

# Public support for Indigenous post-secondary education and training in Ontario

**EnviroNics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research



Indigenous  
Institutes  
Consortium



# Environics Institute

For Survey Research

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The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established by Michael Adams in 2006 with a mandate to conduct in-depth public opinion and social research on the issues shaping Canada's future. It is through such research that Canadians can better understand themselves and their changing society.



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The Indigenous Institutes Consortium (IIC) represents the collective and collaborative efforts of its seven Indigenous-owned and operated education and training institutions across Ontario. Since 1994, the IIC has successfully raised the awareness and profiles of Member Indigenous institutions, learners and communities.

## Ontarians on Reconciliation 2024 Survey

The *Ontarians on Reconciliation 2024 Survey* was conducted by the non-profit Environics Institute, in partnership with the Indigenous Institutes Consortium. The survey of 1,408 adult residents of Ontario was conducted online between August 7 and 23, 2024. The sample includes 239 people who identify as Indigenous and 1,169 who are non-Indigenous. The survey results are weighted by gender, age, region of Ontario, education and Indigenous identity so as to be representative of the actual population of the province. Results for Indigenous respondents, when reported separately, are unweighted and cannot be said to be fully representative of all Indigenous Peoples in the province.

**Complete survey results are available from the [Environics Institute website](#).**



### Survey snapshot

- 1,408 adult residents of Ontario
- Conducted online between August 7 and 23, 2024
- 239 people who identify as Indigenous
- 1,169 who are non-Indigenous

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# Introduction

The Calls to Action issued in 2015 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada included a number of items relating to education. These included calls for measures to eliminate gaps in educational attainment between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada, to provide adequate and equitable funding of education for Indigenous students, and to develop culturally appropriate educational curricula. The expansion of fully-funded and culturally appropriate education and training opportunities for Indigenous Peoples is a key component of a comprehensive approach to addressing historical wrongs; closing current gaps in well-being between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people; and securing a brighter future for all peoples in Canada.

These educational goals are part of the mandate of Ontario's Indigenous Institutes. These Indigenous-owned and led post-secondary institutes are grounded in Indigenous cultures, and serve to expand the educational opportunities and options available to Indigenous learners in the province.

The Indigenous Institutes Consortium, which represents seven of these institutes, was interested in understanding more about how Ontarians see these issues. To do so, the Consortium partnered with the Environics Institute for Survey Research to investigate public attitudes in the province toward reconciliation and relations with Indigenous Peoples in general, and more specifically, toward the objectives of improving education and training outcomes for Indigenous learners. The main results of this study are presented in this report.

The study found broad public support for improving the funding, delivery and outcomes of education and training for Indigenous Peoples living in the province.

# Ontarians support better education and training for Indigenous Peoples

## Overview

A large majority of Ontarians express support for improving the funding, delivery and outcomes of education and training for Indigenous Peoples living in the province:

- Thinking about the future of the province, 85 percent of Ontarians say it is very or somewhat important to help Indigenous Institutes to achieve the goal of allowing Indigenous students an opportunity to learn in an environment free from discrimination.
- 84 percent say that, to advance reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people, it should be either a high or medium priority for all of Canada to ensure that Indigenous Peoples have the same opportunities as other Canadians to access and succeed in education.
- 72 percent believe that increasing the number of Indigenous students who graduate with a college diploma or university degree would have a very or somewhat positive impact on Canada's economy.

 **85%**

of Ontarians say it is very or somewhat important to help Indigenous Institutes to achieve the goal of **allowing Indigenous students an opportunity to learn in an environment free from discrimination.**

 **72%**

believe that **increasing the number of Indigenous students who graduate with a college diploma or university degree** would have a very or somewhat positive impact on Canada's economy.



