

FOCUS
CANADA

2024 SERIES

Intergenerational Mobility in Canada

2024 Update

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For Survey Research

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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 Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by equity-deserving groups, leading practices to effect change and producing concrete results.



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Century Initiative is a national, non-partisan charity with a mission to enhance Canada's long-term prosperity, resiliency and global influence by responsibly growing the population of Canada to 100 million by 2100. Century Initiative delivers its mission by leading, enabling and partnering on initiatives that support long-term thinking and planning in immigration; infrastructure and environment; economy, entrepreneurship and innovation; support for children and families; and education, skills and employment. Century Initiative takes a network approach, prioritizing inclusion of diverse perspectives to inform and advance its work.

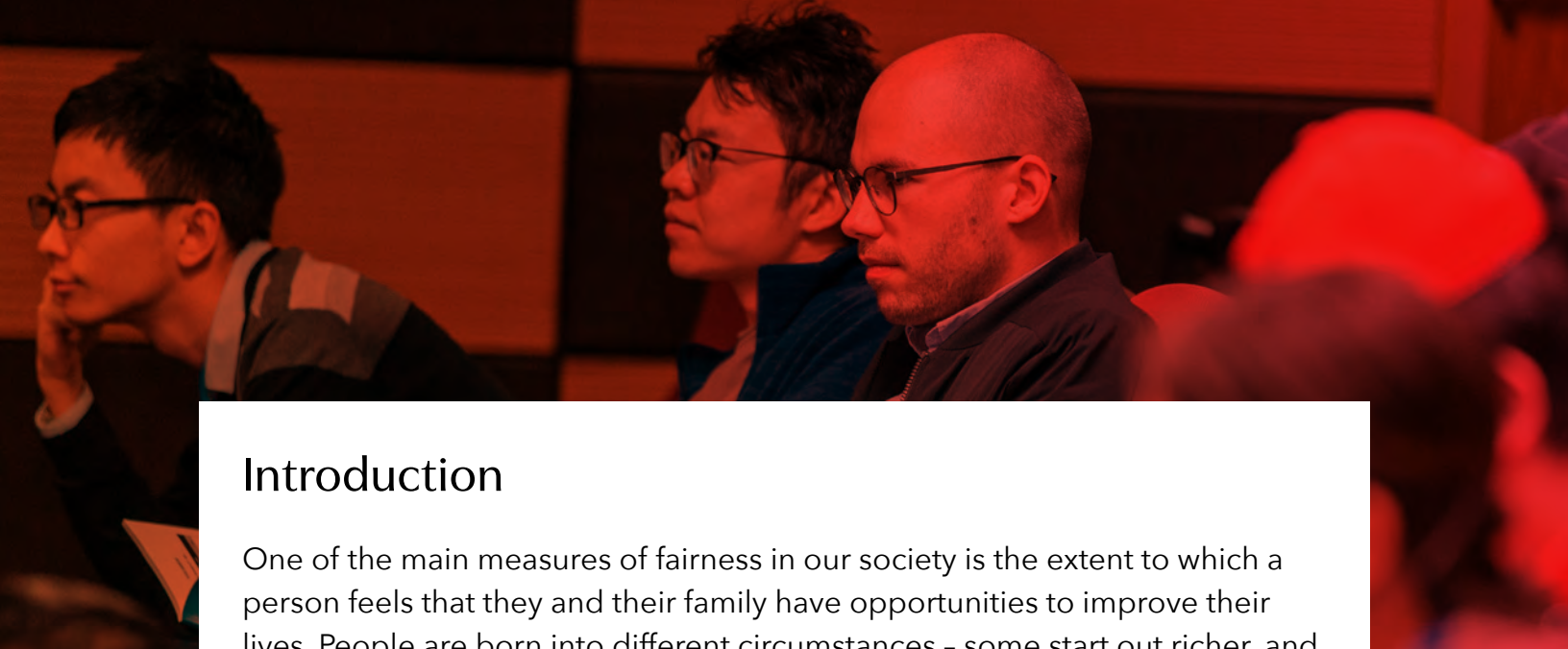
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As part of its Focus Canada public opinion research program (launched in 1976), the Environics Institute updated its research on Canadians' outlook on their current economic situation and future prospects. This survey was conducted in partnership with the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University, and with the ongoing support of Century Initiative. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted (via landline and cellphones) with 2,016 Canadians between September 9 and 23, 2024. A sample of this size drawn from the population produces results accurate to within plus or minus 2.2 percentage points in 19 out of 20 samples. All results are presented as percentages, unless otherwise noted.

For more information about this research, contact [Andrew Parkin](#).

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Introduction

One of the main measures of fairness in our society is the extent to which a person feels that they and their family have opportunities to improve their lives. People are born into different circumstances - some start out richer, and some poorer. But the expectation is that - through education, hard work and perseverance - it will be possible to get ahead, and to position one's children for further success in the future.

When the economy slows, optimism about future prospects typically dims as well. Facing unemployment, lower wages or higher living costs, more people doubt that opportunities for advancement will materialize. But when good economic times return, the promise of upward mobility appears more attainable.

For over 30 years, the Environics Institute (and, prior to its establishment, the Environics Research Group) has sought to gauge this sense of optimism or pessimism by tracking Canadians' outlook on their own prospects, and those of the next generation. It has done so by asking two questions about intergenerational economic mobility. The first question asks Canadians whether they are better off or worse off than their parents were at their age. The second asks Canadians to look ahead at the prospects for the next generation.

The 2024 survey finds that the proportions of Canadians who feel financially worse off today than their parents were at their age, and who feel that the next generation will be worse off than they are, are both trending upwards.

