



Public Opinion in Metropolitan Canada
*Is There a Divide between Canadians Living Inside and Outside
the Country's Biggest Cities?*

REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2019

Overview

This report examines public opinion on a range of issues in Canada's four largest metropolitan areas – Montreal, Toronto, Calgary-Edmonton (combined) and Vancouver – areas that together hold 43 percent of the country's total population. It assesses the extent to which there is a common big-city mindset or agenda that differentiates those living in these major urban areas from the rest of the country. By and large, the results show that this is not the case: the four major urban areas of Canada are neither consistently similar to one another, nor consistently different from the non-metropolitan areas that surround them. A major reason for this is the impact of regional and local economic conditions. In particular, residents of Calgary-Edmonton stand out from those in other big cities as being more concerned about the economy and jobs, and less satisfied with the direction of the country; this dissatisfaction is shared by both residents of Calgary-Edmonton and other Albertans. Another factor is that there is simply more agreement across the country on some issues than is often assumed, particularly on those related to the country's growing diversity. Finally, on certain questions, distinctive provincial political cultures, especially in Quebec and Alberta, appear to shape the views of those living both inside and outside each province's largest cities, overriding any urban-rural differences.

Background: Canada's Big Cities

Canada currently has six city-regions (or census metropolitan areas) with populations of over a million people: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa and Edmonton. Together, these six cities are home to almost half (47%) of the country's total population.

City (census metropolitan area)	Population (2016)	% of total population of Canada
Toronto	5,928,040	16.9%
Montreal	4,098,927	11.7%
Vancouver	2,463,431	7.0%
Calgary	1,392,609	4.0%
Ottawa-Gatineau	1,323,783	3.8%
Edmonton	1,321,426	3.8%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

The question often arises as to whether the values, interests or concerns of the citizens of these big cities are different from those of their counterparts living in smaller cities or towns across the country. Is there a specific metropolitan mindset and set of experiences that distinguishes those living in these major urban centres from other Canadians? If so, is this a manifestation of a more general urban-rural divide within Canadian society?

Public opinion research can help answer questions about the mix of shared and divergent dispositions within Canadian society. Traditionally, however, the focus has been on the country’s different regions, language groups and ethnicities. Cities tend to be overlooked, simply because the survey sample sizes for individual communities are generally too small to support meaningful analysis. In January 2019, however, the Environics Institute conducted a survey of Canadians with an unusually large sample size of 5,732. While the primary objective of the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey of Canadians was not to study urban issues, the nature of the sample is such that an analysis of the views of Canadians living in the country’s biggest cities is nevertheless possible.

This report will examine the similarities and differences in the opinions among big-city dwellers, and between them and their exurban counterparts in Canada. In this report, Calgary and Edmonton are combined (to increase the survey sample), representing metropolitan Alberta. Ottawa, which has a much smaller survey sample, is excluded. The report therefore considers the results for the country’s four largest metropolitan areas – Montreal, Toronto, Calgary-Edmonton (combined) and Vancouver – and compares them both with those of people living in the remainder of their respective provinces, and those of the rest of the Canadian population as a whole. The four metropolitan areas considered here together hold 43 percent of Canada’s total population. The sample sizes for each city are reported in the adjacent table.

		Sample size (unweighted)
Quebec	Montreal	595
	Outside Montreal	426
Ontario	Toronto	529
	Outside Toronto	655
Alberta	Calgary-Edmonton	370
	Outside Calgary-Edmonton	174
B.C.	Vancouver	271
	Outside Vancouver	317
Canada – excluding four major urban areas		3,967

Big Cities: Similarities and Differences

Direction of the country. Majorities of Montreal (55%) and Toronto (54%) residents are satisfied the way things are going in the country today. Residents of Vancouver are somewhat less likely to be satisfied (48%). But it is those living in Calgary-Edmonton who stand out: only 35 percent are satisfied with the way things are going in the country today, compared to 59 percent who are dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with the way things are going in the country today is slightly higher in each of the four big cities than it is in the rest of their respective provinces. These differences are relatively small in the case of Montreal / rest of Quebec and Vancouver / rest of B.C., but are slightly larger in the case of Calgary-Edmonton / rest of Alberta and Toronto / rest of Ontario. Overall, however, satisfaction with the direction in which the country is going appears more clearly linked to one’s province of residence than it is to the size of the city in which one lives.

