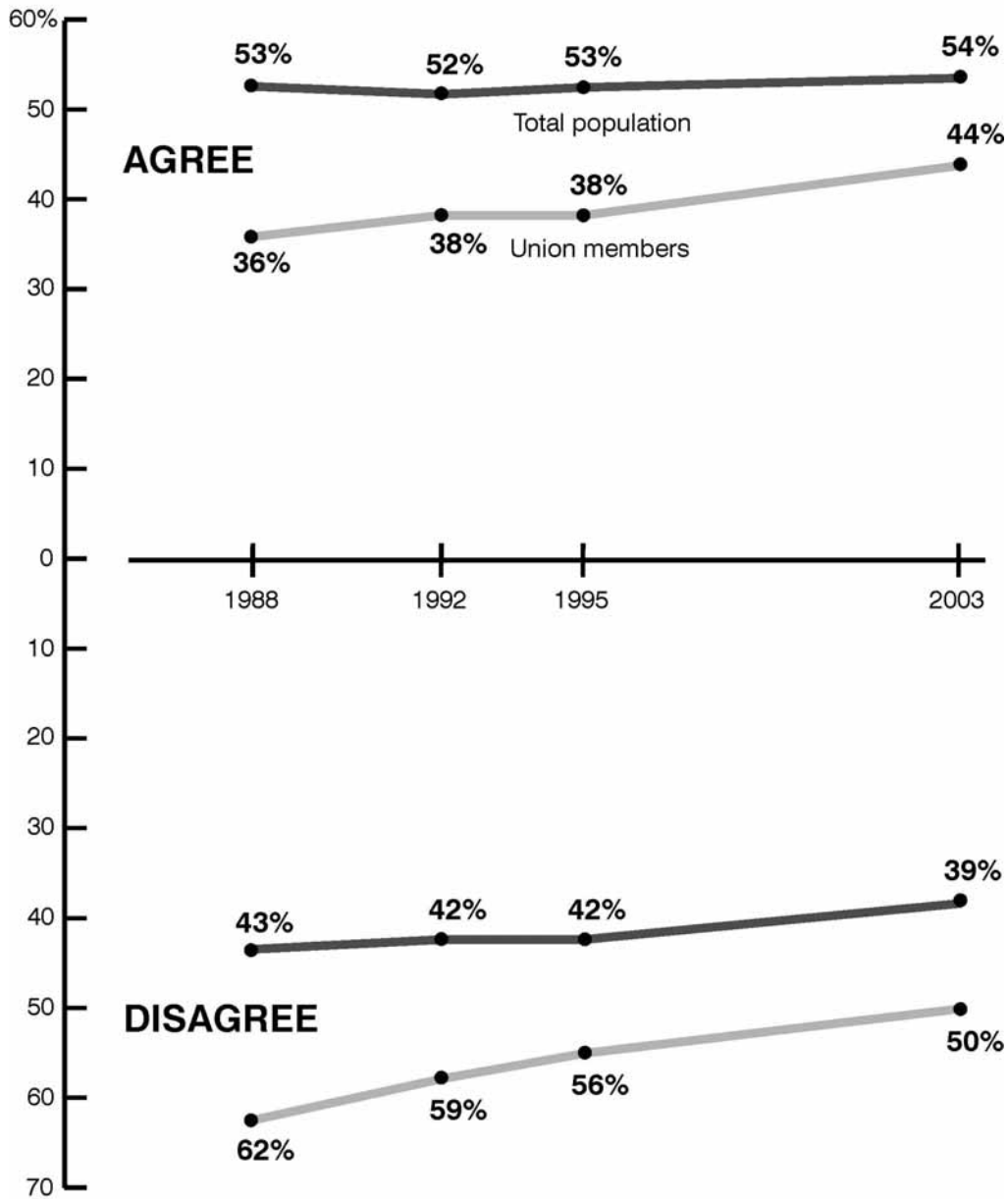
Non-union employees		
	Strongly + somewhat...	
	Agree	Disagree
Even if a union doesn't get employees higher pay, it is worthwhile belonging to a union to get advice and information about pay, benefits, pensions, safety, and your rights at work	54%	41%
Most employees don't need a union to get fair treatment from their employer	64%	29%
Unions can solve workers' problems on the job even when all other approaches have failed	44%	48%

Eligible non-union employees who agree...				
	Total	18-29-year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Most employees don't need a union	64%	62%	60%	54%
Even if a union doesn't get employees higher pay, it is worthwhile belonging	54%	64%	66%	65%
Unions can solve problems when other approaches have failed	44%	51%	53%	47%

Total population Strongly + somewhat agree that...		
	July 2000	2003
Even if a union doesn't get employees higher pay, it is worthwhile belonging to a union to get advice and information about pay, benefits, pensions, safety, and your rights at work	64%	63%
Most employees don't need a union to get fair treatment from their employer	55%	54%
Unions can solve workers' problems on the job even when all other approaches have failed	–	52%

Labour's image

'Most employees today don't need unions to get fair treatment from their employer'



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Most agree unions make jobs better

A majority of Canadians believe unions make 12 factors in job satisfaction better.

The highest consensus in public opinion is that unions have the greatest positive impact on health and safety conditions, benefits, job security, pay and pensions.

- More than three-quarters of people surveyed for the new CLC poll say unions make these conditions a lot or a little better.

Two-thirds say unions improve – a little or a lot – the way supervisors respond to employee complaints, training, pressure at work, discrimination and favouritism.

More than half say unions improve employees’ prospects for advancement and their ability to balance work and family.

From your experience or what you have read or heard, what effect does having a union make on the following working conditions? Does a union make a lot better, a little better, a little worse, or a lot worse?

	A lot better	A little better
Health and safety conditions	41%	40%
Job security	39%	37%
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	39%	40%
Pension benefits	33%	44%
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	32%	34%
Pay	28%	50%
Training for new skills	24%	43%
Discrimination and favouritism	24%	37%
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	23%	43%
The amount of pressure employees are under	17%	39%
Employees’ prospects for advancement	15%	41%
The ability to balance work and family	15%	42%

Compared with the findings in the 2000 CLC study, the perception that unions make conditions better is lower today by three percentage points or more in eight of the twelve factors, which is well within the margin of error for this poll.

Conditions unions make 'a lot' better		
	2000	2003
Health and safety conditions	45%	41%
Job security	42%	39%
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	46%	39%
Pension benefits	41%	33%
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	32%	32%
Pay	36%	28%
Training for new skills	27%	24%
Discrimination and favouritism	25%	24%
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	24%	23%
The amount of pressure employees are under	18%	17%
Employees' prospects for advancement	18%	15%
The ability to balance work and family	20%	15%

To a considerable degree union members and non-union employees agree on the liabilities of being in a union, mainly seniority and the amount of pressure workers deal with on the job.

- One in four non-union workers thinks unions make these conditions worse.
- One in six union members thinks unions make their prospects for advancement worse.
- One in seven union members agrees that unions make things worse in terms of the amount of pressure employees are under and the way supervisors respond to employee complaints.