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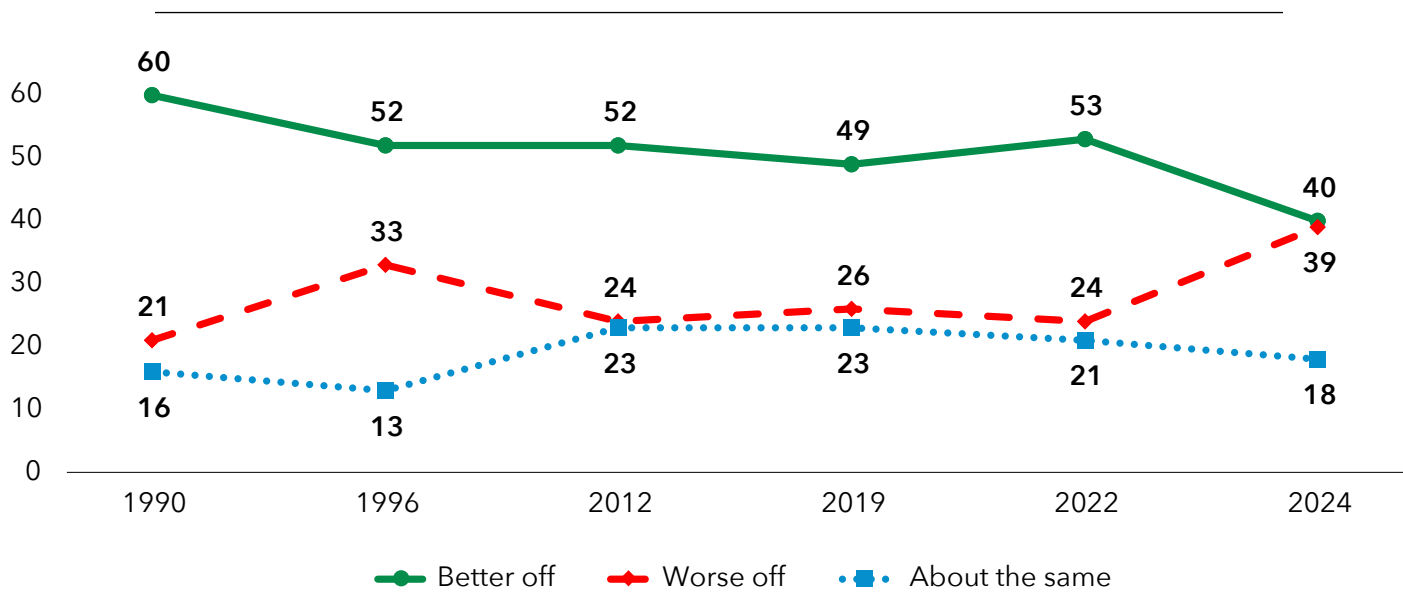
Key findings

- Canadians are currently evenly split between those who say that, financially speaking, they feel that they are better off than their parents were at their age, and those who say they feel they are worse off. This represents a significant shift from previous years, when the proportion feeling better off outnumbered the proportion feeling worse off by a significant margin.
- The proportion in 2024 feeling financially worse off than their parents is the highest recorded since this question was first asked in 1990.
- For Canadian adults under the age of 60, the proportion feeling worse off financially than their parents - for the first time since 1990 - has surpassed the proportion feeling better off.
- Quebecers are much less likely than other Canadians to say that they feel worse off financially than their parents were at their age.
- Canadians are currently more than twice as likely to feel pessimistic as they are to feel optimistic about the prospects for the next generation.
- Since 2022, the proportion expecting that the next generation will be worse off has grown among those in every age group, but more so among young adults age 18 to 29.
- Canadians outside Quebec are more likely than Quebecers to say they expect that the next generation will be worse off. Since 2022, the proportion saying they expect that the next generation will be worse off has increased significantly outside Quebec, but only marginally within that province.
- Immigrants remain much more optimistic than those born in Canada about the prospects for upward mobility for their children.
- Opinions on the two questions covered in this report are closely related to political preferences, with those supporting the party currently in government being more likely to feel optimistic, and those supporting the official opposition being more likely to feel pessimistic.

Are you better off than your parents were at your age?

Canadians are currently evenly split between those who say that, financially speaking, they feel that they are better off than their parents were at their age (40%), and those who say they feel worse off (39%). This represents a significant shift from previous years, when the proportion feeling better off outnumbered the proportion feeling worse off by a significant margin.

FIGURE 1
Better or worse off than your parents?
1990 - 2024



Q10N. Financially speaking, do you feel that you are better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents were at your age?

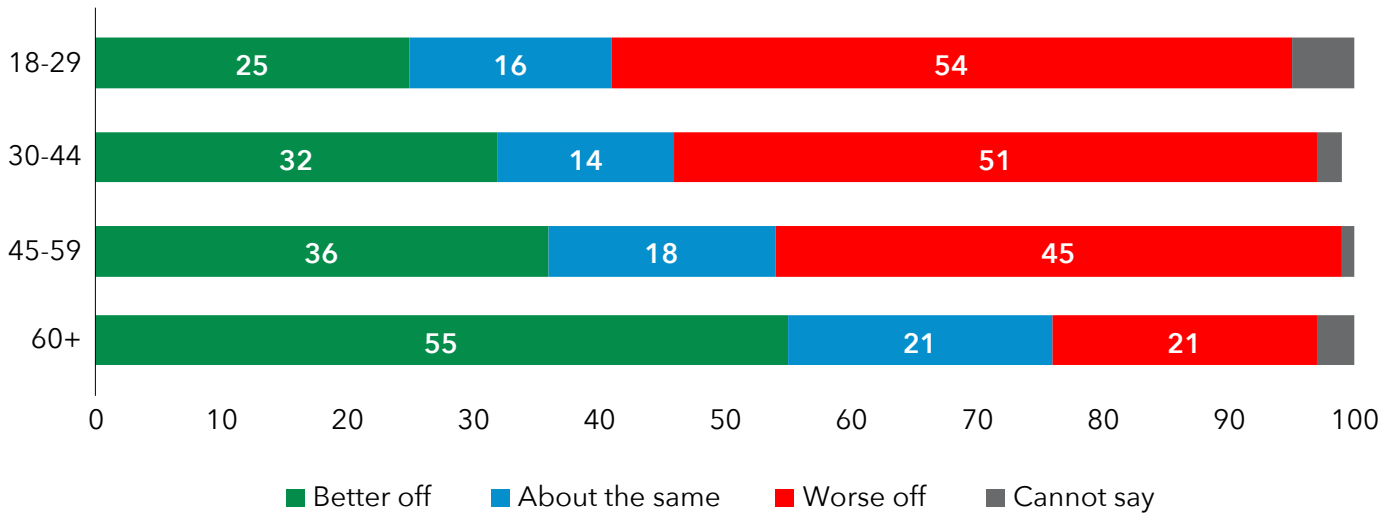
In the period between 1996 and 2022, about one in two Canadians said that, financially speaking, they were better off than their parents were at their age. In 1996, the proportion saying they felt worse off reached one in three, but then declined to one in four in the 2010s and early 2020s. In the decade up to 2022, the proportion feeling better off than their parents outnumbered the proportion feeling worse off by a margin of two to one.

