



# 2020 Survey of Canadians

## REPORT 3: IDENTITY, VALUES and LANGUAGE

### PART I: **IDENTITY**

### Final Report

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**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

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# Executive summary

Canada is a country in which citizens typically express a mix of identities. Three in four, for instance, define themselves as both Canadian and as someone from their province or territory, compared to about one in four define themselves exclusively as either a Canadian only or someone from their province only. The relative strength of these different identities varies across the country. Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador, are the only two provinces where residents are more likely to identify with their province (only or first) than with Canada (only or first). Ontario is the only province where a majority of residents define themselves as a Canadian only or first.

Francophone Quebecers and Canadians outside of Quebec are equally likely to express a mix of identities, defining themselves as both Canadian and as someone from their province or territory. But, within Quebec, those with mixed identities are much more likely to lean toward their provincial identity than the Canadian one.

While the expression of identity differs by age group, the trends inside and outside of Quebec point in opposite directions. Outside of Quebec, younger Canadians are less likely to identify as a Canadian only or first; younger Quebec francophones, in contrast, are slightly more likely to do so. The net result is that, in terms of identity, there is much less difference between Quebec francophones and Canadians outside of Quebec among younger age groups than among older ones.

The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey included a new question about whether people feel any more or less Canadian in a number of different situations. Of the 12 situations presented in the survey, the ones in which people are most likely to say they feel more Canadian relate to official celebrations and remembrances. In situations relating either to Canada's multicultural or bilingual character, fewer people feel more Canadian, while pluralities feel no different. In these situations, however, between one in eight and one in five feel less Canadian. Nevertheless, the survey finds that there are no situations in which the predominant view is the feeling of being "less Canadian" – either among the public as a whole or within specific subgroups. This speaks to the difficulty that political movements and parties in Canada have had in attempting to mobilize public support behind an anti-immigrant or anti-diversity policy platform.

In almost all the situations presented in the survey, immigrants are more likely than those born in Canada to say they feel more Canadian. This includes both the ceremonial situations such as on Canada Day or when hearing the national anthem, and in situations related to the country's diversity. In a country where close to one in four people are foreign-born, it's reassuring from the point of view of integration that national symbols and celebrations appear more, and not less, likely to resonate with newcomers.

# About this report

This report is the third in a series that presents the results of the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey of Canadians, a national public opinion study that gives voice to Canadians on the future of the federation.

- The **first report** in the series focused on the evolution of attitudes related to federalism, regionalism and nationalism; and more specifically on the related issues of energy and climate change policies in Canada.
- The **second report** examined how resources and powers are shared within the federation; and the expectations that citizens have of the different orders of government when it comes to addressing the key issues that affect the country.
- The **third report** explores issues relating to identity, values and language.

The third report is published in three separate parts. This document constitutes Part I and explores the evolution of the Canadian identity. Part II focuses on the extent of value differences across the country, particularly as they relate to religion and the question of how the state, in a secular society, should exercise its religious neutrality. Part III addresses perceptions of the security of the French language in Canada.

## The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey of Canadians

The Confederation of Tomorrow survey was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with four leading public policy organizations across the country: the Canada West Foundation, the Centre d'analyse politique – constitution fédéralisme, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government. It was conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories) between January 13 and February 20, 2020, with a sample of 5,152 Canadians aged 18 and over.

All the reports from the survey, as well as data tables presenting the detailed results of each survey question, are available on the Environics Institute's website at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects>.

# Introduction

The Canadian federation has always needed to accommodate not only different regional economic interests or policy preferences, but also different identities. These identities can be rooted in specific territorially-based communities, such as that of Quebec, or of First Nations, Métis peoples or Inuit – or, indeed, of Canada itself. They can also be formed around characteristics such as ethnicity, culture, language or religion. Canadian unity can be maintained as long it's based on a recognition of the pluralistic nature of identity in a multinational, federated, multicultural and bilingual state.

Identities are never static, but evolve over time in concert with other societal changes, including demographic changes, shifting social values, and external forces such as globalization. While some changes in identity can strengthen the social fabric – by, for instance, broadening the perceptions of who belongs to a particular community – others can have the opposite effect by making these perceptions more exclusionary.