	Little + a lot worse	
	Union members	Non-union employees
Employees' prospects for advancement	17%	24%
The amount of pressure employees are under	14%	23%
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	14%	19%
Discrimination and favouritism	13%	18%
Training for new skills	9%	13%
The ability to balance work and family	8%	12%
Job security	7%	12%
Pay	6%	8%
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	5%	5%
Pension benefits	4%	7%
Health and safety conditions	4%	5%
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	4%	8%

Young Canadians are more inclined than older people to say unions make benefits and job security better.

Canadian workers of colour are more likely than other Canadians to say unions improve benefits, employee prospects for advancement and the ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

Immigrants are less likely than people born in Canada to say unions improve job security.

Total population			
Working conditions unions make 'a lot' better			
	18-29-year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Job security	46%	37%	30%
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	43%	43%	38%
Health and safety conditions	40%	44%	39%
Pension benefits	33%	33%	29%
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	32%	36%	33%
Pay	26%	29%	26%
Training for new skills	25%	34%	25%
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	23%	27%	27%
Discrimination and favouritism	22%	24%	19%
The amount of pressure employees are under	18%	17%	18%
The ability to balance work and family	16%	22%	19%
Employees' prospects for advancement	13%	21%	17%

Union members are more inclined than non-union employees to say unions have made life on the job better, especially in job security and protection from racial and sexual harassment.

The poll shows that union members feel the big difference in having a union isn't so much better pay and other monetary benefits but improved job security and dignity on the job, a stronger voice in decisions and a better chance to speak up without fear when the employer is out of line.

Working conditions unions make ‘a lot’ better			
	Total pop.	Union members	Non-union employees
Health and safety conditions	41%	48%	36%
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	39%	46%	34%
Job security	39%	51%	35%
Pension benefits	33%	40%	31%
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	32%	44%	26%
Pay	28%	34%	25%
Training for new skills	24%	30%	19%
Discrimination and favouritism	24%	32%	20%
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	23%	29%	20%
The amount of pressure employees are under	17%	19%	15%
The ability to balance work and family	15%	20%	12%
Employees’ prospects for advancement	15%	17%	12%

One-third of non-union workers would vote union

A third of non-union employees (33%) would be very or somewhat likely to vote to have a union represent them, simply by being asked to join. This is down slightly from 40% in the CLC poll in 2000.

This number increases significantly if someone could stop their employer from taking reprisals against them. Another one in three non-union workers (30%) who initially were not very likely to vote for a union would be *very or somewhat* likely to vote to unionize under these conditions. The findings mean that labour law reform or clear information campaigns by unions could solve some of the problems unions have when they try to organize non-union employees.

- Eliminating the fear of reprisals increase the percentage of non-union employees who are “very” likely to vote for a union from 14% to 21%.
- Eliminating reprisals increase the share of non-union employees who are *very or somewhat* likely to vote for a union from 33% to 43%.

If you had a choice in a secret ballot tomorrow, how likely would you be to vote to have a union represent you? Would you say...?

Non-union employees (before removing fear of reprisals)				
	All	18-29-year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Very likely	14%	16%	19%	19%
Somewhat likely	19%	26%	21%	17%
Not very likely	16%	17%	18%	21%
Not at all likely	45%	34%	35%	36%
Depends	3%	4%	2%	2%

There is strong support for joining a union among low income workers, young workers, visible minorities and immigrant workers.

- Among low-income workers the share likely to vote for a union increases from 44% to 56% when fear of the employer is removed.
- Among visible minorities the intention to vote for a union climbs from 40% to 54%.
- Among immigrant workers, interest in a union increases from 36% to 49% (an estimated 44% of visible minority Canadians 18 years old and older are immigrants).

If you could be sure your employer could not in any way show any disapproval of your joining a union – could not fire you or change your job or take any other action to penalize you – how likely would you be to vote to have a union represent you? Would you say... very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely or not at all likely?

Non-union employees who would not ‘very likely’ vote to have a union (after removing fear of reprisals)				
	All	18-29-year- olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Very likely	21%	23%	31%	26%
Somewhat likely	22%	29%	23%	22%
Not very likely	16%	15%	14%	17%
Not at all likely	36%	27%	26%	28%
Depends	3%	4%	3%	3%

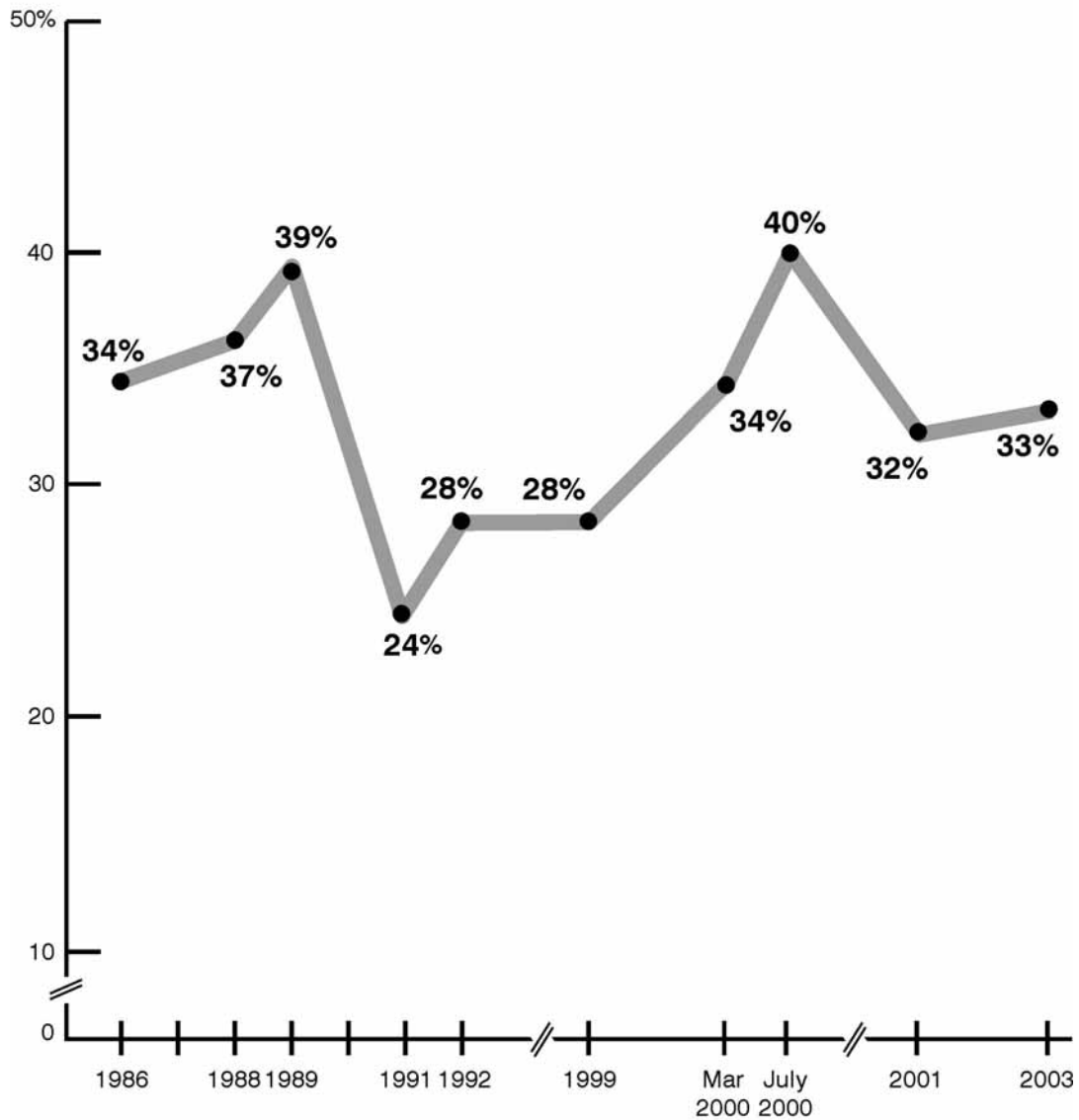
The difficult news in the poll is that only four in ten union members (39%) are “very likely” to vote for a union today, a number that rises to 51% in the scenario of no employer reprisals. On this benchmark immigrants and visible minorities are some of the staunchest union members.