Since 2022, however, the proportion feeling better off has declined by 13 percentage points (from 53% to 40%), while the proportion feeling worse off has increased by 15 points (from 24% to 39%). An additional 18 percent currently feel they are doing about the same as their parents, down three points since 2022. The proportion feeling financially worse off than their parents in 2024 is the highest recorded since this question was first asked in 1990.

The sense of being better off than one’s parents increases with age. A majority of those age 60 and older (55%) say they are better off financially than their parents were at their age, compared to only 25 percent of those age 18 to 29. Conversely, a majority of younger Canadians (54%) say they are worse off financially than their parents were at their age, compared to only 21 percent of their older counterparts.

FIGURE 2

Better or worse off than your parents? By age group
2024



Q10N. Financially speaking, do you feel that you are better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents were at your age?

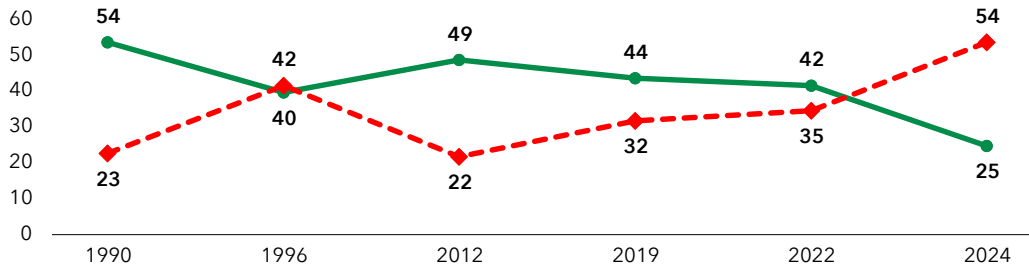
Over time - and particularly in the most recent period since 2022 - the proportions feeling better off than their parents have declined among all age groups. But the decline has been much greater for those under the age of 60. The result is that, for each of the three younger age groups, the proportion feeling worse off financially than their parents has - for the first time in 2024 - surpassed the proportion feeling better off.

FIGURE 3

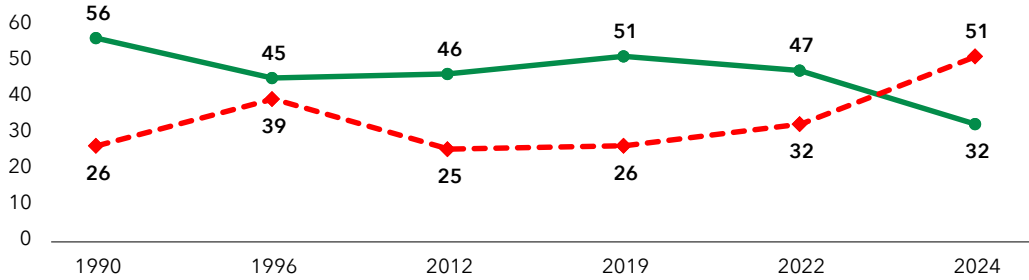
Better or worse off than your parents? By age group

1990 - 2024

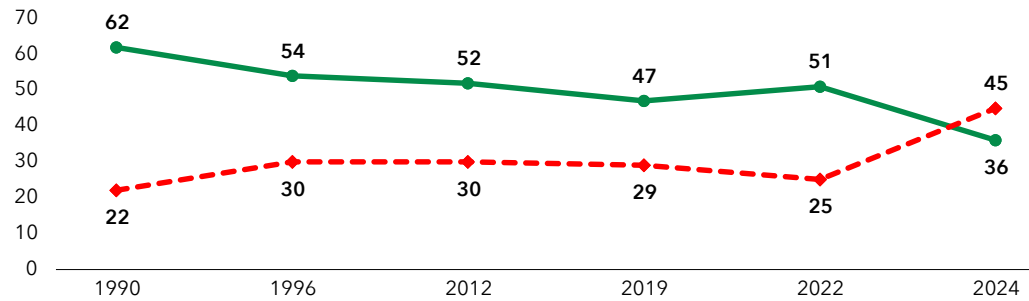
A: Age 18 - 29



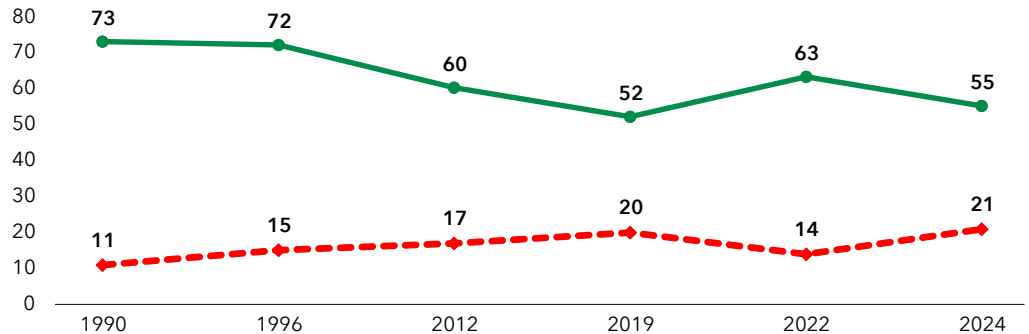
B: Age 30 - 44



C: Age 45 - 59



D: Age 60+



— Better off - - - - - Worse off

Q10N. Financially speaking, do you feel that you are better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents were at your age?