The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey explores this issue by updating information on the mix of Canadian and provincial identities, and by providing new information on whether various situations make people feel more or less Canadian. The survey finds that familiar patterns, such as the unique expression of identity among Quebec francophones, remain well-entrenched. But contrasting trends among age groups inside and outside that province have produced a situation where younger francophones and younger Canadians outside Quebec are more similar in terms of their expression of identity than is the case for their parents or grandparents. The survey also points to some of Canada's successes in terms of the integration of newcomers, as the country's national symbols and celebrations appear more, and not less, likely to resonate with Canadians born outside of the country.

# Canadian and provincial identities

Three in four of Canadians define themselves as both Canadian and as someone from their province or territory. Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador, are the only two provinces where residents are more likely to identify with their province (only or first) than with Canada (only or first). Ontario is the only province where a majority of residents define themselves as Canadian only or first.

Canada has always been a country in which many citizens express a mix of Canadian, and provincial or regional identities. What remains of interest, however, is how the relative strength of these different identities varies across the country; and the question of whether specific identities are strengthening or weakening over time.

To explore this issue, the 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey asked whether Canadians consider themselves to be:

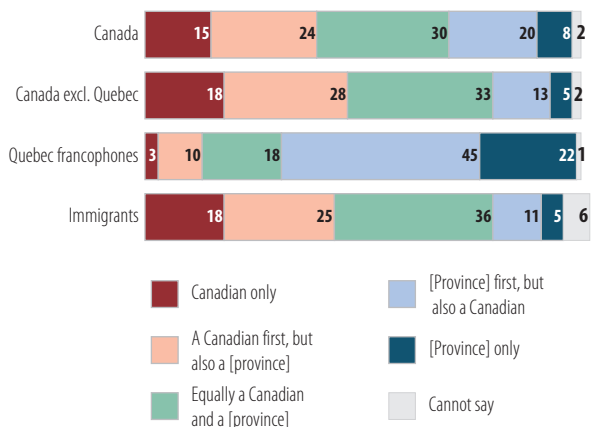
- A Canadian only
- A Canadian first, but also a [name of province]
- Equally a Canadian and a [name of province]
- A [name of province] first, but also a Canadian; or
- A [name of province] only.

The results can be looked at in several different ways, depending on how the specific responses are combined. Three findings in particular stand out.

## Most Canadians express a mix of Canadian and provincial identities

- Three in four (74%) of Canadians define themselves as both Canadian and as someone from their province or territory. This includes 24 percent who say they are a Canadian first, but also someone from their province or territory; 30 percent who say they are equally a Canadian and someone from their province or territory; and 20 percent who say they are someone from their province or territory first, but also a Canadian.

CHART 1  
Identity: Canadian or other?



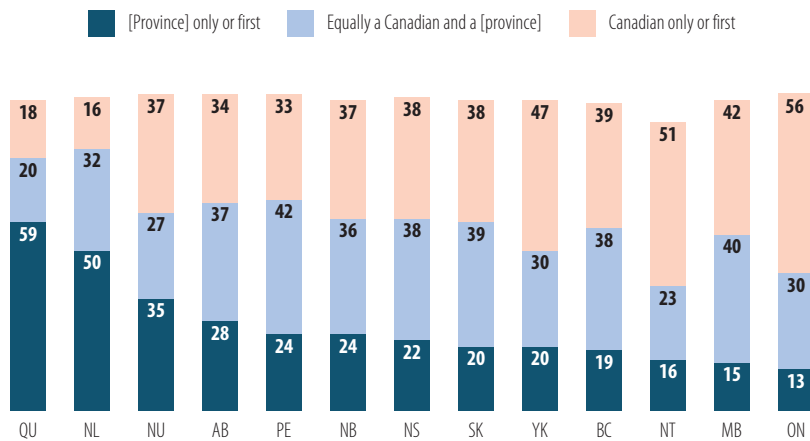
Q.3  
People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself to be: a Canadian only; a Canadian first, but also a [INSERT PROVINCE/TERRITORY]; equally a Canadian and a [INSERT PROV/TERR]; a [INSERT PROV/TERR] first, but also a Canadian; or a [INSERT PROV/TERR] only.