Union members – initially				
	All	18-29-year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Very likely	39%	30%	42%	48%
Somewhat likely	31%	42%	30%	20%
Not very likely	10%	13%	1%	12%
Not at all likely	15%	11%	16%	15%
Depends	3%	4%	6%	5%

Union members ‘very likely’ to vote for a union				
	All	18-29-year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Initially	39%	30%	42%	48%
If no reprisals	51%	46%	58%	57%

As this report shows the fear factor is not the main reason non-union workers reject unions. Unions on the move need to organize satisfied workers, not just the unhappy employees. Unions need to raise satisfaction and loyalty among their existing membership, too.

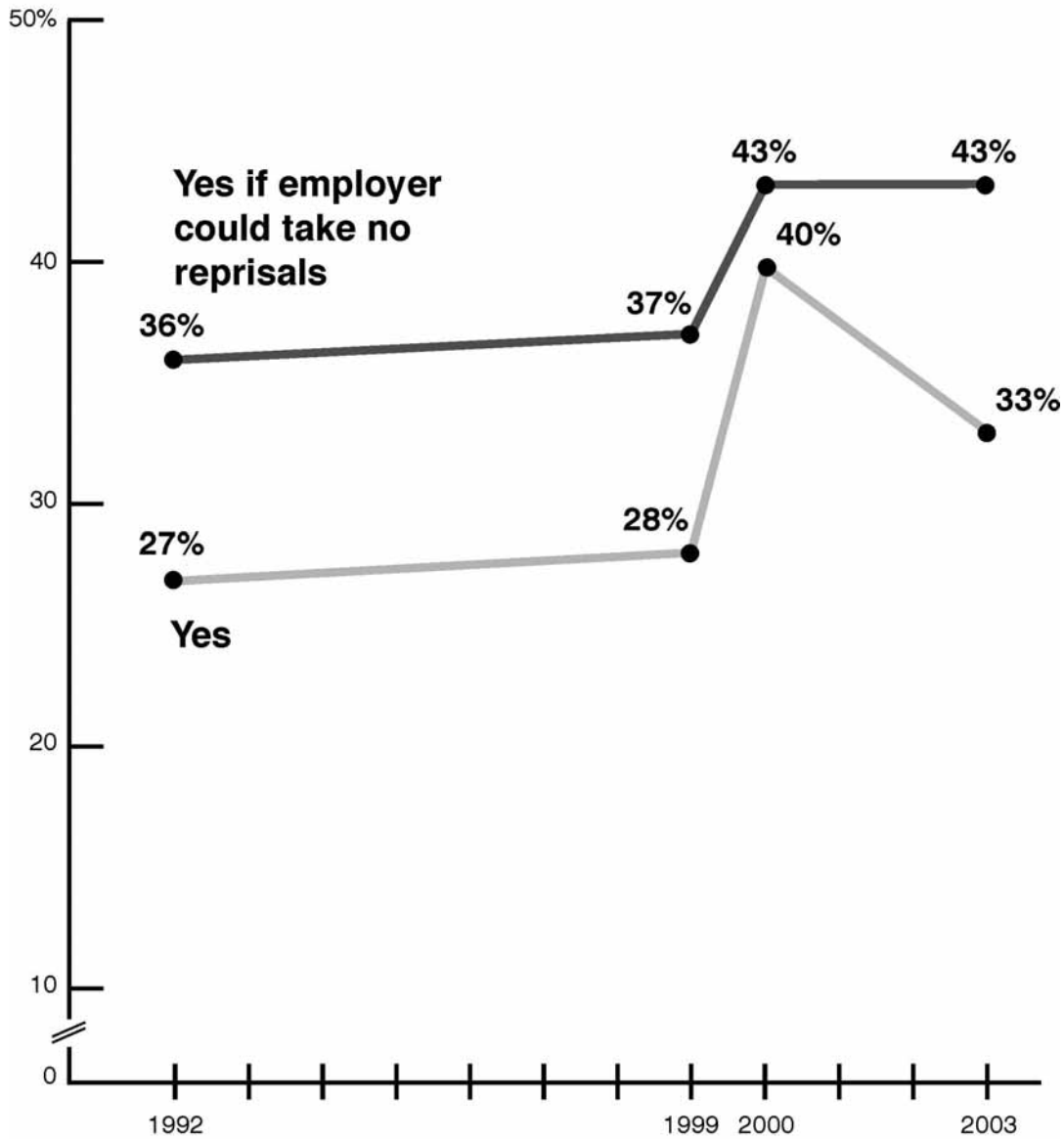
Interest in joining a union



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Removing fear of the boss

% of eligible non-union workers
who would vote for a union



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One in five would consider organizing on-line

About one in five non-union workers would consider joining a union on-line and use their credit card to pay the financial “sacrifice” required by the labour relations boards.

Those “very likely” to join total 8% of non-union employees while the group “somewhat likely” to join on-line add another 12% to the pro-union employees who would sign up through the Internet.

With around nine million non-union workers in the country, each percentage point in the poll represents some 90,000 employees. So with 8% “very likely” to join on-line, Internet organizing could bring unions another 720,000 members.

Suppose that you could go to a web site on the Internet and sign a membership card to have a union represent you. Suppose that you could pay the required fee by entering your credit card information on the same web site. This fee can be one dollar to five dollars and is required by the government to show that you really intended to sign a union membership card. How likely would you be to join a union at this web site? Would you be...

Non-union employees and on-line organizing				
	All	18-29-year- olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Very likely to join	8%	5%	14%	14%
Somewhat likely to join	12%	17%	19%	16%
Not very likely to join	17%	20%	19%	14%
Not at all likely to join	62%	58%	48%	54%

On-line organizing is an obvious way around the fear that employers will penalize workers who express an interest in unions on the job where management can eavesdrop.

According to the new CLC poll on-line organizing is most popular with low-income workers, immigrants, women and visible minorities. Low-income employees, immigrants and visible minorities are workers whose interest in joining a union rose more than ten percentage points in the scenario of no employer reprisals for voting to have a union in an earlier question in the survey.

Which groups have unions helped?

Compared with Vector Research studies in 1988 and 1992 Canadians are more likely today to give unions credit for helping persons of colour, persons with physical disabilities, young workers, immigrants and pensioners.

Here are some groups of people in our country. Tell me if in your opinion unions have helped them or hurt them, or have unions had no impact on them one way or the other?