Quebecers (27%) are much less likely than other Canadians (43%) to say that they feel worse off financially than their parents were at their age.

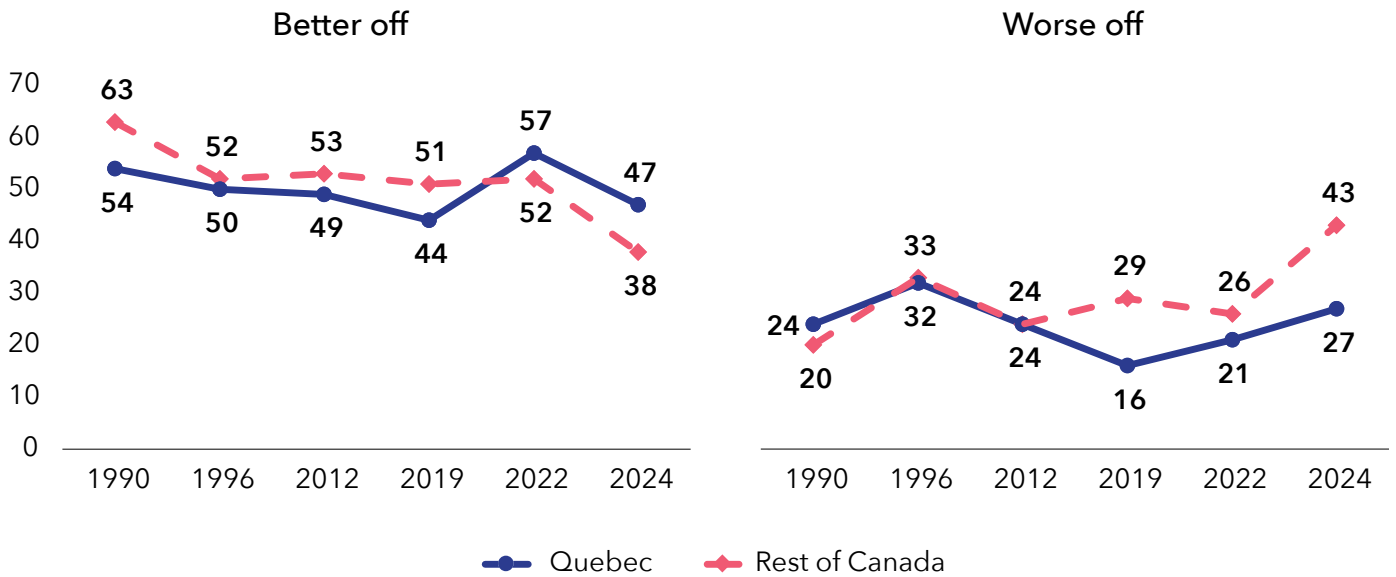
The gap between the proportion feeling better off financially than their parents were at their age, and the proportion feeling worse off, is largest in the case of the youngest age group - those age 18 to 29. Among those in this age group, only 25 percent currently say they feel better off, compared to 54 percent who say they feel worse off, for a gap of 29 percentage points. Over three decades ago, in 1990, the situation was exactly reversed: at that time, 54 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds said they felt better off, compared to 23 percent who said they felt worse off, for a gap of 31 percentage points (but in the opposite direction from the gap that exists today).

There are also important differences in opinion on this question by region, notably between Quebec and the rest of the country. Currently, Quebecers (27%) are much less likely than other Canadians (43%) to say that they feel worse off financially than their parents were at their age. And, while Quebecers are much more likely to say they feel better off (47%) than worse off (27%), this is not the case for Canadians living outside of the province: outside of Quebec, people are slightly more likely to say they feel worse off than their parents were at their age (43%) than they are to say they feel better off (38%).

FIGURE 4

Better or worse off than your parents? By region

1990 - 2024



Q10N. Financially speaking, do you feel that you are better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents were at your age?

Moreover, the gap between Quebecers and other Canadians has widened significantly over the past two years, as the jump since 2022 in the proportion feeling worse off was much more modest in Quebec (up 6 percentage points) than in the rest of the country (up 17 points). In 2022, there was a five-point difference between Quebecers and other Canadians on this measure; today that gap has widened to 16 points.

Will the next generation be better off?

Canadians are currently more than twice as likely to feel pessimistic as they are to feel optimistic about the prospects for the next generation.

Just over one in two (53%) say they expect that the next generation will be worse off when they become their age (i.e., the same age as the person responding to the survey). This compares to 21 percent who expect that the next generation will be better off, and the same proportion (21%) who expect them to do about the same.

The proportion saying the next generation will be worse off is not quite the highest ever: the figure reached 56 percent in 1996. But this proportion has increased by 15 percentage points since 2012, and by eight percentage points over the past two years (since 2022).