- About one in four (23%) do not express a mix of identities, opting to define themselves as either a Canadian only (15%) or someone from their province only (8%).
- Francophones Quebecers (73%) and Canadians outside of Quebec (74%) are equally likely to express a mix of identities, defining themselves as both Canadian and as someone from their province or territory. But within Quebec, those with mixed identities are much more likely to lean toward their provincial identity than the Canadian one. Specifically, 45 percent of francophone Quebecers see themselves as someone from their province or territory first, but also a Canadian; outside Quebec, only 13 percent define themselves in this way.

**In two provinces, residents are more likely to identify with their province (only or first) than with Canada (only or first)**

- Francophone Quebecers (67%) are much more likely to identify with their province only or first than with Canada only or first (13%). In contrast, only 18 percent of Canadians outside of Quebec identify with their province only or first, while 46 percent identify only or first as Canadian.
- Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province, besides Quebec, where residents are more likely to identify with their province (only or first) than with Canada (only or first). One in two (50%) in the province define themselves as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians only or first, while only 16 percent define themselves as a Canadian only or first (32% define themselves as equally a Canadian and a Newfoundlander and Labradorian).

**CHART 2**  
**Identity: Canadian or other?**  
 By region



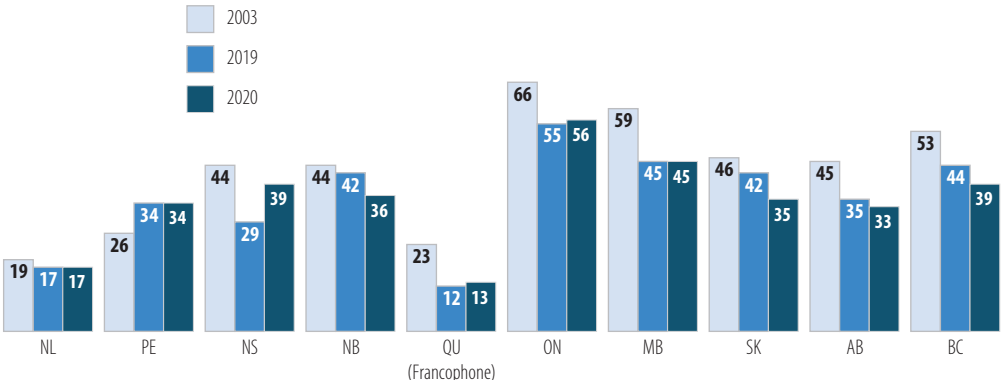
Q.3  
 People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself to be: a Canadian only; a Canadian first, but also a [INSERT PROVINCE/TERRITORY]; equally a Canadian and a [INSERT PROV/TERR]; a [INSERT PROV/TERR] first, but also a Canadian; or a [INSERT PROV/TERR] only.

**In only one province do a majority of residents define themselves as a Canadian only or first**

- Ontario is the only province where a majority of residents (56%) define themselves as a Canadian only or first. One in two (51%) residents of the Northwest Territories also define themselves this way.

- Canadians with an immigrant background (first- or second-generation immigrants) are somewhat more likely to define themselves as a Canadian only or first, compared to those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents. But this modest overall difference is entirely the product of a very significant difference in Quebec. In Quebec, 39 percent of first- or second-generation immigrants define themselves as a Canadian only or first, compared to 13 percent of Quebecers born in Canada to Canadian-born parents.

**CHART 3**  
**Identity: Canadian only or first?**  
 2003 – 2020 By region non-Indigenous peoples only<sup>1</sup>



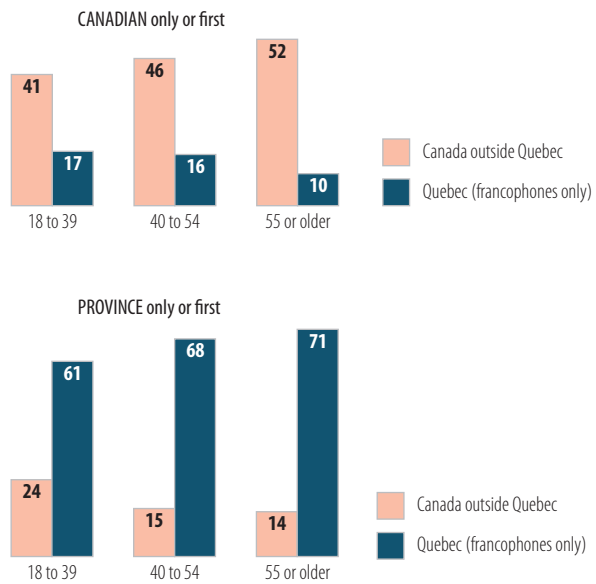
Q.3a  
 [Non-Indigenous respondents only] People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself to be: a Canadian only; a Canadian first, but also a [INSERT PROVINCE/TERRITORY]; equally a Canadian and a [INSERT PROV/TERR]; a [INSERT PROV/TERR] first, but also a Canadian; or a [INSERT PROV/TERR] only.

