

**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

A  
**FOCUS  
CANADA**  
REPORT

# The Evolution of the Canadian Identity

DECEMBER 2022

## Background



As part of its **Focus Canada** public opinion research program (launched in 1976), the Environics Institute updated its research on Canadian attitudes about the economy and opportunities for social mobility. The survey was conducted in partnership with Century Initiative. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted (via landline and cellphones) with 2,000 Canadians between September 6 and 30, 2022. 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.



The **Environics Institute for Survey Research** was established in 2006 as an independent non-profit organization to promote relevant and original public opinion and social research on important issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it has been changing, and where it may be heading.

[environicsinstitute.org](http://environicsinstitute.org)



**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, urban development, employment and entrepreneurship, early childhood supports, and education.

[centuryinitiative.ca](http://centuryinitiative.ca)

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## Executive summary

The Canadian identity is in constant evolution, in response to changing political forces and cultural influences. One of the more important potential sources of change in recent years is the growing ethno-cultural diversity of the population, driven by immigration and, in particular, by the growing number of immigrants arriving from Asian and Africa. Ongoing discussions of the history and current situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada might also be affecting how people conceive of the national identity. Other events may affect the resonance of certain symbols, such as the prominent display of the Canadian flag by the protestors who occupied parts of downtown Ottawa earlier in 2022.

The evolution of the Canadian identity, and of pride in being Canadian, has been tracked by the Focus Canada survey since the mid-1980s. The latest survey, conducted in September 2022, finds that nine in ten Canadians express at least some pride in being a Canadian, including three in five who say they are very proud. But this survey also confirms that the strength of this pride is somewhat lower than in previous decades. Strong pride has declined among all age groups, but more noticeably among those under the age of 45, compared to those age 45 and older.

In terms of the Canadian identity, three items stand out as the most likely to be seen as very important: the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada's health care system and Canada's systems of public education. Three other items are almost as likely to be seen as very important: Indigenous Peoples in Canada, the Canadian flag and multiculturalism.

The relative importance of these and other items, however, has shifted over time. Items relating to Canada's diversity – such as multiculturalism, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, bilingualism and Indigenous Peoples – are all becoming more likely to be seen as very important to the Canadian identity. More traditional items, such as the national anthem, the flag, the RCMP and the CBC have – at least more recently – become less important.

Perspectives on national identity vary considerably among population groups within the country. Among the most notable differences are those between Quebecers and those living in the rest of Canada. Quebecers are significantly less likely to say that a number of symbols of the Canadian state are very important to the Canadian identity. There are also differences among age groups, as many of the components of Canadian identity resonate more with younger Canadians than with their older counterparts. This is the case in 2022, both with social programs such as health care and public education, as well as the items associated with Canada's diversity, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Indigenous Peoples, multiculturalism and bilingualism.

As might be expected, immigrants are more likely than those born in Canada to express attachment to components of the Canadian identity such as multiculturalism. But immigrants are also more likely than non-immigrants to see other symbols of the Canadian state, such as the flag and the national anthem, as being very important to the Canadian identity.

Finally, there are important differences in the opinions of supporters of the main federal political parties: Conservative Party supporters are more likely than Liberal Party or NDP supporters to say that items traditionally associated with the Canadian state (including the flag and the national anthem) are

very important to the Canadian identity. Items associated with Canada's diversity are more likely to be seen as very important by Liberal Party or NDP supporters.

The survey also addresses the question of whether Canadian culture needs more protection from outside influences, or needs to be more open to outside influences. Canadians are currently more or less evenly split. The proportion that says that Canadian culture needs to be protected from outside influences, however, has declined gradually since 1995. Since the mid-1990s, two groups in particular have become much more supportive of more openness: younger Canadians and Canadians who support the NDP.

## Pride in being Canadian

*While most people in Canada are proud of being a Canadian, the strength of this pride is somewhat lower than in previous decades.*