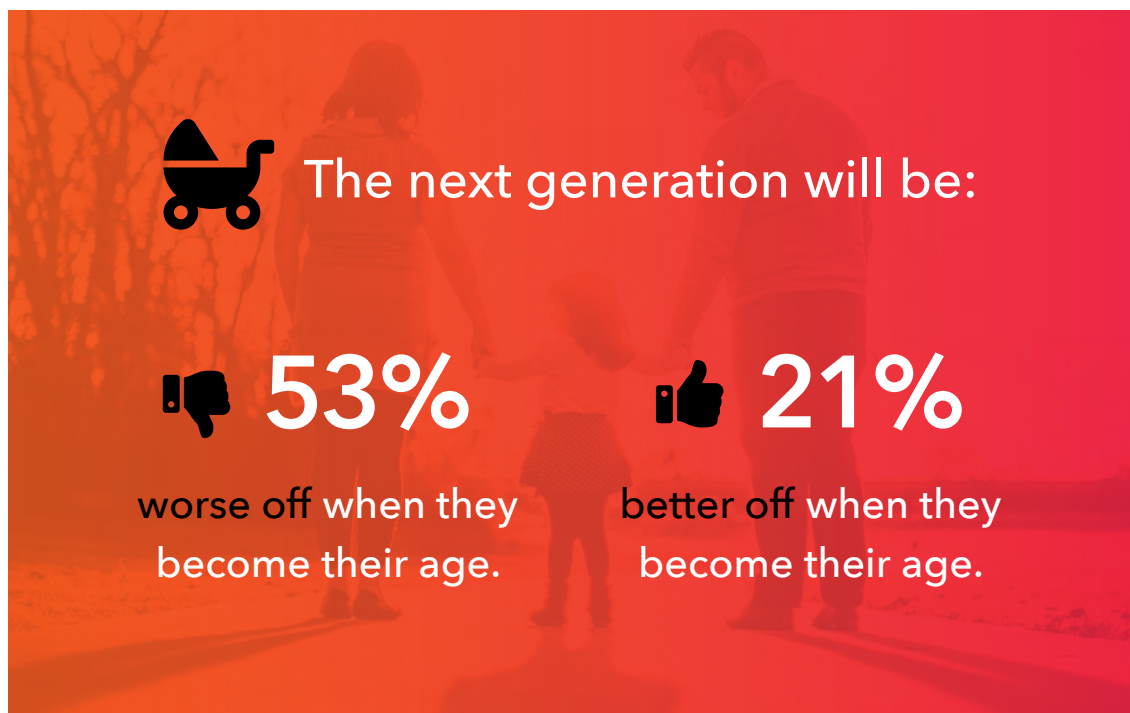
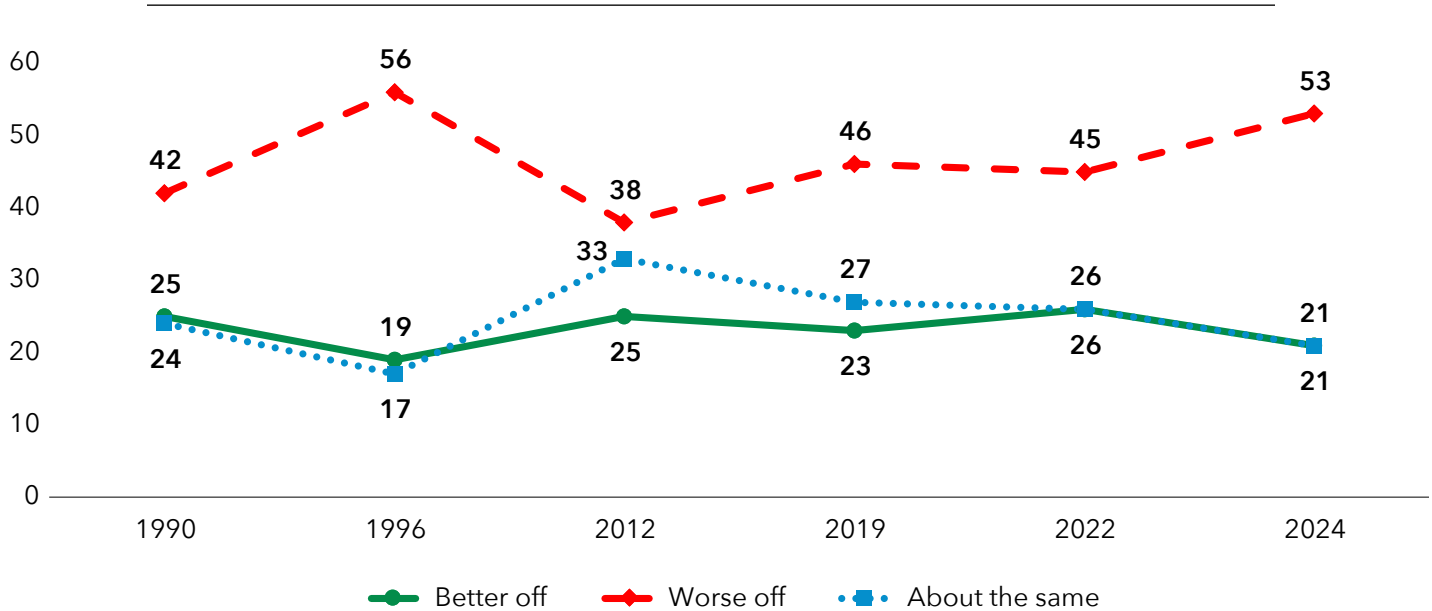


FIGURE 5

Will the next generation be better or worse off?