Question	Response	Quebec		Ontario		Alberta		B.C.		Canada – excluding four major urban areas
		Montreal	Outside Montreal	Toronto	Outside Toronto	Calgary-Edmonton	Outside Calgary-Edmonton	Vancouver	Outside Vancouver	
Direction of the country	Satisfied	55	51	54	45	35	27	48	43	45
	Dissatisfied	35	39	38	48	59	71	45	49	48

Employment and income. Seven in ten residents of Toronto (70%) and Calgary-Edmonton (69%) are concerned about themselves or a member of their immediate family finding or keeping a stable, full-time job. Residents of Vancouver (57%) are somewhat less likely to be concerned than are their counterparts in Toronto or Calgary-Edmonton. It is Montrealers, however, who stand out as being much less likely to be concerned (47%) about job security compared to their counterparts in the country’s other big cities.

There are no differences in views on this question between British Columbians living inside or outside of the province’s biggest city, or between Quebecers living inside or outside of Montreal. In Alberta, the difference between big-city residents and those in the rest of the province is noticeable but relatively small. Residents of Toronto, however, are significantly more concerned than are other Ontarians about finding or keeping a stable, full-time job (in Toronto, this concern is accentuated among younger adults, those with a university education and immigrants).

Residents of Calgary-Edmonton are not only among those most concerned about finding or keeping a stable, full-time job, they are also among those most concerned about their income. Two in five (41%) residents of these two cities describe their total household income as either not enough and they are stretched, or as not enough and they are having a hard time. This is a

significantly higher proportion than that found in Vancouver (31%), Toronto (28%) or Montreal (27%).

Question	Response	Quebec		Ontario		Alberta		B.C.		Canada – excluding four major urban areas
		Montreal	Outside Montreal	Toronto	Outside Toronto	Calgary- Edmonton	Outside Calgary- Edmonton	Vancouver	Outside Vancouver	
Job security	Concerned	47	45	70	57	69	64	57	56	56
	Not concerned	47	48	25	37	29	33	40	37	38
Assessment of income	Good enough	27	29	29	25	23	20	29	21	24
	Just enough	43	41	39	37	34	35	38	33	36
	Not enough	27	28	28	35	41	41	31	43	37

On this question, there is little difference between those living inside and outside of the major urban areas in Quebec or Alberta. There is some difference in Ontario between those living inside and outside of Toronto, and an even larger difference in B.C. British Columbians living outside of Vancouver (43%) are more likely than Vancouverites (31%) to say their household income is either not enough and they are stretched, or not enough and they are having a hard time

As with the question on overall satisfaction, then, province of residence appears to play a bigger role in shaping one's economic outlook than the size of the city in which one lives. There are important differences in views across the four major urban areas; and while there are some differences between the views of those living inside and outside a province's major urban area, these are not consistent enough to point to an overall urban-rural cleavage in Canada.

Role of government. Residents of the country's three largest cities (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver) are somewhat more likely to favour having a larger government with more services than are other Canadians, as opposed to a smaller government with fewer services. Montrealers, however, are no different from other Quebecers on this question: Quebecers are about twice as likely to favour a larger government over a smaller government, regardless of whether they live in the province's largest city or not. In contrast, residents of both Toronto and Vancouver are more likely than those living in the rest of their respective provinces to favour having a larger government with more services. Albertans, regardless of whether they live in Calgary-Edmonton or not, are less likely than other Canadians to favour a larger government, and more likely to favour a smaller government.