	Helped	Hurt	No impact	Don't know
Working women	68%	4%	19%	8%
People with physical disabilities	58%	5%	26%	11%
Visible minorities	55%	4%	27%	13%
Immigrants	51%	6%	28%	15%
Pensioners	49%	6%	32%	13%
Youth and young workers	40%	12%	37%	11%

Unions have had a good reputation for helping working women over the entire 15-year period; 67% said in 1988 that unions help working women compared with 68% in the new CLC poll.

% saying unions have helped . . .						
	Total	Women	18-29-year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants	Non-union employees
Working women	68%	67%	72%	62%	65%	66%
People with physical disabilities	58%	58%	64%	55%	59%	54%
Visible minorities	55%	56%	58%	49%	48%	53%
Immigrants	51%	51%	55%	46%	41%	49%
Pensioners	49%	46%	60%	45%	51%	47%
Youth and young workers	40%	40%	38%	43%	39%	32%

People under 30 are more likely than older people to say unions have helped pensioners, immigrants, persons with disabilities, working women and visible minorities.

However, young people are less certain than older Canadians that unions have helped young people. Some 38% of people under 30 say unions have had no impact on young workers.

Almost no one says unions have hurt any of these groups.

% of Canadians who say unions have helped...			
	1988	1992	2003
Working women	67%	64%	68%
People with physical disabilities	45%	47%	58%
Visible minorities	43%	42%	55%
Pensioners	43%	41%	49%

Most support union involvement in non-bargaining issues

Canadians are likely to support a long list of union campaigns if they relate to specific non-bargaining-related activities rather than general or abstract “non-bargaining-related. Three out of four people, for instance, say unions should be more involved in promoting equality for women and visible minorities, campaigning to ban imported products made by child labour or in sweatshops, educational campaigns to stop racism and lobbying governments to increase spending on social programs.

Next I am going to read you a series of proposals or campaigns that many unions support and spend a portion of their members’ dues on. For each one I read please tell me if you think unions should be more involved or less involved in it. Do you think unions should be more involved or less involved in ... ?

Unions and non-bargaining activities		
	More involved	Less involved
Promoting equality for women	78%	13%
Campaigning to ban imports of products made by child labour or in sweatshops in poor countries	76%	16%
Educational campaigns to stop racism	74%	17%
Lobbying governments to increase spending on social programs such as health care and education	75%	18%
Promoting equality for visible minorities	73%	17%
Campaigning to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour	71%	21%
Campaigning for a national child care program	71%	21%
Lobbying the federal government to increase employment insurance benefits	68%	24%
Campaigning to make international trade agreements and the globalization process more beneficial to workers	59%	28%
Lobbying governments to ban private hospitals and for-profit health care	52%	35%
Promoting world peace, for instance, stopping the war in Iraq	48%	39%
Marches and protests against globalization and international trade agreements	43%	41%

Unions and non-bargaining activities – unions should be more involved in...		
	2000	2003
Promoting equality for women	76%	78%
Campaigning to ban imports of products made by child labour or in sweatshops in poor countries	73%	76%
Educational campaigns to stop racism	73%	74%
Lobbying governments to increase spending on social programs such as health care and education	73%	75%
Promoting equality for visible minorities	67%	73%
Campaigning to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour	67%	71%
Campaigning for a national child care program	70%	71%
Lobbying the federal government to increase employment insurance benefits	64%	68%
Campaigning to make international trade agreements and the globalization process more beneficial to workers	-	59%
Lobbying governments to ban private hospitals and for-profit health care	50%	52%
Promoting world peace, for instance, stopping the violence in East Timor (2000)/stopping the war in Iraq (2003)	55%	48%
Marches and protests against globalization and international trade agreements	35%	43%

About three-quarters of non-union employees say unions should be more involved in these non-bargaining activities. Interviewers told respondents that unions “spend a portion of their members’ dues” on them. An even larger percentage of union members say unions should get more involved in these social and political campaigns.

<i>% saying unions should be more involved in . . .</i>		
	Union members	Non-union employees
Promoting equality for women	81%	77%
Campaigning to ban imports of products made by child labour or in sweatshops in poor countries	81%	76%
Lobbying governments to increase spending on social programs such as health care and education	80%	73%
Educational campaigns to stop racism	79%	73%
Campaigning to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour	76%	70%
Promoting equality for visible minorities	76%	73%
Lobbying the federal government to increase employment insurance benefits	76%	64%
Campaigning for a national child care program	74%	69%
Campaigning to make international trade agreements and the globalization process more beneficial to workers	63%	57%
Marches and protests against globalization and international trade agreements	50%	39%
Lobbying governments to ban private hospitals and for-profit health care	56%	49%
Promoting world peace, for instance, stopping the war in Iraq	49%	44%

More than half of Canadians say unions get involved in social and legislative issues either to benefit their members or because unions are really concerned about the issues (as opposed to just seeking publicity).

Seven in ten prefer a union involved in the community

An overwhelming share of union and non-union employees throughout the country would be more likely to join a union that is active in community issues than a union that only bargains and does not get involved in the community.

- In the new CLC poll, by 71% to 16% Canadians would pick the union that gets involved in the community over the union that only bargains for its members.
- Among union members the socially active union is preferred by 74% to 19%.
- Among non-union employees the socially active union is the choice by 70% to 14%.

Visible minorities, workers under 30 and immigrants are just as likely as other workers to support a socially engaged union over a union that only bargains and rejects community involvement.

If you were thinking about a union to join, and the choice came down to two unions, which would you be more likely to join?

Union members				
	All	18-29-year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
The union that is active in community issues	74%	75%	90%	68%
The union that just bargains for its members and does not take up community issues	19%	21%	6%	22%
Both	4%	2%	4%	9%
Neither	<1%	-	-	-
Depends	1%	-	-	2%

Non-union employees

	All	18-29- year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
The union that is active in community issues	70%	72%	67%	66%
The union that just bargains for its members and does not take up community issues	14%	18%	19%	21%
Both	4%	4%	2%	4%
Neither	8%	4%	8%	6%
Depends	2%	1%	1%	2%

Compared with the 2000 CLC poll support among union members for the union that gets involved in community issues is up slightly.

	2000		2003	
	Union members	Non-union employees	Union members	Non-union employees
The union that is active in community issues	66%	70%	74%	70%
The union that just bargains for its members and does not take up community issues	28%	23%	19%	14%
Both	1%	2%	4%	4%
Neither	3%	2%	<1%	8%
Depends/don't know	2%	3%	3%	4%

The paradox for unions is that more Canadians want unions to tackle social problems than want to join unions. Non-union workers seem to be ready to spend union resources on non-bargaining-related causes and non-organizing-related activities. Since 70% of non-union workers are more likely to join an active union than a union without a social agenda, while only 33% are likely to vote (in the abstract) to have a union – the direction for unions should be to get their message out to the public more clearly and strongly.

While it is tempting to see social activism as a solution to union image problems, unions have to decide whether their social activism is strategic and leads to union growth and influence. Otherwise, social unionism could turn out to be an expensive distraction from other, more vital priorities.

How the public views union advocacy

Unions take stands on a lot of issues, but the public filters what unions say through a screen of skepticism.

For instance, while 31% of Canadians say unions speak out on international trade, peace, health care, the economy and other issues because they are concerned about those issues, another 25% say unions speak up “just to benefit their members.” And then there are the 29% who say unions do it just to get publicity (which is not entirely negative if part of the message gets through).