1990 - 2024

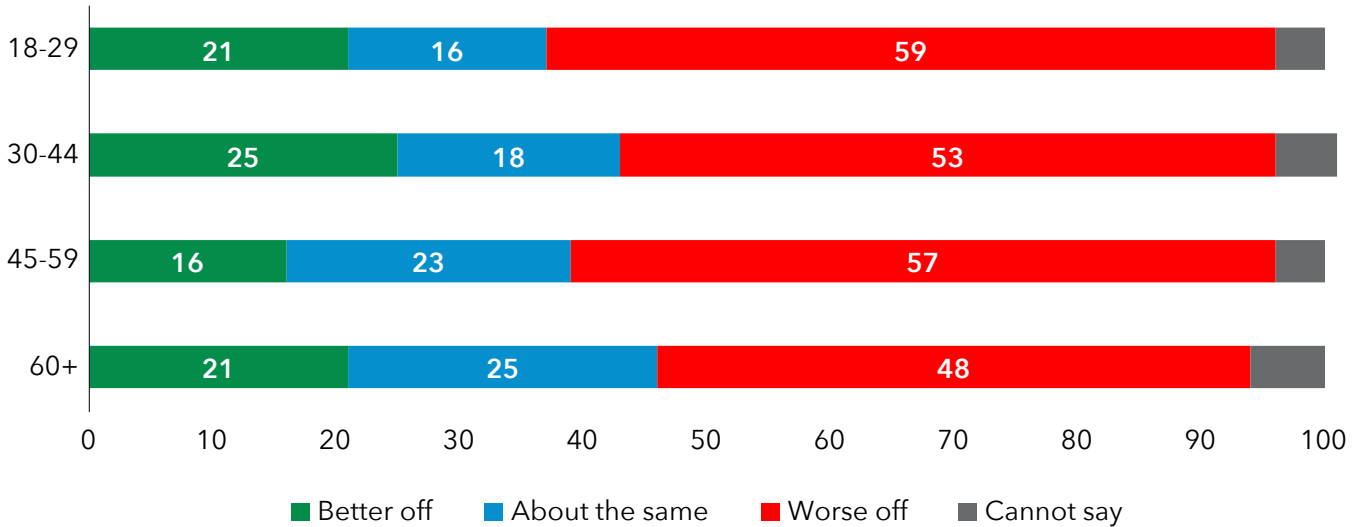


Q11N. And do you think the next generation – for example your children, nieces or nephews – will be better off, worse off, or about the same when they become your age?

While there are some differences in opinion across age groups, these differences are not as pronounced as for the previous question (about whether one feels better or worse off than one's parents). The proportion of Canadians who expect that the next generation will be better off than they are is the same (21%) among 18- to 29-year-olds as it is among those age 60 and older. Those age 18 to 29 are the most pessimistic about the prospects for the next generation (with 59% expecting them to be worse off), but the proportion holding this view is similar among those age 45 to 59 (57%).

FIGURE 6

Will the next generation be better or worse off? By age group
2024



Q11N. And do you think the next generation – for example your children, nieces or nephews – will be better off, worse off, or about the same when they become your age?

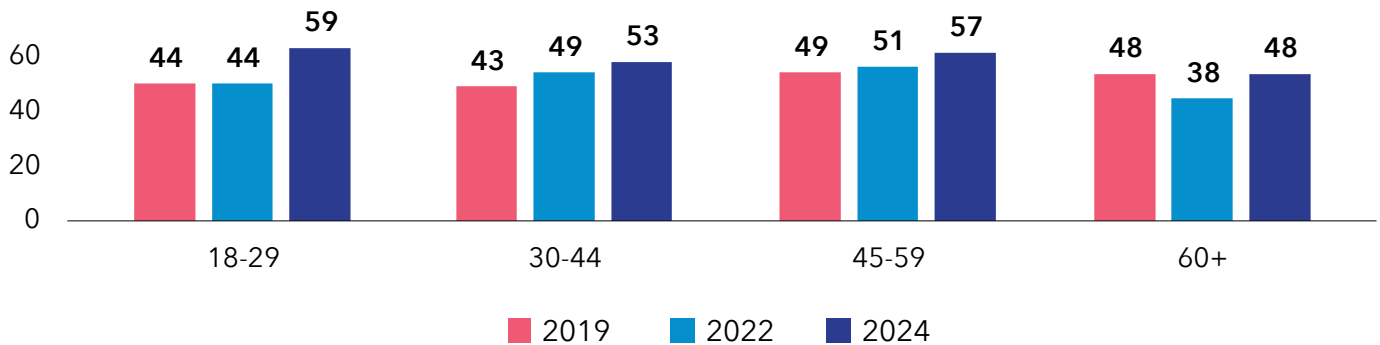
Pessimism has grown among those in each age group, but a little more so among those age 18 to 29. Among those in this youngest age group, the proportion expecting that the next generation will be worse off has increased by 15 percentage points since 2022 (from 44% to 59%), compared to smaller increases among those age 30 to 44 (from 49% to 53%), those age 45 to 59 (from 51% to 57%), and those age 60 and older (from 38% to 48%).

Pessimism has grown among those in each age group, but a little more so among those age 18 to 29.

FIGURE 7

The next generation will be worse off. By age group

2019 - 2024



Q11N. And do you think the next generation – for example your children, nieces or nephews – will be better off, worse off, or about the same when they become your age?

There is little regional difference in the proportions saying they expect that the next generation will be *better off* when they become their age. However, Quebecers (44%) are currently less likely than other Canadians (56%) to say they expect that the next generation will be *worse off*, and more likely (28% compared to 19%) to say they think they will end up being about the same.