Question	Response	Quebec		Ontario		Alberta		B.C.		Canada – excluding four major urban areas
		Montreal	Outside Montreal	Toronto	Outside Toronto	Calgary- Edmonton	Outside Calgary- Edmonton	Vancouver	Outside Vancouver	
Size of government	Smaller	17	19	18	16	25	23	17	18	17
	Larger	38	40	39	28	27	22	38	24	30
	Neither	33	27	38	50	42	47	38	49	44
Impact of government	Positive	29	24	35	29	20	22	36	27	27
	Negative	36	42	38	48	58	59	38	48	47
	Not much impact	11	26	17	13	14	12	16	15	17

The pattern is roughly similar when it comes to the question of the kind of impact one thinks governments have on most people's lives. Residents of Toronto and Vancouver are more likely than those living in the rest of their respective provinces to say that governments have a positive impact, and less likely to say that they have a negative impact. Albertans are noticeably different – and again, this difference holds true regardless of whether one lives in Calgary-Edmonton or not. Albertans are less likely than other Canadians to say that governments have a positive impact on most people's lives, and more likely to say that they have a negative impact. Montrealers fall somewhere in the middle, being slightly more positive than their counterparts in Calgary-Edmonton, and slightly less positive than those in Toronto and Vancouver.

It does not appear, then, that there is a shared and distinctive big-city view on the role of government in Canada. There is, however, evidence of distinctive perspectives within provinces, particularly Quebec and Alberta, that hold across urban-rural boundaries.

Diversity. While Canadians have become much more welcoming of immigrants and refugees over the past 25 years,¹ the Confederation of Tomorrow survey nonetheless finds that two in three (65%) agree that there are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values. There is surprisingly little variation in views on this question across the country's four major urban areas, or between these areas and the rest of the country. Agreement is only slightly lower than average in Toronto and Vancouver, and – with the exception of B.C. – only slightly higher than average in areas of the country outside of the major urban centres. Quebecers, including Montrealers, are slightly more likely to agree that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values.

¹ See: Keith Neuman, "Canadian Public Opinion on Immigration and Refugees," (Toronto: Environics Institute, April 30, 2019); <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadian-public-opinion-on-immigration-and-refugees---focus-canada-spring-2019>.

Question	Response	Quebec		Ontario		Alberta		B.C.		Canada – excluding four major urban areas
		Montreal	Outside Montreal	Toronto	Outside Toronto	Calgary- Edmonton	Outside Calgary- Edmonton	Vancouver	Outside Vancouver	
Too many immigrants not adopting Canadian values	Agree	71	74	61	67	66	69	61	62	66
	Disagree	24	23	32	28	30	27	31	31	29
A person with strong attachment to their ethnic community is no less Canadian*	Agree	77	78	74	71	68	--	68	79	74
	Disagree	18	13	21	24	28	--	26	15	20
A person with strong attachment to their religion is no less Canadian*	Agree	66	77	76	77	71	--	78	79	78
	Disagree	23	19	18	18	22	--	20	16	17

* Split sample

The survey includes two additional questions related to diversity: Canadians were asked whether they agree that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own **ethnic community** is no less Canadian than anyone else,” or that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own **religion** is no less Canadian than anyone else.” Each respondent was asked one of these questions, chosen at random. As a result, the sample responding to each of these two questions is too small to report in the case of Alberta outside of Calgary-Edmonton.

When the responses for all big-city dwellers are compared to those of other Canadians, no significant differences are observed: about seven in ten agree in all cases. There are no significant differences between the views of Quebecers inside or outside of Montreal, Ontarians inside or outside of Toronto, or British Columbians inside or outside of Vancouver.

Again, on these issues, what stands out is the absence of significant differences, either across the major cities, or between the major cities and smaller communities.