<sup>1</sup> In the 2019 edition of the survey, a separate question was asked of Indigenous peoples. In order to allow for a more precise comparison in responses between 2019 and 2020, Indigenous respondents are not included in the 2020 results for this chart.

- Identities differ by age group, but the trends inside and outside of Quebec point in opposite directions. Outside of Quebec, younger Canadians are less likely to identify as a Canadian only or first, and are somewhat more likely to identify as someone from their province only or first. Young Quebec francophones, by contrast, are somewhat more likely than their older counterparts to identify as a Canadian only or first, and less likely to identify as a Quebecer only or first. The net result of these contrasting trends is that the gap in definitions between Quebec francophones and Canadians outside of Quebec is somewhat narrower among younger age groups than among older ones.

Across Canada as a whole, the answers to this question are identical to those found in 2019. In the case of some individual provinces, however, there were modest changes. Specifically, the proportion identifying as a Canadian only or first declined by seven points in Saskatchewan, six in New Brunswick, and five in British Columbia.

**CHART 4**  
**Identity: Canadian or province?**  
 By age group



Q.3  
 People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself to be: a Canadian only; a Canadian first, but also a [INSERT PROVINCE/TERRITORY]; equally a Canadian and a [INSERT PROV/TERR]; a [INSERT PROV/TERR] first, but also a Canadian; or a [INSERT PROV/TERR] only.

# What makes you feel more Canadian?

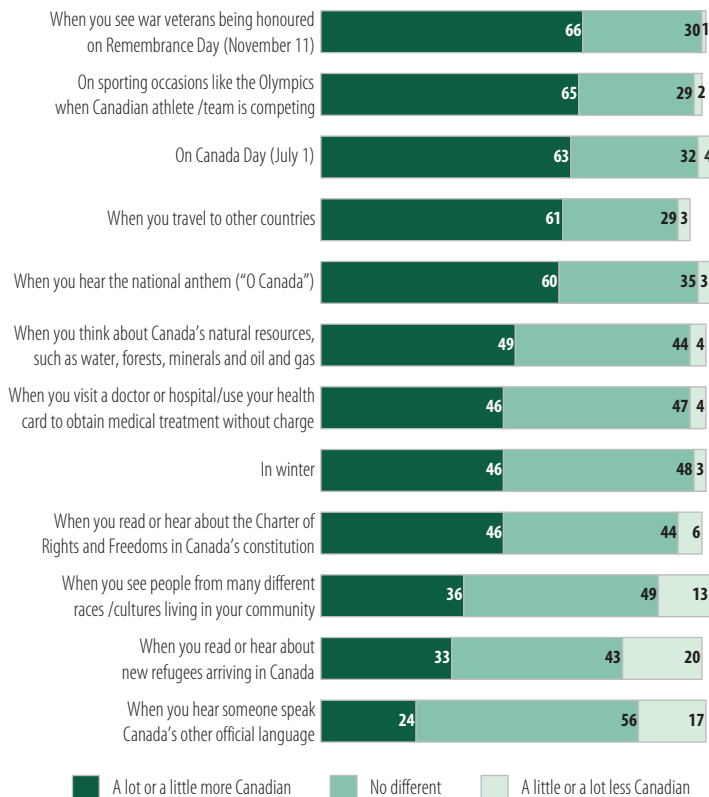
Canadians are most likely to say they feel more Canadian in situations that relate to official celebrations and remembrances. Fewer people feel more Canadian, and between one in ten and one in five feel less Canadian, in situations that relate to Canada’s multicultural or bilingual character (in these cases, pluralities say they feel no different). In all the situations presented in the survey, Quebec francophones are less likely to feel more Canadian, compared to Canadians outside Quebec. In almost all the situations presented in the survey, immigrants are more likely than those born in Canada to say they feel more Canadian.