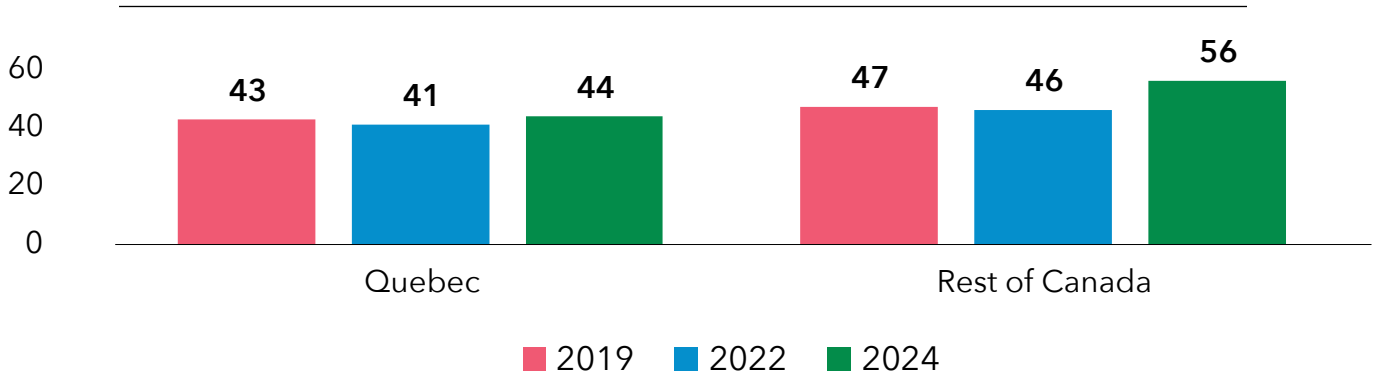
Compared to 2022, the proportion saying they expect that the next generation will be worse off has increased by only three percentage points in Quebec (from 41% to 44%), but by 10 points outside the province (from 46% to 56%).



FIGURE 8

The next generation be worse off. By region

2019 - 2024



Q11N. And do you think the next generation – for example your children, nieces or nephews – will be better off, worse off, or about the same when they become your age?

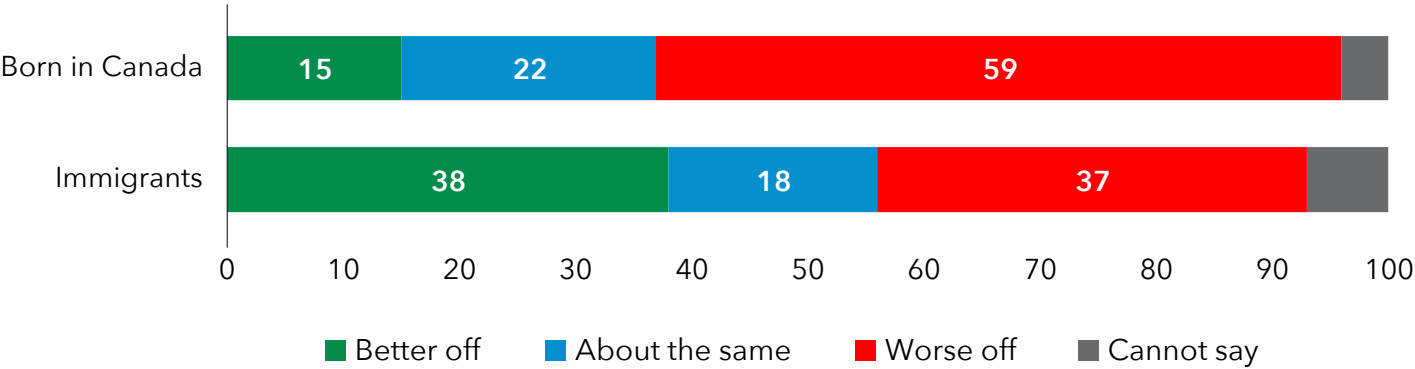
Immigrants remain much more optimistic than those born in Canada about the prospects for upward mobility for their children. In fact, the proportion of immigrants who expect that the next generation will be better off when they become their age (38%) is more than twice that for non-immigrants (15%). Conversely, among those born in Canada, 59 percent expect that the next generation will be worse off, compared to only 37 percent among immigrants.

The proportion of immigrants who expect that the next generation will be better off when they become their age (38%) is more than twice that for non-immigrants (15%).

FIGURE 9

Will the next generation be better or worse off? By immigrant background

2024



Q11N. And do you think the next generation – for example your children, nieces or nephews – will be better off, worse off, or about the same when they become your age?