Why do you think unions speak out about issues such as international trade, peace, health care, the economy and other issues not directly related to negotiating contracts for their members? Is it...?

	All	18-29 year-olds	Visible Minorities	Immigrants	Non-union employees
Because they are generally concerned about these issues	31%	29%	26%	27%	27%
Just for publicity	29%	26%	28%	29%	31%
Just to benefit their members	25%	31%	31%	31%	28%
All those reasons	5%	7%	4%	4%	5%
Other reasons/depends	3%	2%	7%	4%	4%
Don' know	6%	4%	3%	5%	5%

In 1991, 40% said unions speak out on issues just to benefit members, but 27% said the unions were concerned about the issues. Union members are a little more inclined than non-union members to say unions speak up out of genuine concern for the issues.

	1991		2003	
	Total pop.	Union members	Total pop.	Union members
Because they are generally concerned about these issues	27%	28%	31%	35%
Just for publicity	29%	22%	29%	31%
Just to benefit their members	40%	49%	25%	21%
All, other reasons/depends	2%	1%	8%	9%
Don't know	3%	2%	6%	3%

**40% hear anti-union comments,
28% positive**

Compared with three years ago Canadians are slightly less likely to hear anti-union comments today. But overall only 28% today (compared with 27% in 2000) hear positive things.

In the 2000 CLC poll 46% said they heard mostly negative comments when they hear people talk about unions while today 40% say so.

Younger Canadians, visible minorities and immigrants – who all are more pro-union than other people – are more likely to report hearing positive things about unions.

- By 44% to 27% non-union workers hear mostly the negative when it comes to unions.

Workers in larger workplaces than in small workplaces hear negative things more frequently. Older union members are more likely to hear negative comments than younger union members.

When you hear people talk about unions, do they tend to say positive things or negative things about unions?

2003			
	Total pop.	Union members	Non-union employees
Positive	28%	29%	27%
Negative	40%	45%	44%
Both	25%	24%	24%
Don't hear anyone talk about unions	3%	2%	3%
Don't know	3%	1%	3%

For unions the important finding in the poll is that 45% of union members say they hear mostly negative comments about unions (only 29% mostly hear positive things). The new results are similar to the 2000 poll findings. Considering that unions have considerable scope to communicate with their members at work and off the job, these are awkward statistics.

July 2000			
	Total pop.	Union members	Non-union employees
Positive	27%	34%	25%
Negative	46%	43%	46%
Both	20%	21%	17%
Don't hear anyone talk about unions	6%	1%	10%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%

Who's satisfied

with their job? Who's not?

Canadian workers are satisfied with their jobs overall, but up to a quarter are dissatisfied with some aspect of their work.

In the new CLC poll job satisfaction levels are virtually unchanged from the findings in the national employee satisfaction study conducted by Vector for the CLC in 2000.

On the whole where you work, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with? Is that very or rather satisfied/dissatisfied? [Interviewers prompted respondents with more than one job... "It is your main job that we are asking about."]

	Very + rather	
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	86%	5%
Health and safety conditions	84%	10%
Your ability to balance work and family	81%	11%
Your job security	76%	15%
Discrimination and favouritism	73%	14%
Your pay	72%	22%
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	70%	19%
Training for new skills	69%	20%
Your prospects for advancement	67%	21%
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	66%	22%
The amount of pressure you are under at work	66%	23%
The pension benefits	57%	26%

Employees are happiest with their safety and health conditions, job security, their ability to balance family and work, their protection at work against sexual and racial harassment and the least of favouritism.

They are the least satisfied with their pay, training opportunities, pensions, workloads, benefits and their supervisors' responses to employee complaints.

	Very + rather dissatisfied	
	2000	2003
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	4%	5%
Health and safety conditions	10%	10%
Your ability to balance work and family	12%	11%
Your job security	13%	15%
Discrimination and favouritism	13%	14%
Your pay	19%	22%
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	20%	19%
Training for new skills	21%	20%
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	22%	22%
Your prospects for advancement	23%	21%
The amount of pressure you are under at work	24%	23%
The pension benefits	27%	26%

Union members are happier than non-union employees with their pension plans, pay and benefits.

Non-union workers, however, are a little happier than organized employees about their supervisors, health and safety conditions and discrimination and favouritism. (It could be that non-union employees are less sensitive to discrimination and not as aware as union members of unsafe conditions on the job.)

Who's satisfied (very + rather) with . . .

	All employees	Union members	Non-union employees
Protection from sexual or racial harassment	86%	86%	87%
Health and safety conditions	84%	82%	88%
Your ability to balance work and family	81%	80%	83%
Your job security	76%	78%	76%
Discrimination and favouritism	73%	70%	76%
Your pay	72%	76%	70%
How supervisors handle employee complaints	70%	66%	74%
Training for new skills	69%	66%	72%
Your prospects for advancement	67%	66%	69%
Dental, drug and health benefits	66%	76%	61%
The amount of pressure you are under	66%	63%	68%
The pension benefits	57%	68%	50%

Workers of colour tend to be less satisfied than others with their supervisors and complain more about discrimination and favouritism. In union, immigrants and workers of colour tend to be less satisfied than other employees over discrimination and supervision.

Who's satisfied (very + rather) with ...

	18-29 year olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Protection from sexual or racial harassment	89%	82%	80%
Your ability to balance work and family	80%	78%	79%
Health and safety conditions	80%	79%	81%
Your job security	76%	71%	72%
How your supervisors handle employee complaints	73%	68%	65%
Discrimination and favouritism	72%	71%	67%
Training for new skills	72%	68%	63%
Your prospects for advancement	70%	64%	61%
Your pay	66%	66%	61%
The amount of pressure you are under	68%	64%	63%
Dental, drug and health benefits	63%	63%	63%
The pension benefits	56%	56%	60%

The least satisfied non-union employees are workers of colour, immigrants and women in workplaces of 100 or more employees. For example, 26% of workers of colour unorganized employees are dissatisfied with the way supervisors treat employee complaints compared with 16% of all unorganized workers.

- Only 57% of immigrants without unions – vs. 70% of all non-union workers – are satisfied with their pay.
- While 69% of non-union workers are happy with their chances to advance where they work, just 57% of workers of colour employees and immigrants are.

While every non-union workplace has specific problems, the poll shows that overall in the country there are four on-the-job issues that dominate the non-union employees' agenda: pensions, benefits, pay and job security.

Vector Research composed the agenda by adding the percentage of non-union workers who are dissatisfied with a particular factor at work and the percentage of non-union employees who feel a union makes that same factor or working condition “a lot” better. (See page 34.) The result is an index or measurement of intensity for each of the twelve workplace factors.

For instance, 30% of non-union employees are very or rather dissatisfied with their employer’s pension plan, and 31% say unions make pensions a lot better.

The result of adding 30% and 31% is a factor of 61, the highest total on the list of twelve working conditions. For benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care the union attraction factor is 60, and for pay, 50.

Some 26% of non-union employees say unions make things a lot better for employees facing racial and sexual harassment at work. However, few employees are dissatisfied over racial and sexual harassment, so the net union attraction figure is only 30.