The distribution of powers. In Canada, cities have no definitive constitutional status of their own; famously, they are ‘creatures of the provinces,’ meaning that their structure, powers and resources are established and subject to modification by their provincial governments. Over the years, many big-city mayors, dissatisfied with the deal they are getting from their respective provinces, have often turned to Ottawa for help, typically in the form of additional federal spending on urban issues such as transit infrastructure or housing. The Confederation of Tomorrow survey shows, however, that, on the whole big-city populations are no more likely than other Canadians to seek a stronger federal government.

In Canada as a whole, only 17 percent would like the federal government to take charge of many of the things that their provincial government is currently responsible for. That figure is only marginally higher in the cities of Toronto (21%) and Vancouver (20%), and lower in Montreal (15%) and Calgary-Edmonton (12%). In each of the four big-city areas, higher proportions of residents prefer that their provincial government takes charge of many of the things that the federal government currently does; this includes 45 percent of Montrealers and 46 percent of those living in Calgary-Edmonton.

Question	Response	Quebec		Ontario		Alberta		B.C.		Canada – excluding four major urban areas
		Montreal	Outside Montreal	Toronto	Outside Toronto	Calgary-Edmonton	Outside Calgary-Edmonton	Vancouver	Outside Vancouver	
Distribution of powers	Transfer more power to federal government	15	12	21	20	12	9	20	12	17
	Transfer more power to provincial	45	52	31	24	46	56	31	32	35
	Keep things as they are	27	26	32	37	25	22	28	34	31

Priorities. The clearest evidence for the absence of a common big-city agenda in Canada comes from the response to the open-ended question about the most important problem facing Canadians today. The most frequently mentioned items differ significantly from city to city. And only one item – the economy – appears among the top five problems mentioned in each of the four major urban areas.

- *In Vancouver*, the item most frequently identified as the most important problem is affordable housing (18%), followed by the economy (12%), the cost of living (9%), the environment (9%), and poverty, homelessness and inequality (6%).
- *In Calgary-Edmonton*, the economy dominates the list, with 24 percent saying it is the most important problem facing Canadians today; this is followed by political

representation (12%), energy and pipelines (11%), jobs and unemployment (8%) and immigration (5%).

- *In Toronto*, the five most frequently mentioned problems are the economy (12%), affordable housing (9%), political representation (8%), jobs and unemployment (7%) and the cost of living (7%).
- *In Montreal*, the most frequently mentioned problem is the environment (17%), followed by immigration (12%), political representation (9%), health care (8%) and the economy (7%).

Clearly, residents of Calgary-Edmonton are preoccupied with the downturn in the oil and gas sector; the economy is their main concern, with jobs, pipelines and the effectiveness of government representation also high on the list. In Montreal, where the economy has been much stronger, the environment tops the list, but the issues of jobs and pipelines are absent. Affordable housing is hardly mentioned as a problem in Calgary-Edmonton and Montreal, but tops the list in Vancouver and is the second most frequently mentioned problem in Toronto.

While it is clear that the four major urban areas differ from one another on this issue, the question of whether each mirrors the rest of their respective provinces is harder to answer; the patterns are inconsistent. The biggest problem in the minds of Quebecers, regardless of whether they live in Montreal, is the environment. But immigration is cited as the country's biggest problem by twice as many Montrealers as other Quebecers. Affordable housing is high on the list of problems for Torontonians, but not for other Ontarians; the case is reversed for immigration. British Columbians outside of Vancouver include political representation, and energy and pipelines on their list of top problems, whereas Vancouverites include the cost of living and poverty, homelessness and inequality. Only in Alberta do the major urban areas and the rest of the province share an identical list of top five problems, most of which relate to the economy, energy and political representation.

Overall, then, while there are some issues that tend to be more of a concern to Canadians living in some big cities than those living outside of them, such as affordable housing or poverty, there are also many concerns that are shared, at least within the context of individual provinces. More broadly, there is greater variation in the list of concerns across provinces than there is between major urban areas and other communities within each province.