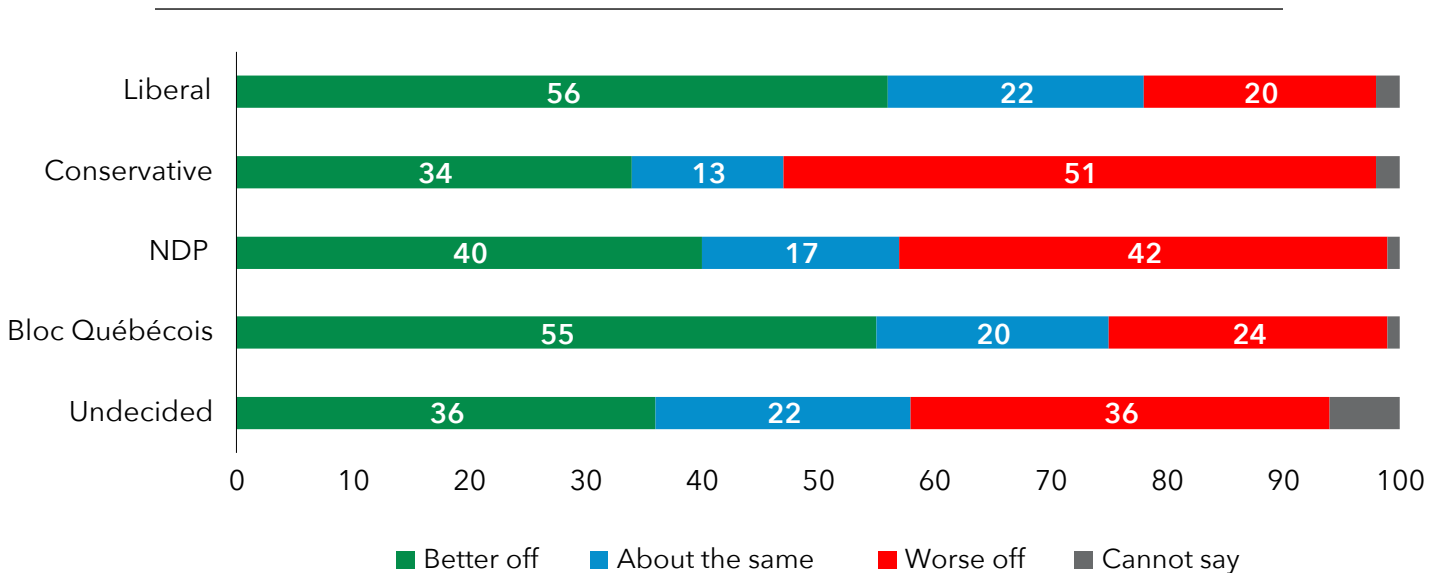
Opinions on mobility and party politics

Opinions on the two questions covered in this report are closely related to political preferences, with those supporting the party currently in government being more likely to feel optimistic, and those supporting the official opposition being more likely to feel pessimistic.

Currently, a majority of Canadians who support the federal Liberal Party (56%) say that, financially speaking, they are better off than their parents were at their age, compared to only 20 percent who say they are worse off. But the reverse is true for those supporting the Conservative Party; among Conservative supporters, a majority (51%) say they are worse off and only 34 percent say they are better off.

FIGURE 10

Better or worse off than your parents? By federal vote intention 2024



Q10N. Financially speaking, do you feel that you are better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents were at your age?



Since 2022, the proportion of each party's supporters feeling better off has declined - but this decline has been greater among supporters of the Conservative Party.

A majority of supporters of the Bloc Québécois (55%) also say they are better off than their parents were. NDP supporters are evenly split between those who feel better off (40%) and those who feel worse off (42%).

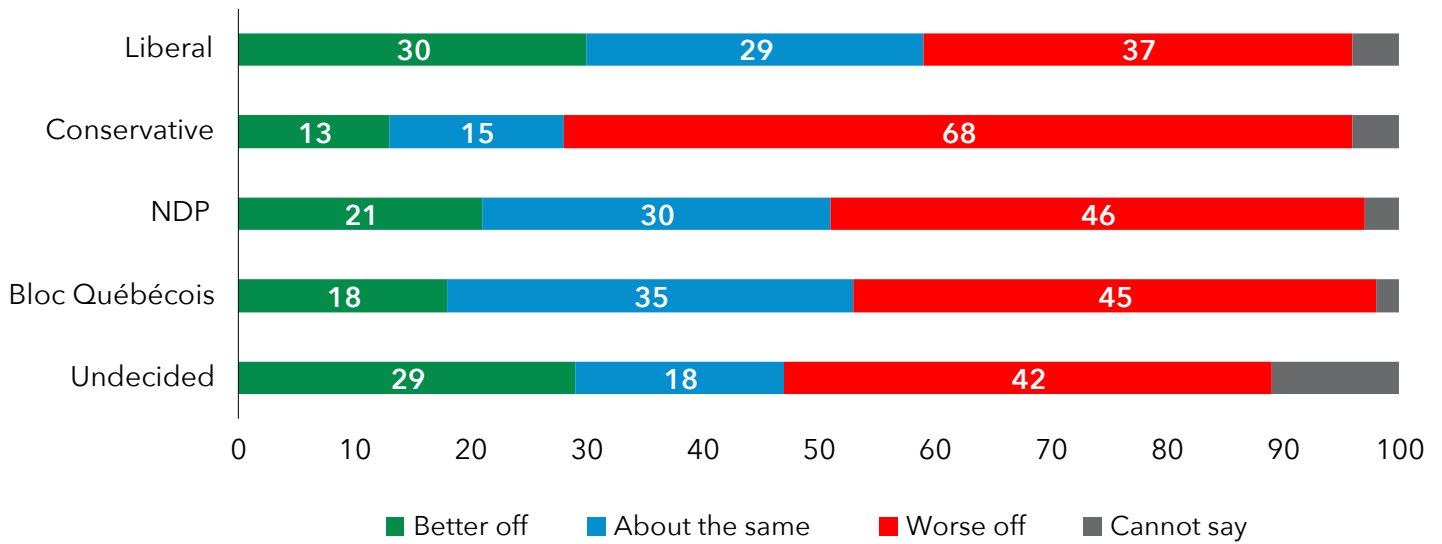
Since 2022, the proportion of each party's supporters feeling better off has declined - but this decline has been greater among supporters of the Conservative Party. Conservative Party supporters are 15 percentage points less likely today than in 2022 to say they are better off than their parents; this compares to an eight-point drop for Liberal Party supporters, and a five-point drop for supporters of the NDP.

Conservative Party supporters are also more likely than supporters of the other main federal political parties to say they expect that the next generation will be worse off when they become their age. This more pessimistic outlook is expressed by 68 percent of Conservative Party supporters, compared to 46 percent of NDP supporters, 45 percent of Bloc Québécois supporters, and 37 percent of Liberal Party supporters. It is notable, however, that at least a plurality among each group of partisans currently feels pessimistic about the prospects for the next generation.

FIGURE 11

Will the next generation be better or worse off? By federal vote intention

2024



Q10N. Financially speaking, do you feel that you are better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents were at your age?

Supporters of both the current governing party and the official opposition are more likely to take a pessimistic view today than they were in 2022. The proportion expecting that the next generation will be worse off increased by 15 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters, and by six points among Liberal Party supporters. However, NDP supporters have become less pessimistic over the past two years: they are now 10 points less likely to say they expect that the next generation will be worse off.

When considering these trends, it is important to keep in mind that the relative popularity of each party has also changed over the past two years, with the Liberal Party becoming less popular and the Conservative Party becoming more popular. While it may be the case that some Conservative Party supporters have grown more pessimistic in outlook since 2022, it is also likely that Canadians who have become more pessimistic have switched their support from the Liberal Party (or another option) to the Conservative Party.



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