The non-union organizing agenda			
	Very + rather dissatisfied with	Unions make a lot better	Net union attraction
The pension benefits	30%	31%	61
Benefits such as dental, prescription drugs and supplemental health care	26%	34%	60
Your pay	25%	25%	50
Your job security	15%	35%	50
Health and safety conditions	8%	36%	44
Training for new skills	18%	19%	37
The way supervisors respond to employee feedback and complaints	16%	20%	36
The amount of pressure you are under at work	21%	15%	36
Your prospects for advancement	21%	12%	33
Discrimination and favouritism	13%	20%	33
Protection from sexual or racial harassment at work	4%	26%	30
Your ability to balance work and family	10%	12%	22

How Canadians view the corporate agenda

Public opinion about global trends creates the conditions in which unions organize. To describe those conditions, the CLC asked a representative cross-section of Canadians for their views on five economic trends in the corporate agenda:

- Corporate mergers;
- Declining union strength;
- Free trade;
- Increasing global competition, and
- Privatization.

Compared with three years ago, when the same questions were posed across the country for the Canadian Labour Congress, Canadians are more divided today about globalization and free trade. More Canadians are taking a stand both for and against the trend to more integration of the economies of the nations of the globe.

For example, 55% now versus 62% in 2000 say increasing global competition is a trend going in the right direction. And 21% today compared with 17% in 2000 say the trend toward increasing global competition goes in the wrong direction.

I'd like to read you a list of trends in the country today. For each one I read, please tell me whether you consider this a step in the right direction, a step in the wrong direction or something that won't make a difference.

	Right direction	Wrong direction	No difference
Increasing global competition	55%	21%	15%
More free trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization	49%	27%	14%
The declining power and membership of unions	34%	35%	20%
Corporate mergers	24%	42%	18%
The downsizing and privatization of public services	22%	59%	11%

Trends moving in the 'right direction'		
	2000	2003
Increasing global competition	62%	55%
More free trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization	56%	49%
The declining power and membership of unions	38%	34%
Corporate mergers	26%	24%
The downsizing and privatization of public services	28%	22%
Trends moving in the 'wrong direction'		
	2000	2003
Increasing global competition	17%	21%
More free trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization	24%	27%
The declining power and membership of unions	36%	35%
Corporate mergers	47%	42%
The downsizing and privatization of public services	56%	59%

Union members are more likely than non-union employees to think all five trends are moving in the wrong direction.

But free trade is seductive. Even 48% of union members say the trend to more free trade agreements goes in the right direction (32% say the wrong direction).

- 52% of union members meanwhile say increasing global competition goes in the right direction.

This figure, however, is down from 62% of union members who said in 2000 that increasing global competition is a good trend.

In British Columbia, more than in other regions, people are inclined to see privatization of public services and the declining power and membership of unions as a trend in the wrong direction.

- 70% in B.C., compared with 59% nationally, see downsizing and privatizing public services as a trend moving the wrong way.
- Residents in B.C., whose province's forest industry has been battered by U.S. trade sanctions, are more inclined than residents in other regions to say more NAFTA and WTO agreements go in the wrong direction (40% vs. 27% nationally).

'Wrong direction'				
	Total population	Atlantic	Québec	B.C.
Downsizing and privatization	59%	60%	54%	70%
Declining union membership	35%	36%	39%	46%
More free trade agreements	27%	18%	27%	40%

Canadian under 30, however, are more optimistic about free trade agreements such as NAFTA and the World Trade Organization. In the 18-29 year-old segment of the public, 56% say the trend toward more free trade agreements goes in the right direction, compared with only 44% of Canadians who are 50 and older.

Trends moving in the 'wrong direction'				
	Visible Minorities	Immigrants	Union members	Non-union employees
Declining union power and membership	32%	34%	53%	28%
Corporate mergers	32%	38%	48%	42%
Downsizing and privatization of public services	54%	51%	68%	59%
More free trade agreements	23%	24%	32%	24%
Increasing global competition	18%	20%	25%	20%

Trends moving in the 'right direction'			
	Total population	18-29-year olds	50 +
Increasing global competition	55%	55%	54%
More free trade agreements like the North American Free trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization	49%	56%	44%
The declining power and membership of unions	34%	27%	36%
Corporate mergers	24%	30%	20%
The downsizing and privatization of public services	22%	22%	22%

Membership satisfaction remains stable over a decade

Union members rate their local and national leaders about the same today as a decade ago.

In a 1993 national poll of union members, 66% were somewhat or very satisfied with their national union leadership compared with 66% in the new CLC poll, conducted August 16-22. In the 1993 poll 74% were satisfied with their local union leadership, while today 66% are satisfied.

Efforts to improve membership satisfaction would pay off in several ways, such as more membership involvement, more support for union campaigns such as public health care, and more organizing success.

The Vector polls for the CLC over the past 20 years are clear and consistent – membership satisfaction and organizing results are associated. Membership satisfaction influences organizing because unions cannot afford multi-million-dollar advertising campaigns to polish their image. Their reputation is not made in ads; members make a union's reputation.

The more satisfied members there are the more powerful is positive word-of-mouth about unions (and word-of-mouth advertising is the most persuasive kind).

[Full- and part-time employees in jobs covered by union agreements were asked...] Thinking about the national/local leadership of your union, how satisfied are you overall with the services they provide and the contracts and conditions they have helped you negotiate? Would you say...

National union		
	2003	1993
Very satisfied	18%	17%
Somewhat satisfied	47%	49%
Somewhat dissatisfied	15%	17%
Totally dissatisfied	12%	12%
Don't know	8%	4%

Local union		
	2003	1993
Very satisfied	21%	20%
Somewhat satisfied	46%	54%
Somewhat dissatisfied	17%	14%
Totally dissatisfied	12%	8%
Don't know	5%	4%

Public sector union members are a little more satisfied with their national leadership today than a decade ago while private sector members are less satisfied with both their national and local union leaders.

Public sector union members satisfied with their...		
	2003	1993
National leadership	69%	60%
Local leadership	68%	71%

Private sector union members satisfied with their...		
	2003	1993
National leadership	61%	73%
Local leadership	61%	76%

Union members rate their national union leadership			
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
All members	66%	27%	8%
Visible minorities	73%	17%	9%
Immigrants	75%	19%	6%
18-29 years old	71%	18%	10%
Public sector	69%	26%	5%
Private sector	61%	30%	8%

Union members rate their local union leadership			
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
All members	66%	29%	5%
Visible minorities	67%	21%	12%
Immigrants	69%	22%	8%
18-29 years old	69%	25%	7%
Public sector	68%	29%	3%
Private sector	61%	32%	7%

Unions have been through tough times in the past decade. Perhaps it's an achievement to keep membership satisfaction from falling. Two-thirds of union members are satisfied with their union. But that means around three in ten are not, far too many if unions want to grow and move to more influence in Canada.

To grow unions need more ambassadors and cheerleaders, members who create "buzz" about their union by telling others about the benefits of unions and about the labour movement's values and policies. Only one in ten members, however, is both a satisfied member and a member who tells people how they feel about their union "even if no one asks."

Québec is different. Satisfied members in Québec are much more likely than members in other provinces to tell others about their union.

When you are not at work do you usually tell people how you feel about the union only if someone asks you or do you tell people how you feel even if no one asks?