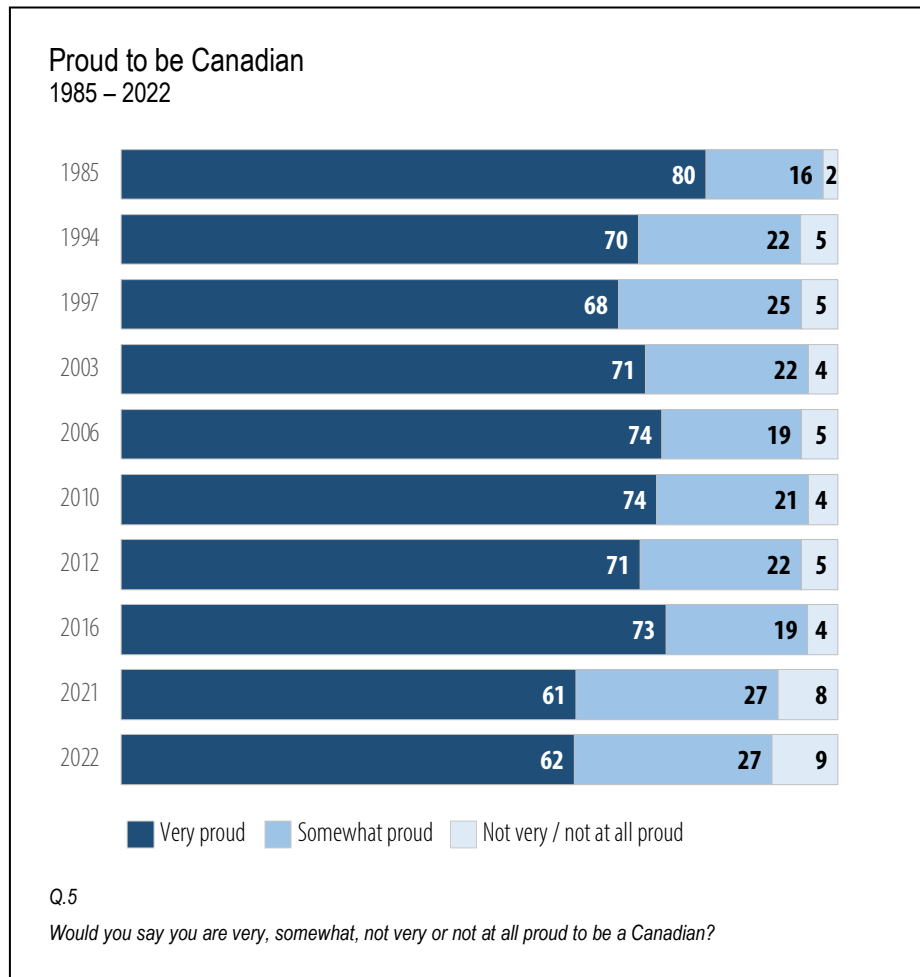
**Pride in being a Canadian.** In 2022, three in five (62%) people in Canada say they are very proud to be a Canadian, and 27 percent say they are somewhat proud. Only nine percent say they are not very or not at all proud.

While about nine in ten Canadians express at least some pride in being a Canadian, the strength of this pride is somewhat lower than in previous decades. The proportion saying they are very proud remained at a little over seven in ten for roughly two decades, from the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s. But between 2016 and 2021, this proportion fell by 12 percentage points, reaching the lowest level (61%) since this question was first asked in 1985. Since last year, the proportion who say they are very proud to be Canadian is essentially unchanged (up 1 point).

Compared to previous decades, strong pride in being a Canadian has declined in each region of the country, with the exception of Quebec, where it was already much lower than average. Strong pride has declined among all age groups, but more noticeably among those under the age of 45, compared to those age 45 and older. It has also declined among supporters of all the main federal political parties, but slightly less so for supporters of the Liberal Party than for supporters of either of the main opposition parties.

## The Canadian identity

*Items relating to Canada's diversity – such as multiculturalism, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, bilingualism and Indigenous Peoples – are all becoming more likely to be seen as important to the Canadian identity.*



**How important are the following to the Canadian identity?** Every country has symbols that encapsulate or reflect the national identity. These symbols may shift in importance over time, with some becoming more prominent while others fade away. They may also be contested, speaking more to some groups within the country than others. The Focus Canada surveys have been measuring the importance of different symbols, institutions or concepts to the Canadian identity for over 35 years. The latest survey confirms that, over time, symbols associated with Canada’s cultural diversity are becoming more important.

In 2022, three items stand out as the most likely to be seen as very important to the Canadian identity: the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (78%), Canada’s health care system (78%) and Canada’s systems of public education (72%).

Three other items are almost as likely to be seen as very important – with roughly two in three Canadians taking this view: Indigenous Peoples in Canada (69%), the Canadian flag (65%) and multiculturalism (64%).