In all societies, certain events, circumstances or symbols can stir feelings of national identity and pride. It cannot be taken for granted, however, that all citizens respond to the same events in the same way; some symbols or situations may resonate more with some than with others. In extreme

cases, some events or symbols may have a polarizing effect, eliciting feelings of greater pride among some citizens, but having the opposite effect on others.

To explore this in the Canadian context, the 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey included a new question about whether people feel any more or less Canadian in a number of different situations. The question was adapted from a similar one used in surveys in the United Kingdom, designed to measure how expressions of British, English and Scottish national identities vary in different contexts.<sup>2</sup> The answers to the question show that there are important differences both in responses (feeling more or less Canadian) across the various situations, and in the responses of different groups within the Canadian population to each situation.

CHART 5  
Feel more or less Canadian?



Q.4  
Some people feel more Canadian in some situations and less Canadian in others. Where would you put yourself on this scale in the following situations ... ?

2 David McCrone and Frank Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 63 ff.

Of the 12 situations presented in the survey, the ones in which people are most likely to say they feel a lot or a little more Canadian generally relate to official celebrations and remembrances. At least three in five feel a lot or a little more Canadian in the following situations:

- when you see war veterans being honoured on Remembrance Day (November 11) (66%);
- on sporting occasions like the Olympics when a Canadian athlete or team is competing (65%);
- on Canada Day (July 1) (63%);
- when you travel to other countries (61%); and
- when you hear the national anthem (“O Canada”) (60%).

There is a second group of situations in which just under one in two say they feel a lot or a little more Canadian. Two situations relate to the country’s climate or landscape, and two relate to how governments interact with or protect citizens:

- when you think about Canada’s natural resources, such as water, forests, minerals and oil and gas (49%);
- when you visit a doctor or hospital and use your health care card to obtain medical treatment without charge (46%);
- in winter (46%); and
- when you read or hear about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada’s constitution (46%).

Notably, in each of the nine situations mentioned so far, very few people feel *less* Canadian (in most of the nine cases, fewer than 5% say they feel a little or a lot less Canadian). Those who do not feel more Canadian in these situations tend to say they feel no different. This suggests that very few feel that the situations in question threaten or undermine their sense of Canadian identity.

There is a final group of three situations where fewer people feel more Canadian, and where between one in eight and one in five feel less Canadian. These situations relate either to Canada’s multicultural or bilingual character.

- when you see people from many different races and cultures living in your community (36% feel a lot or a little *more* Canadian, while 13% feel a little or a lot *less* Canadian);
- when you read or hear about new refugees arriving in Canada (33% feel a lot or a little *more* Canadian, while 20% feel a little or a lot *less* Canadian); and
- when you hear someone speak Canada’s other official language (24% feel a lot or a little *more* Canadian, while 17% feel a little or a lot *less* Canadian).<sup>3</sup>

In these cases, pluralities say they feel no different. However, as mentioned, a notable minority say these situations made them feel a little or a lot less Canadian. This suggests that these types of situations are somewhat more polarizing than the others. A discussion of which groups are more likely to say they feel less Canadian in these situations follows.

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<sup>3</sup> For respondents completing the survey in English, the other language was identified as French; for respondents completing the survey in French, the other language was identified as English.

## Quebec and the rest of Canada

As noted previously, Quebec francophones have a much less pronounced sense of Canadian identity, in that they are less likely to identify as a Canadian only or first, and more likely to identify as someone from their province only or first. It's not surprising, then, to find that in all 12 situations, Quebec francophones are less likely to feel more Canadian, compared to Canadians outside Quebec.

Some of the largest differences appear on those items that are most closely linked to the celebration of the Canadian state, such as Canada Day (Quebec francophones are 36 points less likely to say it makes them feel more Canadian) and hearing "O Canada" (a difference of 27 points). There are also significant differences in the cases of Remembrance Day (a difference of 23 points) and watching Canadian athletes at the Olympics (a difference of 21 points).