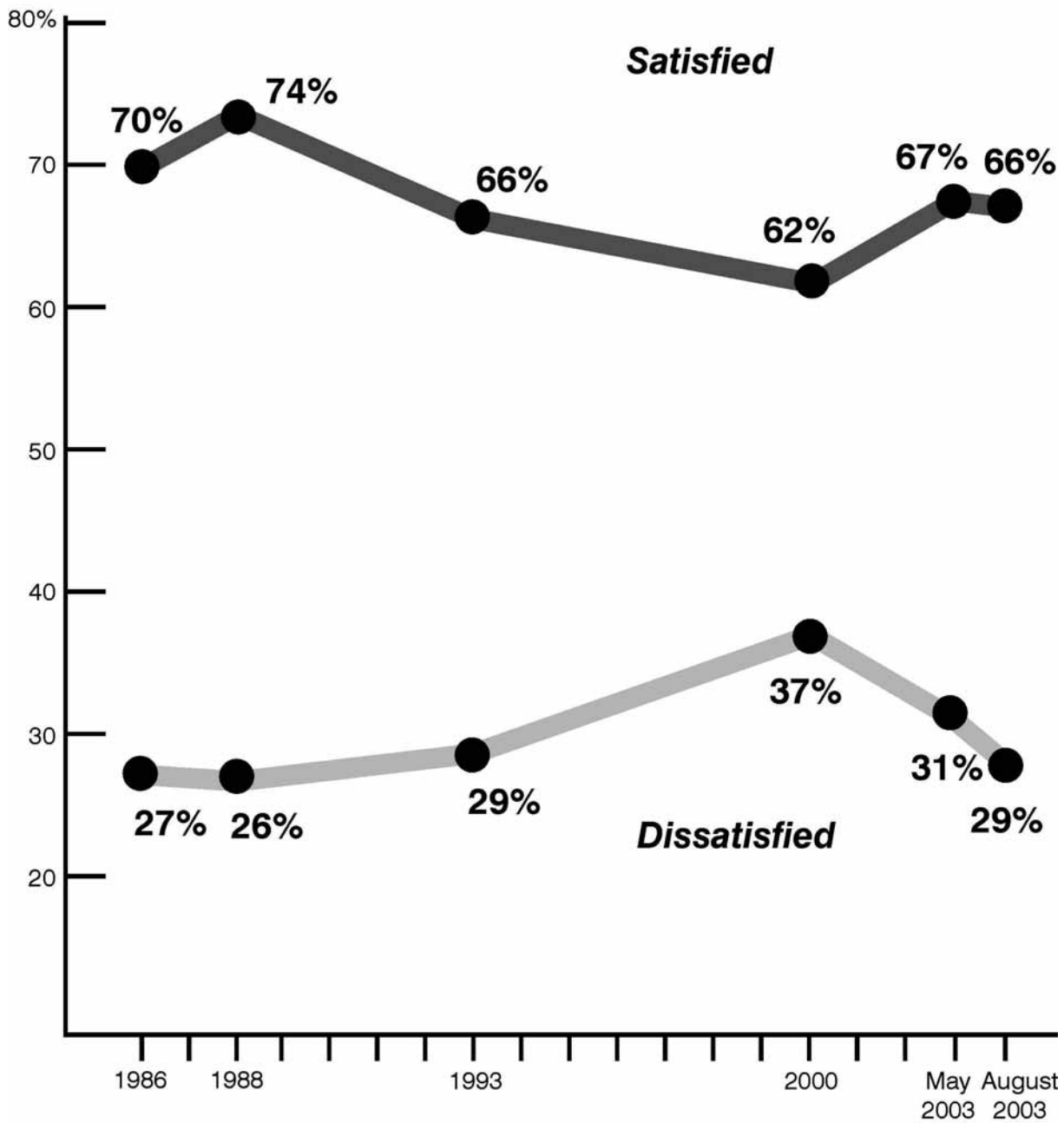
	All	18-29-year-olds	Québec	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Only if someone asks	67%	69%	55%	48%	62%
Even if no one asks	21%	18%	38%	27%	21%

To take a strategic look at the communications issue facing unions Vector Research segmented union members into four groups: Ambassadors, Quiet Sympathizers, Silent Discontents and Vocal Opponents. Ambassadors outnumber the trash-talkers, the Vocal Opponents, by about two to one. Remember that 66% of members are satisfied, but most don't tell anyone unless they're asked.

More than half are Quiet Sympathizers (53%). They are satisfied with their union but don't talk about it unless someone prompts them. Another 27% are Silent Discontents. They are unhappy with their union but don't say so unless someone asks. Some 7% are Vocal Opponents. They are unhappy with their union and don't wait to be asked to tell people! Ambassadors tend to be men, persons of colour, members 30 to 49 years old in private sector jobs and employees with longer than average seniority (10½ years compared with just under 7½ years for all members).

Four kinds of union members					
	All	18-29- year-olds	Québec	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Ambassadors	13%	14%	26%	16%	9%
Quiet Sympathizers	53%	55%	43%	51%	60%
Silent Discontents	27%	27%	20%	26%	23%
Vocal Opponents	7%	4%	10%	8%	8%

Tracking members' satisfaction with their union



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Why workers will not join unions

The CLC poll asked employees who would not vote for a union why not.

The survey shows that fear of unions – not employers – is the most powerful obstacle in organizing. Non-union workers acknowledge unions make some aspects of work better. But they also want to minimize what they perceive as the risks and disadvantages of unions.

The startling finding is how similar the views of non-union workers and union members are.

- Four in ten members and non-union workers say employees have no say in how the union operates.
- 38% of members and 44% of non-members who would not *very likely* vote for a union say the seniority system is a “major reason” for not wanting a union. (They want promotions based on merit.)
- 44% of members and 38% of non-union workers who are not “very likely” to vote for a union say dues are too high considering what members get.

[Respondents who would not “very likely” vote for a union were asked...] As I read the following please tell me if it is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason that you are not very likely to vote for a union.

Union members			
	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason
Members have no say in how the union operates	45%	37%	17%
Dues are too high for what you get out of it	44%	33%	22%
With a union, promotions are base on seniority, not just initiative and merit	38%	36%	25%
You might have to go on strike	36%	32%	30%
Your employer would not approve of employees having a union	22%	28%	44%
You worry that your employer might close down if there was a union	26%	30%	43%
You are not eligible to be in a union because you have a management or other confidential job	22%	28%	48%

Non-union members			
	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason
With a union, promotions are based on seniority, not just initiative and merit	44%	23%	30%
Members have no say in how the union operates	43%	26%	28%
Dues are too high for what you get out of it	38%	29%	27%
You might have to go on strike	34%	24%	40%
You are eligible to be in a union because you have a management or other confidential job	28%	22%	47%
You worry that your employer might close down if there was a union	22%	23%	53%
Your employer would not approve of employees having a union	21%	25%	49%

Seven in ten non-union workers want associations

In the best-case scenario, removing employer reprisals, 43% of non-union workers are very or somewhat likely to vote for a union today, according to the new Vector Poll for the CLC.

But nearly twice as many – 70% – would like an association. That’s more than 6 million workers seeking assistance in their working life.

Not surprisingly, interest in an association is strongest among groups that are most interested in a union. But even 72% of anti-union workers want associations!

