

DECEMBER 2024

Counting Constraints: A Comprehensive Count of Canada's Regulatory Requirements

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To quantify the regulatory burden across Canada, CFIB has estimated the number of regulatory requirements (or restrictions) within each jurisdiction's legislation and regulations — two primary sources of rules affecting businesses and citizens. **Legislation (or statutes)** are laws passed by each jurisdiction's legislative body, setting a broad legal framework for specific purposes, such as tax collection or worker certification. **Regulations** are specific rules tied to certain statutes and are enacted by government officials rather than the legislature. They provide a more detailed framework for how statutes are enforced or implemented. Jurisdictions that produce their own regulatory count typically use different methods, making comparisons difficult, underscoring the need for a consistent approach.

A regulatory requirement refers to a rule that prevents, limits or deters certain actions or behavior by businesses or individuals through additional costs, hurdles or outright prohibition. They can also mandate certain actions, like filling out forms or paying fees, that individuals or businesses might not otherwise choose.

To estimate the number of regulatory requirements in provinces across Canada, CFIB is counting instances of key terms indicative of behavior-altering provisions within available public statutes and regulations in each province and within the federal government.¹ These key terms—"shall", "must", "may not", "required", and "prohibited"—some of which are also used by the Governments of Ontario and British Columbia for their own regulatory counts.^{2,3} Counting these key terms was not always possible in Quebec given that a substantial portion of the province's regulations are only available in

¹ This regulatory count analyzes the lists of public acts across jurisdictions, focusing on public bills that address community-wide policies, as distinct from private bills that apply to specific individuals or entities.

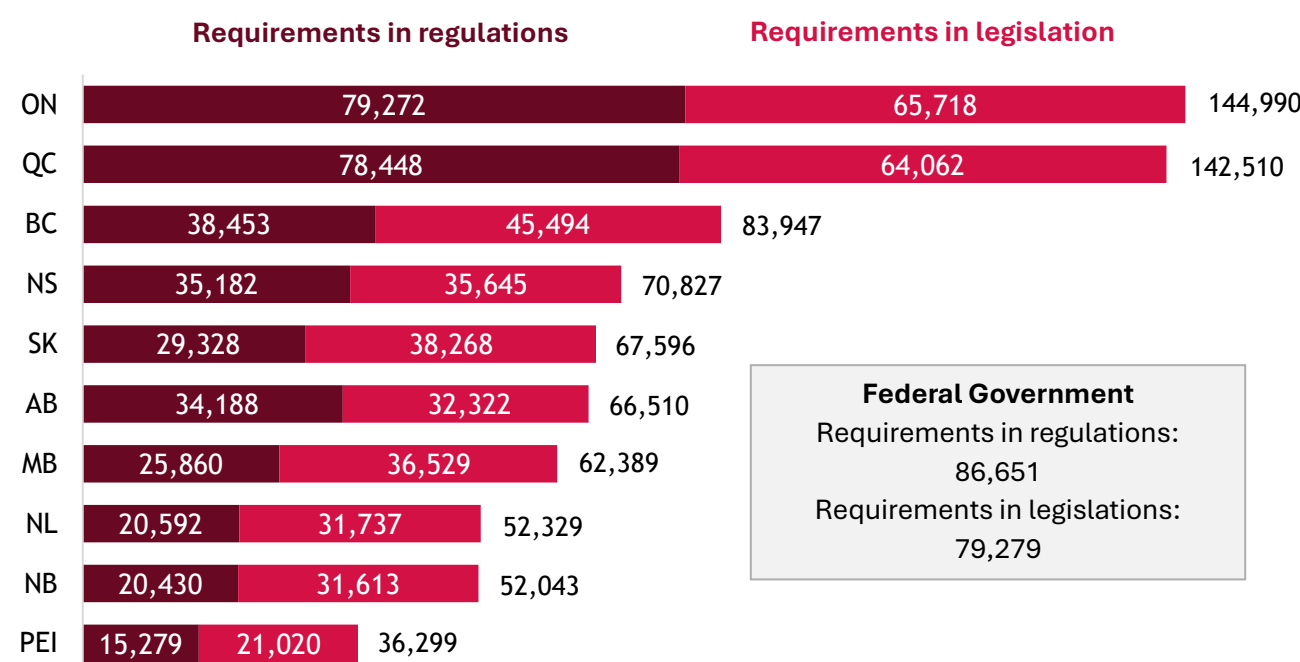
² Government of Ontario. 2024 Burden Reduction Report: Enhancing Ontario's communities - Pathways to efficiency and connection, [Link](#).

³ Government of British Columbia. How We Count Guide, [Link](#).

French. To account for this, the French words “doit”, “ne pourrait pas”/”ne peut pas”, “requis” (including “requis” & “requises”), and “interdit” (including “interdite” & “interdites”) were counted in those documents instead.

The process of identifying these key terms involved reviewing PDF versions of each jurisdiction’s legislative and regulatory documents. The number of instances in which the key terms appear was counted to develop a total. This approach has limitations, as the presence of these terms doesn’t always indicate a regulatory requirement. Conversely, a single instance may represent multiple requirements. Additionally, some requirements may be embodied using words this method does not capture. Requirements not considered in this count include those in government policies and forms. Further, regulatory counts do not perfectly reflect the overall regulatory burden as requirements can be different in scope and impact. Nevertheless, this count serves as the only comprehensive and standardized measure of Canada’s regulatory burden.

Total 2024 Regulatory Requirements in Canada



Source: CFIB analysis of government legislations and regulations. See Sources for more details.

The 2024 data reveal a significant variation in regulatory requirements across jurisdictions, ranging from around 36,000 in Prince Edward Island to nearly 150,000 in Ontario. Generally, larger provinces tend to have a higher total count, driven by their larger economies and wider range of industries, which can require more complex regulations to manage. Nonetheless, Alberta, which has a larger

population than Nova Scotia or Saskatchewan, has a smaller regulatory count than either.⁴ Additionally, despite having more than 1.5 times Quebec's population, Ontario has nearly the same number of requirements, suggesting population is not the sole determinant of the number of requirements. Smaller provinces like PEI and New Brunswick generate most of their regulatory requirements through legislation, while larger provinces like Quebec and Ontario produce more through regulation. A federal regulatory count was also conducted; however, comparisons between the federal count and provincial counts are challenging due to fundamental differences in national versus provincial governance structures.

Sources for Regulatory Requirements

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⁴ Statistics Canada. Population estimates quarterly, [Link](#).

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