## Economic impact of improvements to Indigenous education and training

More than seven in ten Ontarians recognize that improvements to Indigenous education and training will have a positive impact on the Canadian economy. The proportion saying that improvements will have a very or somewhat positive impact is highest in the case of “providing more skills training opportunities for Indigenous workers so they can get better paying jobs and help their communities prosper” (75%), but is almost as high for “increasing the number of Indigenous students who graduate with a college diploma or university degree” (72%) and “encouraging more Indigenous entrepreneurs to launch new businesses” (72%). In the case of these first two measures (providing more skills training opportunities and increasing the number of graduates), more than two in five Ontarians expect the impact on the Canadian economy would be very positive.

Most of the remainder say each of these three measures might have no impact or do not express an opinion; only a very small proportion (3% in each case) of Ontarians anticipate that such measures would have a negative economic impact.

*More than seven in ten Ontarians recognize that improvements to Indigenous education and training will have a positive impact on the Canadian economy.*

TABLE 1

**Economic impact of improved education and training**

	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Cannot say
Providing more skills training opportunities for Indigenous workers so they can get better paying jobs and help their communities prosper	75	14	3	8
Increasing the number of Indigenous students who graduate with a college diploma or university degree	72	16	3	8
Encouraging more Indigenous entrepreneurs to launch new businesses	72	17	3	8
Allowing Indigenous communities more of a say over the development of natural resources located near the communities where they live	66	16	8	10
Increasing the number of Indigenous people who hold top leadership and management positions in the country's largest businesses	57	24	6	13

*Q: In your opinion, over time, would the following measures have a positive impact on Canada's economy, a negative impact, or have no impact either way?*

These results suggest that the public generally sees steps to improve Indigenous education and training as being a win-win, benefitting not only Indigenous Peoples, but the prosperity of all Canadians as well.

Somewhat smaller majorities also see two other measures as having a very or somewhat positive economic impact: "allowing Indigenous communities more of a say over the development of natural resources located near the communities where they live" (66%) and "increasing the number of Indigenous people who hold top leadership and management positions in the country's largest businesses" (57%). Fewer than one in ten anticipate that such measures would negatively impact the country's economy.



# Priorities to advance reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people

Thinking about how to advance reconciliation, at least three in four Ontarians place a high or medium priority on a number of measures to improve access to education and training for Indigenous Peoples, including equitable funding for post-secondary education.

## **Specifically, the proportions holding this opinion are:**

- 84% in the case of “ensuring that Indigenous Peoples have the same opportunities as other Canadians to access and succeed in education;”
- 80% in the case of “ensuring that people who are Indigenous can access the skills training they need to get good jobs close to the communities where they live;”
- 76% in the case of “building more schools in Indigenous communities so Indigenous students can attend and graduate high school without having to leave home;” and
- 75% in the case of “making sure post-secondary education institutions (like colleges and universities) that are run by Indigenous communities can afford to provide the same quality of education as do other post-secondary education institutions in Canada.”

Fewer than one in five do not see these measures as priorities, and about one in ten offer no opinion. It is notable that there is public support, not only for improving access to education and training in general, but for measures that speak specifically of improving access within Indigenous communities and Indigenous-run post-secondary education institutions.

**TABLE 2**  
**Priorities to advance reconciliation**

	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not a priority at all	Cannot say
Ensuring that Indigenous Peoples have the same opportunities as other Canadians to access and succeed in education	59	25	6	3	7
Ensuring that people who are Indigenous can access the skills training they need to get good jobs close to the communities where they live	50	30	9	3	7
Building more schools in Indigenous communities so Indigenous students can attend and graduate high school without having to leave home	43	32	11	6	8
Making sure post-secondary education institutions (like colleges and universities) that are run by Indigenous communities can afford to provide the same quality of education as do other post-secondary education institutions in Canada	43	32	11	5	9
Ensuring Indigenous students can attend post-secondary education institutions (like colleges and universities) that are run by Indigenous communities	34	33	16	7	9
Providing more Indigenous Peoples with opportunities to learn and speak their Indigenous languages	34	32	15	9	9
Creating more opportunities for non-Indigenous Canadians to learn about Indigenous history and cultures	30	37	18	7	8

*Q: In order to advance reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people, do you think that each of the following should be a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority or not a priority at all for Canada?*



*In the context of advancing reconciliation, majorities of both non-Indigenous Ontarians and Indigenous Peoples living in the province see each of these measures as either high or medium priorities for Canada.*

**The proportion of Ontarians placing a high or medium priority on three other measures is somewhat smaller, but still reaches two in three. This includes:**

- “ensuring Indigenous students can attend post-secondary education institutions (like colleges and universities) that are run by Indigenous communities” (68% say this should be a high or medium priority for all of Canada);
- “creating more opportunities for non-Indigenous Canadians to learn about Indigenous history and cultures” (67%); and
- “providing more Indigenous Peoples with opportunities to learn and speak their Indigenous languages” (66%).

