

**CIRANO note based on the book *PERCEPTION DES RISQUES AU QUÉBEC – BAROMÈTRE CIRANO 2017*
by Nathalie de Marcellis-Warin and Ingrid Peignier, February 2017**

The *Baromètre CIRANO 2017* is a survey of 1008 representative Quebecers that examines their perceptions of various social issues. Its findings reveal that Quebecers want their opinions to be heard and a greater participation in both the elaboration and implementation of the Quebec government's policies and in decisions made on the issues and public or private projects that entail risks and harmful repercussions.

Analyzing this survey data jointly with data from previous years (2011 and 2013) yields a better understanding of Quebecers' current concerns and risk perceptions and their trends over the past five years. Among other things, data on some ten sociodemographic characteristics (age, sex, language, education, income, region of residence, etc.) were gathered for each respondent, making the *Baromètre* a unique tool for identifying the determinants of the social acceptability of 44 issues grouped into seven broad categories: healthcare issues, environmental issues, socio-economic issues, industrial issues, technological innovation, infrastructure and public projects, and security.

Risks associated with the healthcare system are the principal preoccupation of Quebecers, both individually and collectively. The risk categories of greatest concern at the individual level remained constant in 2011, 2013, and 2016: (1) healthcare system risks, (2) economic and financial risks, and (3) environmental and energy security risks.

The three areas perceived as presenting the greatest risk are: access to healthcare in terms of emergency room overcrowding in hospitals (77% of Quebecers see this as a great or very great risk), access to healthcare in terms of challenges obtaining services (70%), and corruption (73%). Emergency room overcrowding has been one of the three most at risk projects / issues to Quebecers since 2011. While corruption has been in the Top 3 since 2013, the proportion of Quebecers who perceive a great or very great risk of corruption declined from 82% in 2013 to 73% in 2016 (in 2011, this issue was not covered by the survey). Conversely, even though there is a real risk of earthquakes in Quebec, only 8% of Quebecers perceive this as a great or very great risk, placing it last among the 44 issues examined. In underestimating this risk, Quebecers are less conscious of the need to be prepared for it and are thus more vulnerable.

With regard to infrastructure, the authors observe that the perceived risk level has declined over the past five years and that confidence in the government has shown a marked improvement.

It is worth noting that, in the case of some projects and issues, at least 10% of the population admits that it doesn't know the risk level. These projects are as follows: the use of nanotechnologies (25% report that they have no opinion regarding their confidence in the government's ability to manage them), the use of gene therapy in healthcare (12%), heat waves (12%), projects involving private-public partnerships (12%), construction of wind farms (11%) and, finally, shale gas exploration and electromagnetic waves (both at 10%).

Projects perceived as most beneficial to Quebec are in a variety of areas: healthcare (58% consider vaccination to be somewhat or very beneficial), natural resource development (43% consider wind farm construction, and 34% mining operations, beneficial) and, finally, the use of new technologies (46% of Quebecers believe that the "Internet of things" is good for Quebec and 73% of Quebecers support the use of an Internet-connected device). At the other extreme, issues related to hazardous or risky materials appear to be perceived as the least beneficial to Quebec and, for that very reason, are least accepted. Thus, since 2013 the operation of nuclear power plants and the consumption of GMOs are the projects / issues perceived as the least beneficial and least acceptable for Quebec.

However, the most noteworthy finding to the authors was that 83% of Quebecers want to be consulted by the government on how large projects are managed and on policy decisions. The population wants a new relationship with the government. The relevance of the public's contributions depends on a thorough knowledge and understanding of the issues on which it is being consulted, yet 68% of Quebecers do not know where to obtain information on risky issues / projects, and 53% don't know about the *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement* (BAPE). This backdrop clearly illustrates the need for a fresh look at what has been done to provide the population with sound and diverse skills—an essential prerequisite for high-quality citizen participation.

Written for a large public, *Perception des risques au Québec – Baromètre CIRANO 2017* is addressed to everyone who wants to know more about Quebecers' concerns regarding the great issues of the day. It was formally launched at CIRANO last January 26 and is published by the *Presses internationales Polytechnique*. To obtain the document (in French), [click here](#). For the PowerPoint presentation and the executive summary (also in French), [click here](#).