There is also a large difference in the views of the two populations as they pertain to the health care system: Canadians outside of Quebec (52%) are more than twice as likely as Quebec francophones (23%) to say that they feel more Canadian when they visit a doctor or hospital, and use their health care card to obtain medical treatment without charge. This does not mean that francophone Quebecers value publicly funded health care any less than other Canadians, but rather that it's become more tied to a sense of Canadian identity for other Canadians than it has for Quebec francophones.<sup>4</sup>

Expressions of Canadian identity also vary based on other demographic factors, although these variations are not always consistent across the 12 different situations presented in the survey.

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<sup>4</sup> For comparison, an Environics Institute survey in 2012 found that Quebecers were much less likely than other Canadians to say that Canada's health care system was very important to the Canadian Identity (Focus Canada, 2012).

## Age

There are few differences among age groups in the case of the five situations in which people are the most likely to say they feel a lot or a little more Canadian, such as during the Olympics or on Canada Day (with the exception that those age 55 and older are especially likely to feel more Canadian on Remembrance Day).

There are differences, however, in the case of many of the other items. Those between the ages of 18 and 34 are 20 points more likely than those age 55 and older to feel more Canadian in winter, and 14 points more likely to feel more Canadian when they use their health care card to obtain medical treatment without charge.

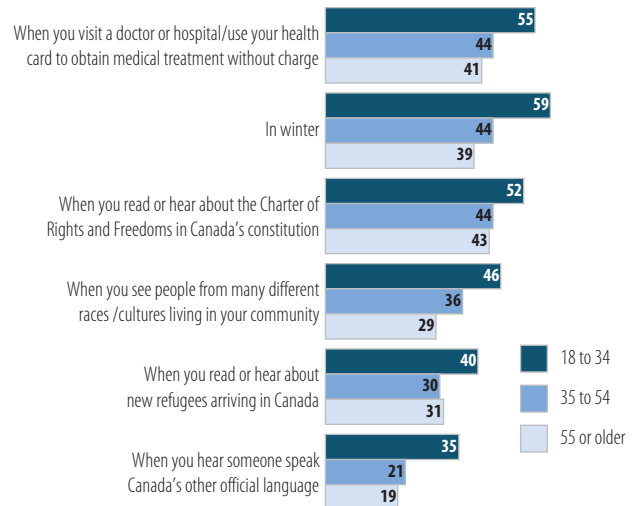
There are also important differences between younger and older Canadians in the case of situations related to Canada's diversity. Compared to those age 55 and older, those between the ages of 18 and 34 are:

- 17 points more likely to feel more Canadian when they see people from many different races and cultures living in their community;
- 16 points more likely to feel more Canadian when they hear someone speak Canada's other official language;
- nine points more likely to feel more Canadian when they read or hear about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada's constitution; and
- nine points more likely to feel more Canadian when they read or hear about new refugees arriving in Canada.

CHART 6

### Feeling more Canadian

"A lot or a little more Canadian," by age group



Q.4

Some people feel more Canadian in some situations and less Canadian in others. Where would you put yourself on this scale in the following situations ... ?

## Immigration status

In almost all the situations presented in the survey, immigrants are more likely than those born in Canada to say they feel more Canadian. This includes both ceremonial situations such as on Canada Day or when hearing the national anthem, and in situations related to the country's diversity, such as when they see people from many different races and cultures living in their community, or when they read or hear about new refugees arriving in Canada.

The greatest differences between the two groups, however, occur in two situations: when they visit a doctor or hospital, and use their health care card to obtain medical treatment without charge; and when they read or hear about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In both cases, 56 percent of immigrants feel more Canadian, compared to 44 percent of those born in Canada.

It is perhaps not surprising that immigrants are more likely than those born in Canada to feel *more* Canadian in these situations: some immigrants may be expressing particular enthusiasm for the symbols of a country that welcomed them; for others, their answers may reflect the fact that they're in the process of acquiring a new national identity (they're starting from a less defined "identity base" than are those born in Canada). That said, in a country where close to one in four people are foreign-born, it's reassuring from the point of view of integration that national symbols and celebrations appear more and not less likely to resonate with newcomers.