In the context of advancing reconciliation, majorities of both non-Indigenous Ontarians and Indigenous Peoples living in the province see each of these measures as either high or medium priorities for Canada - but, in each case, the proportion of Indigenous Peoples holding this opinion is higher. Among Indigenous Peoples, 84 percent say that it should be a high or medium priority to ensure that Indigenous-run post-secondary education institutions can afford to provide the same quality of education as do other post-secondary education institutions in Canada. And, in the case of “ensuring Indigenous students can attend post-secondary education institutions that are run by Indigenous communities,” the proportion holding this view is 82 percent.

## Goals for Indigenous Institutes

Ontarians may not be aware that Indigenous-owned and operated education and training institutions form one of the pillars of the province's post-secondary education system. The survey, therefore, reminded participants of this, stating that:

*"As you many know, some colleges in Ontario are owned and operated by First Nations communities - these are known as Indigenous Institutes. Indigenous Institutes offer programs that draw upon Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledge."*

**With this information as background, majorities of Ontarians agree that it is either very or somewhat important to the future of the province to help these Indigenous Institutes achieve a number of goals. These include:**

- allow Indigenous students an opportunity to learn in an environment free from discrimination (85% say this is very or somewhat important);
- provide the training and skills that Indigenous students need to be successful in the workforce after they graduate (85%);
- help Indigenous Peoples and their communities recover from the negative impacts of past government policies like residential schools (77%); and
- strengthen Indigenous cultures and languages (74%).



**TABLE 2**  
**Goals for Indigenous Institutes**

	Very or somewhat important	Not very or not at all important	Cannot say
Allow Indigenous students an opportunity to learn in an environment free from discrimination	85	6	8
Provide the training and skills that Indigenous students need to be successful in the workforce after they graduate	85	7	8
Help Indigenous Peoples and their communities recover from the negative impacts of past government policies like residential schools	77	13	10
Strengthen Indigenous cultures and languages	74	15	11

*Q: Thinking about the future of the province, how important do you think it is for these Indigenous Institutes to help achieve each of the following goals?*

In each case, 15 percent or fewer do not see these goals as being important to the future of the province, and about 10 percent do not offer an opinion.

The previous figures combine the proportions that see each goal as either very or somewhat important. But majorities of Ontarians see the first two goals as very important (57% and 55%, respectively). In the case of helping Indigenous Peoples and their communities recover from the negative impacts of past government policies like residential schools, almost one in two (46%) see this goal as very important.

Again, these results confirm that, for most Ontarians, outcomes that can benefit Indigenous learners - such as better and more culturally appropriate education and training - are also seen as having a wider benefit by contributing to a better future for the province as a whole.



# Ontarians and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people

## The role of individuals

Two in three Ontarians (67%) believe that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Only 17 percent say individual Canadians do not have a role to play, and an additional 17 percent offer no opinion either way.

While a majority of non-Indigenous people in Ontario (66%) feel that Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation, the proportion is even higher among those who identify as Indigenous (82%).

## The role of governments

Ontarians are much more likely to say that have governments should go further to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples than they are to say that governments have gone too far.

Overall, 44 percent of Ontarians say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, compared to only 18 percent who say that governments have gone too far. About one in four (24%) think that things are about right, and 14 percent offer no opinion.