Instead of a union would you like to have an employee association where you work to represent the employees and take up problems with supervisors and management?

All non-union employees				
	All	18-29-year- olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants
Yes	70%	77%	69%	75%
No	27%	19%	27%	23%
Don't know	4%	4%	4%	2%

Low-income workers, immigrants, employees in smaller workplaces and young workers are all more interested than average unorganized employees in having some form of voice and representation at work. Link this interest in representation to the potential to contact and organize workers through the Internet and the possibilities of rapidly increasing union ranks is tantalizing.

Compared with the CLC’s 2000 poll interest in an association is higher today. In the 2000 national survey of non-union workers 64% preferred an association instead of a union compared with 70% in the new survey.

Eight in ten members use the Internet

In a 1996 Poll for the CLC 31% of union members across Canada were using the Internet and another 19% intended to get access to the World Wide Web in the coming year (only 25% of all Canadians were using the 'Net then).

When the political action department of the CLC surveyed union members in October 2001, 75% of members used the Internet (another 8% intended to go online in the coming year). Members' intentions became real. In the new CLC survey 81% of members use the Internet.

Do you use the Internet at...?

% of Canadian adults on the 'Net					
	Total pop.	18-29- year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants	Union members
Home	59%	72%	58%	65%	65%
Work	37%	39%	36%	38%	48%
Some other place	20%	37%	32%	23%	20%

On average how long do you access or surf the Web?

	Total pop.	18-29- year-olds	Visible minorities	Immigrants	Union members
More than five times a day	17%	19%	25%	27%	14%
Two to four times a day	29%	30%	28%	31%	28%
A few times a week	31%	32%	31%	27%	33%
About once a week	9%	6%	4%	5%	9%
A few times a month	6%	6%	5%	5%	6%
Once a month or less often	7%	5%	8%	5%	8%

In 2001 members were spending an average of 7 ½ hours a week on the 'Net. Instead of three in ten union Internet users going online every day as they did in 1996, four in ten surf every day now.

Union members on the Internet			
	1996	2001	2003
% of members on the 'Net	31%	75%	81%
More than five times a day	-	-	14%
Two to four times a day	32%	-	28%
A few times a week	31%	-	33%
About once a week	-	-	9%
A few times a month	19%	-	6%
Once a month or less often	19%	-	8%

Source: Vector Research + Development Inc. national polls

Final thoughts

The new Canadian Labour Congress poll shows its affiliates the need to address four questions. The answers will tell whether unions continue on the move or face a slow decline in their memberships and influence.

1. How can unions be more proactive and deal with the threat of employer reprisals for organizing?
2. How can unions shift the perception of many non-union employees – who are satisfied with their jobs overall – that a union would adversely affect their working life?
3. How can unions accelerate contacts with pro-union unorganized workers – especially younger workers, immigrants, low-income employees, women and persons of colour?
4. What steps can unions take to build on the reservoir of positive feelings among workers and the public into support for organizing and social campaigns?
5. How unions dramatically increase the number of ambassadors in their ranks – satisfied, pro-union members who voluntarily tell others how great their union is?

The challenge is to make unions attractive to satisfied workers, too, to re-format union organizing, adapt union operations to organize workers in non-traditional ways, and improve the jobs of millions of Canadians who want a union.

It will not be easy to find the answers, but it will be impossible without the resolve to ask them.

Method

The findings in this poll are based on telephone interviews conducted from August 16 through August 22, 2003, with 2,007 adults throughout the country by the polling firm Vector Research + Development Inc.

The sample of phone numbers chosen was drawn by recognized probability sampling methods to insure that each region of the country was represented in proportion to its population and by a method that gave all residential telephone numbers, both listed and unlisted, an equal chance of being included in the poll.

The data were weighted in each region of the country to match the known demographic characteristics of the population.

In sampling theory, in 19 cases out of 20 (in 95% of polls in other words), the results based on a random sample of 2,007 will differ by no more than ± 2.2 percentage points.

This means you can be 95% certain that the survey results do not vary by more than 2.2 percentage points in either direction from results that would have been obtained by interviewing all adults 18 years or older in the country.

The error margins for subgroups such as provinces and gender are larger. For the Ontario sample of 500, for example, the error margin is 4.4 percentage points. For the sample of 463 union members the margin of sampling error is 4.6 percentage points.

Samples of any size have some degree of precision. A larger sample is not always better than a smaller sample. Larger samples are generally more precise but sometimes not.

The important rule in sampling is not how many poll respondents are selected but how they are selected.

One method to insure that all members of a population have a known chance of being selected includes dialing randomly generated phone numbers to insure that people with unlisted numbers are included. Another is to dial the number again and again when no one answers to insure that people often away from home are sampled.

How can a sample of 2,000 truly reflect the opinions of 30 million Canadians within a few percentage points?

Measures of sample reliability are derived from the mathematical science of statistics. At the root of statistical reliability is probability, the odds of obtaining a particular outcome by chance alone.

For example, the chances of having a coin come up heads in a single toss are 50%. Heads is one of only two possible outcomes. The chance of getting two heads in two coin tosses is less because two heads are now only one of four possible outcomes: a head/head, head/tail, tail/head and tail/tail.

As the number of coin tosses increases, it becomes increasingly more likely to get outcomes that are either close to half heads or exactly half because there are more ways to get such outcomes.

Sample survey reliability works the same way but on a much larger scale. As in coin tosses, the most likely sample outcome is the true percentage of whatever is measured across the total population. Next most likely outcomes are very close to the true percentage. A statement of potential margin of error or sample precision reflects this.

The margin of error refers only to sampling error; other non-random forms of error may be present. Even in true random samples, precision can be compromised by other factors, such as the wording of questions or the order in which questions were asked.

Some pages in the computer analysis show the standard deviation. The S.D. embraces the range where 68% (or approximately two-thirds) of the respondents would fall if the distribution of answers is a normal bell-shaped curve.

For example, page 75 shows the spread of responses to the question about a union's impact on the way supervisors respond to employee complaints.

Using a scale of one to five, with one meaning a union makes this factor "a lot worse" and five "a lot better," the mean or average level of impact in the opinions across the country is 3.72. On page 80 the mean or average in opinions on a union's impact on pay is 4.00. Canadians believe unions have a greater impact on pay than on how supervisors handle employee feedback.

The standard deviation, however, reveals more. For pay the S.D. is 0.93 while for the way supervisors handle employee complaints it's 1.13. Add the S.D. to the mean to get the top of the range; subtract the S.D. from the mean to get the bottom of the range. There is a much wider range of opinions – meaning much less consensus – about how much impact a union has on pay (3.07 to 4.93) than how a union impacts the way supervisors deal with employee feedback (2.59 to 4.85).

The standard error (S.E.), or standard error of the estimate, is shown below the S.D. The S.E. is a measure of how different the respondents are from each other in their answers. The S.E. is a measure of confidence or reliability, roughly equivalent to the error margin cited for sample sizes in polls. The S.E. measures how far off the sample's results are from the standard deviation.

The smaller the S.E. the greater the reliability of the data. In other words, a low S.E. indicates that the answers given by respondents in a certain group such as males or females do not differ much from the probable spread of the answers "predicted" in sampling and probability theory.

- Marc Zwelling
President, Vector Research + Development Inc.