Most Important Problem Facing Canadians Today (top five mentions in each area)

Quebec				Ontario			
Montreal		Outside Montreal		Toronto		Rest of Ontario	
Environment / climate change	16.7%	Environment / climate change	17.4%	Economy	12.1%	Immigration	10.4%
Immigration	12.1%	Government / political representation	9.5%	Affordable housing	8.5%	Economy	9.9%
Government / political representation	8.6%	Debt / finances	7.1%	Government / political representation	8.0%	Government / political representation	9.0%
Health care	8.4%	Economy	6.4%	Jobs / unemployment	7.4%	Health care	8.2%
Economy	7.0%	Immigration	5.4%	Cost of living	6.9%	Jobs / unemployment	7.0%
Alberta				B.C.			
Calgary-Edmonton		Rest of Alberta		Vancouver		Rest of B.C.	
Economy	24.3%	Government / political representation	18.5%	Affordable housing	17.5%	Government / political representation	10.5%
Government / political representation	12.1%	Jobs / unemployment	14.8%	Economy	12.4%	Affordable housing	9.5%
Energy, pipelines and resources	11.2%	Energy, pipelines and resources	13.8%	Cost of living	9.2%	Environment / climate change	8.5%
Jobs / unemployment	7.6%	Economy	13.2%	Environment / climate change	8.6%	Health care	8.3%
Immigration	4.7%	Immigration	6.3%	Poverty, homelessness and inequality	5.7%	Energy, pipelines and resources	8.0%
Canada – excluding four major urban areas							
Government / political representation		9.6%					
Economy		8.9%					
Health care		7.7%					
Environment / climate change		7.6%					
Immigration		7.3%					

Summary

This report sets out to compare opinions on a range of issues, both across the country's four major urban areas, and between each of these areas and the rest of their respective provinces. The goal was to assess the extent to which there is a common big-city mindset or agenda that

differentiates those living in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary-Edmonton and Vancouver from the rest of the country. By and large, the results show that this is not the case. Although there are some exceptions, on the whole the four major urban areas of Canada are neither consistently similar to one another, nor consistently different from the non-metropolitan areas of Canada.

One reason for this is clearly the impact of regional and local economic conditions. Residents of Calgary-Edmonton stand out from those in the other big cities as being more concerned about the economy and jobs, and less satisfied with the direction of the country; this dissatisfaction is shared by both residents of Calgary-Edmonton and other Albertans. While Toronto and Vancouver are not facing the same economic downturn as Calgary-Edmonton, local conditions in those two cities are pushing issues such as the affordability of housing up to the top of their agendas, in contrast to the situation in a city such as Montreal.

Another factor is that there is simply more agreement across the country on some issues than is often assumed. There is both widespread agreement that strong attachment to an ethnic or religious community does not make a person any less Canadian than anyone else, and concern that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values. In the context of this report, the important point is that there is an absence of any significant difference in views between those living inside or outside of the country's major urban areas. On a different issue, there is also no strong support in the big cities for a shift of powers within the federation from provincial governments to Ottawa.

Finally, on questions of the size and role of government, provincial political cultures, such as those in Quebec and Alberta, appear to shape the views of those living both inside and outside each province's largest cities, overriding any urban-rural differences.

Big cities share many common features and face many similar challenges as they continue to grow. But this does not mean that Canadians who live in these cities will always share the same opinions. There are many issues that unite us, and this holds true regardless of whether we live in smaller communities or larger ones. There are also issues on which we differ, but in many cases, these differences are of a more regional character than an urban-rural one.

Data Source

The 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey of Canadians was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with five leading public policy organizations across the country: the Canada West Foundation, the Mowat Centre, the Centre D'Analyse Politique – Constitution et Fédéralisme, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at Saint Francis Xavier University. The research consisted of a national public opinion survey conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories) with a representative sample of 5,732 Canadians (ages 18 and over) between December 14, 2018 and January 16, 2019.