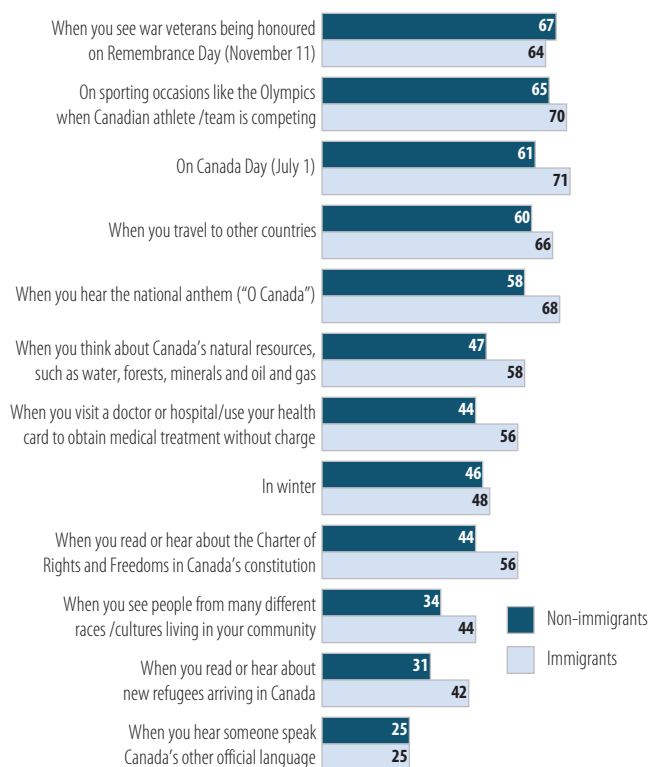
The other side of the coin, however, is that a notable minority of non-immigrants in Canada say they feel *less* Canadian in situations relating to the country's diversity. While the vast majority of non-immigrants feel either no different in these situations, or feel more Canadian, it remains the case that:

- 14 percent feel *less* Canadian when they see people from many different races and cultures living in their community; and
- 22 percent feel *less* Canadian when they read or hear about new refugees arriving in Canada.

## CHART 7

### Feeling more Canadian

"A lot or a little more Canadian," Immigrants vs. non-immigrants



Q.4

*Some people feel more Canadian in some situations and less Canadian in others. Where would you put yourself on this scale in the following situations ... ?*

<sup>5</sup> This result, however, is affected by the particularly low portion of non-immigrants in Quebec who feel more Canadian in this situation. The difference between immigrants and non-immigrants in the proportion feeling more Canadian when using their health care card is 21 points in Quebec, but only six points outside of Quebec.

## Feeling less Canadian

Other factors are related to expressions of Canadian identity in these different situations, including education and income; in most of the situations presented in the survey, those with a university education and those who are more satisfied with their incomes are more likely to say they feel more Canadian than are those without a post-secondary education or who describe their incomes as being “not enough.” The proportion of those who feel less Canadian is often even greater when education is combined with both age and gender. The group most likely to feel less Canadian is men over the age of 55 without a post-secondary education. In the case of this group:

- 22 percent feel less Canadian when they see people from many different races and cultures living in their community (compared to the overall average of 13%);
- 30 percent feel less Canadian when they read or hear about new refugees arriving in Canada (compared to the overall average of 20%); and

- 33 percent feel less Canadian when they hear someone speak Canada’s other official language (compared to the overall average of 17%).

Thus, while between one in eight and one in five Canadians overall feel less Canadian in the situations that relate to the country’s diversity, this proportion increases to between one in four and one in three among this specific demographic group, namely older men without a post-secondary education.

It remains the case, however, that in these situations, most Canadians in general, and even most older men without a post-secondary education, either feel no different, or feel more Canadian. In short, there are no situations in which the predominant view is the feeling of being “less Canadian” – either among the public as a whole or within specific subgroups. This speaks to the difficulty that political movements and parties in Canada have had in attempting to mobilize public support behind an anti-immigrant or anti-diversity policy platform.

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## Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people

Finally, it is notable that, in most of the situations mentioned in the survey, there is no difference in the views of those who identify as Indigenous compared to those who do not. One exception is the case of the public health care system: Indigenous Peoples (58%) are more likely than non-Indigenous people (45%) to say they feel more Canadian when they use their health care card to obtain medical treatment without charge. But the difference is narrower outside of Quebec, where the proportions are 60

percent for Indigenous Peoples and 52 percent for non-Indigenous people.

The general similarity in responses between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people is perhaps not surprising, given the way the question is phrased. In view of the legacy of colonialism, some Indigenous Peoples may experience the celebration of Canada Day differently than non-Indigenous Canadians, without necessarily feeling less Canadian.

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