### Feelings on reconciliation

**67%**

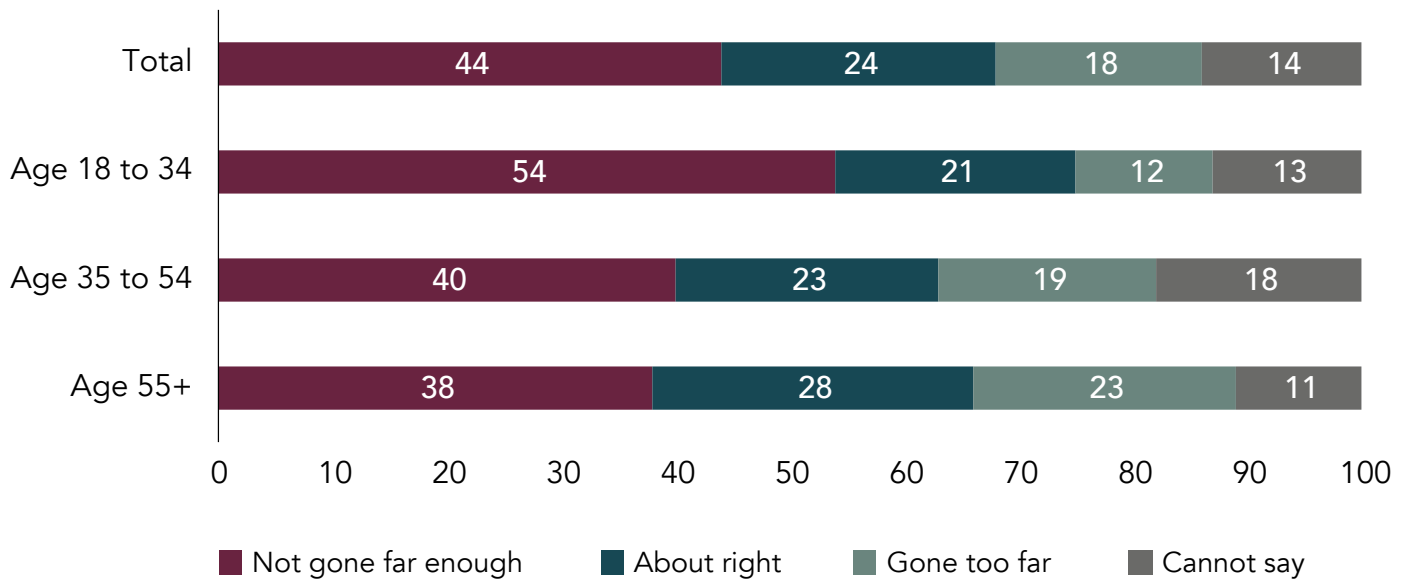
of Ontarians believe that **individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation** between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

**44%**

of Ontarians say that **governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.**

FIGURE 1

**Have governments gone too far or not far enough?**



Q: In your opinion, have governments in Canada gone too far or have they not gone far enough in trying to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples?

*Younger adult Ontarians are more likely than their older counterparts to say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.*

Younger adult Ontarians are more likely than their older counterparts to say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. This is the view of 54 percent of those age 18 to 34, compared to 40 percent of those age 35 to 54, and 38 percent of those age 55 and older.

Indigenous Peoples in Ontario (69%) are more likely than non-Indigenous Ontarians (43%) to say that governments have not gone far enough.

# Relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Ontario

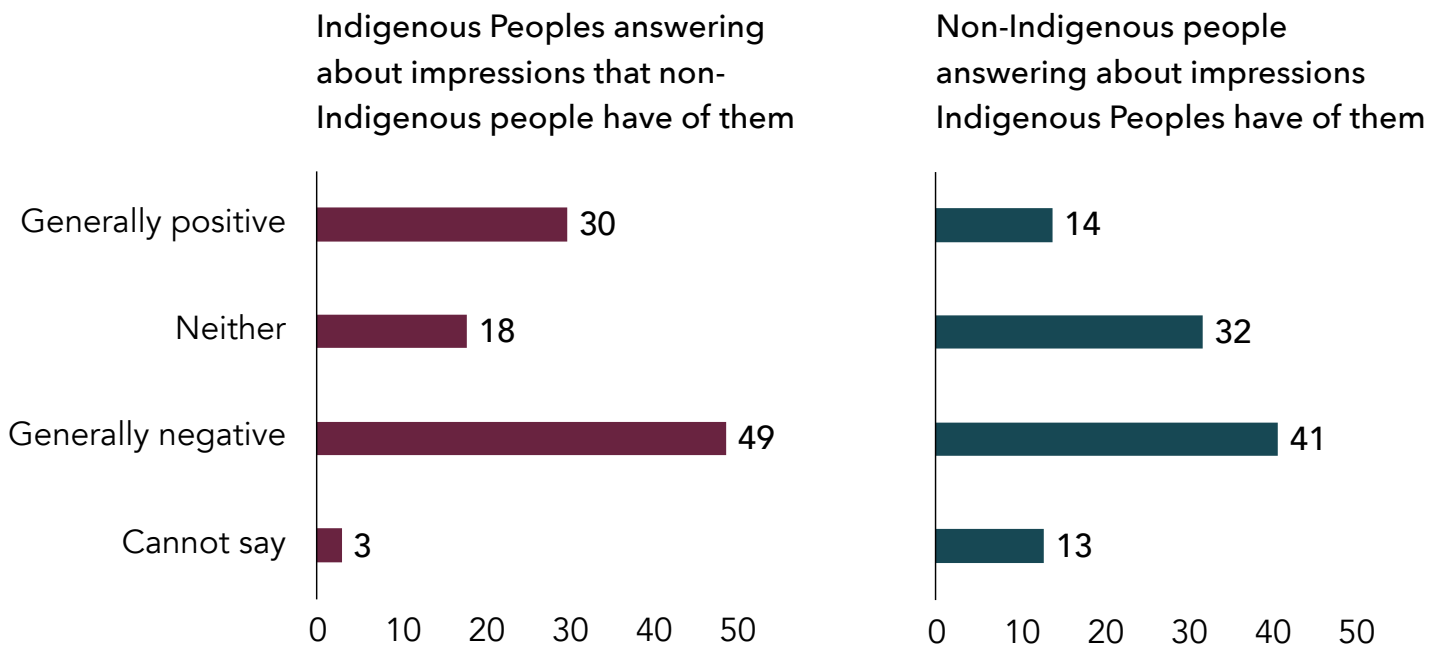
Pluralities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Ontario think that their group is perceived negatively by the other group.

Among non-Indigenous residents of Ontario, 41 percent say that Indigenous Peoples' impression of them is generally negative. Only 14 percent say that Indigenous Peoples generally have a positive impression of non-Indigenous people. About one in three (32%) think this impression is neither positive nor negative, and the remainder (13%) do not express an opinion.

Compared to how non-Indigenous people think they are perceived by Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Peoples are more likely to say that non-Indigenous people's impression of them is negative - about one in two (49%) hold this view. But they are also more likely to say that this impression is generally positive (30%), and fewer say the impression is neither positive nor negative (18%), or offer no opinion (3%).

FIGURE 2

## How each groups thinks it is perceived by the other



Q: Do you think that non-Indigenous people's / Indigenous Peoples' impression of Indigenous people / non-Indigenous people is generally positive or generally negative?





*Ontarians are almost twice as likely to be optimistic as they are to be pessimistic about the prospects for reconciliation in the near future.*

Among both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people, the proportions that say the other group perceives them negatively is lower among those in the youngest age group, and rises with age.

Most non-Indigenous people in Ontario express interest in knowing more about Indigenous Peoples. Two in three (67%) agree that they would be personally interested in learning more about Indigenous cultures, compared to 20 percent who disagree (an additional 12% do not offer an opinion).

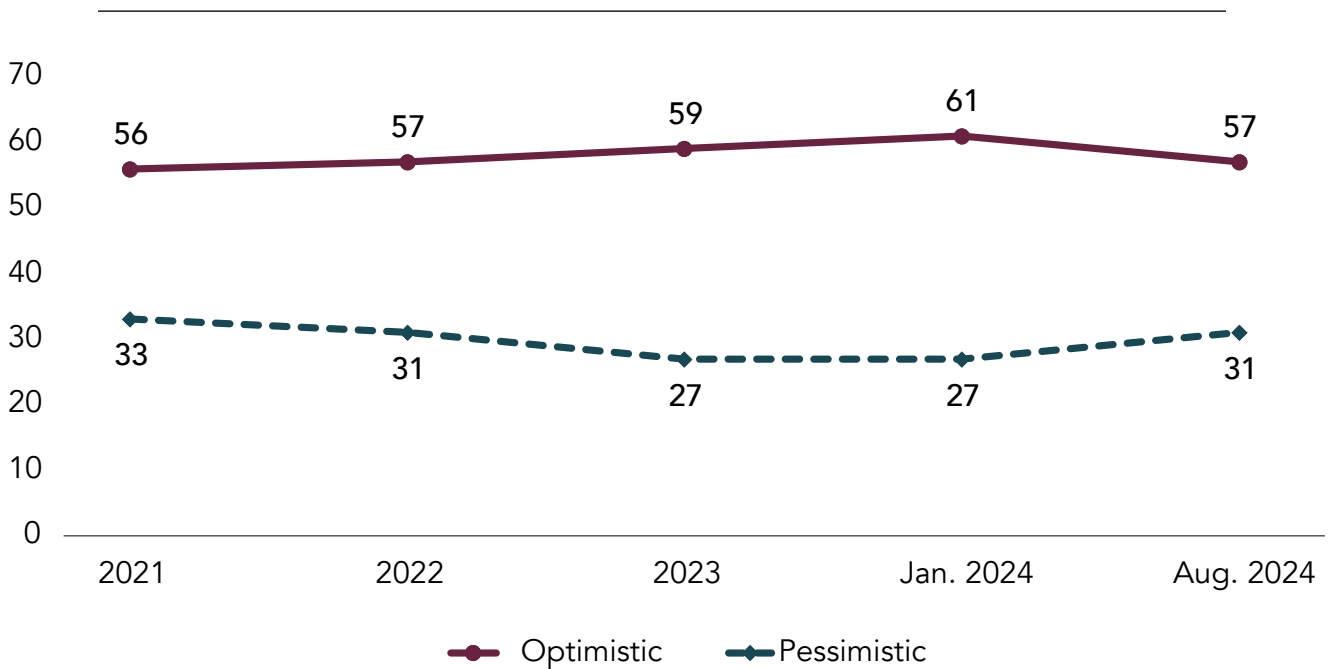
## Prospects for the future

Ontarians are almost twice as likely to be optimistic as they are to be pessimistic about the prospects for reconciliation in the near future. A majority (57%) say they are either very or somewhat optimistic that we will make meaningful progress toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This compares to 31 percent who are very or somewhat pessimistic (an additional 12% do not express an opinion either way).

Indigenous Peoples in Ontario are even more optimistic. Among those identifying as Indigenous, 72 percent say they are optimistic about the prospects for reconciliation, and only 25 percent are pessimistic.

The overall level of optimism about the prospects for reconciliation has held steady in Ontario over the past several years.

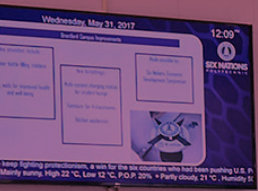
**FIGURE 3**  
**Progress toward reconciliation**



*Q: Thinking about Canada over the next decade, are you very optimistic, somewhat optimistic, somewhat pessimistic or very pessimistic that we will make meaningful progress toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?*

*Sources for prior surveys: Environics Institute, Confederation of Tomorrow.*

Finally, there is broad recognition that progress toward reconciliation can benefit all Canadians, and not only Indigenous Peoples and communities. Four in five Ontarians (80%) (including 79% of those who are not Indigenous) agree that “everyone in Canada will benefit if Indigenous communities grow more economically prosperous and self-sufficient.” Only one in ten (10%) disagree with this statement (an additional 10% offer no opinion).



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