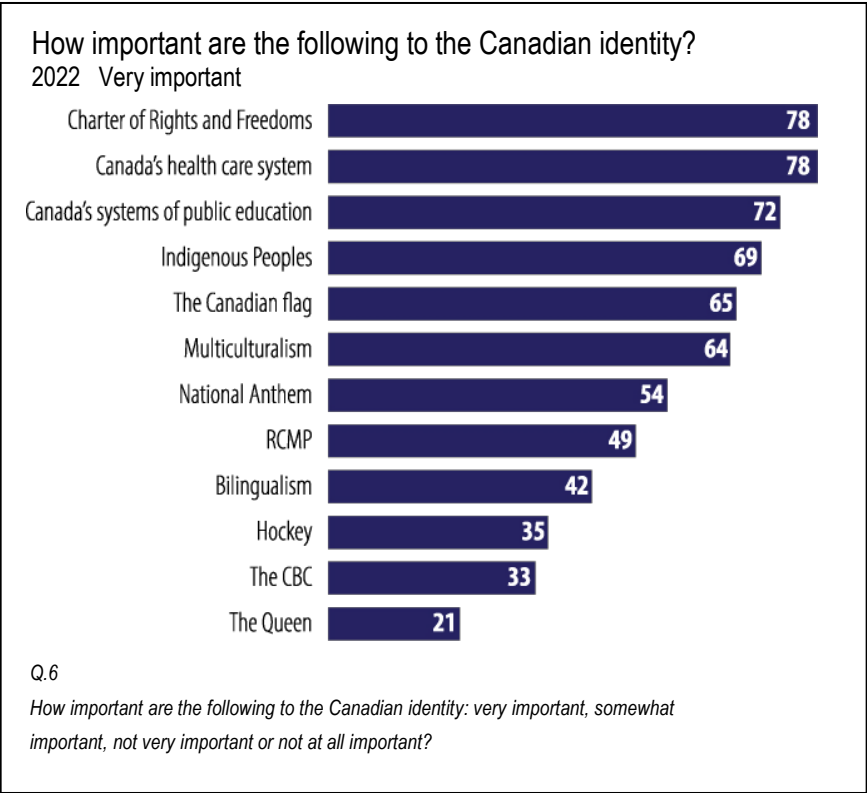
Somewhat less likely to be seen as very important are: the national anthem (O Canada) (54%), the RCMP (49%) and bilingualism (42%).

The three items least likely to be seen as very important to the Canadian identity are: hockey (35%), the CBC (or in French: Radio-Canada) (33%) and the Queen (21%).<sup>1</sup>

**Trends over time**

*Becoming more important to the Canadian identity*

This question about the Canadian identity has been asked many times since 1985 (although not all the individual items were included each time). There have been many ups and downs in the importance attached to each item over the years, but in some cases, clear trends appear.



<sup>1</sup> Note that the survey fieldwork was conducted in the days immediately following the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Several items are increasingly likely to be seen as very important to the Canadian identity. One such item is multiculturalism: the proportion of Canadians saying this is very important has grown from a low of 35 percent in 1994, to 64 percent today.

Another is the Indigenous Peoples of Canada: over the past decade, the proportion of Canadians saying they are very important to the Canadian identity has jumped by 20 percentage points, from 49 percent to 69 percent. Some may object to the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as part of the Canadian identity, partly because the presence of Indigenous Peoples on this territory pre-exists Canada, and partly because it risks trivializing or misrepresenting the place of Indigenous Peoples in the country today. But the fact that Canadians are becoming more likely to say Indigenous Peoples are very important in this sense – over the period marked by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and revelations about the harm done to Indigenous children, families and societies by the residential school system – is nonetheless a positive sign, as it suggests growing awareness and support for Indigenous issues among the general public.

**How important are the following to the Canadian identity?**  
1985 – 2022 Very important

	1985	1990	1991	1994	1996	1997	2000	2003	2007	2010	2012	2015	2022
Charter of Rights and Freedoms	–	–	72	63	67	72	76	71	72	78	73	81	78
Canada’s health care system	–	–	–	–	82	87	80	78	83	85	81	88	78
Canada’s systems of public education	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	78	72
Indigenous Peoples	–	–	–	–	–	–	57	–	–	–	49	62	69
The Canadian flag	68	66	62	69	64	70	73	68	69	73	67	–	65
Multiculturalism	44	39	36	35	36	37	54	47	50	56	49	54	64

Q.6  
*How important are the following to the Canadian identity: very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?*

The trend over time relating to bilingualism is not as stark or consistent; there have been several ups and downs over time, and the proportion saying bilingualism is very important to the Canadian identity is currently not at an all-time high. That said, the proportion holding this view today (42%) is much higher than in the early 1990s, and five points higher than when the question was last asked a decade ago. Looking only at Canadians living outside Quebec, the proportion that sees bilingualism as very important to the Canadian identity today (36%) is 14 percentage points higher than in 1991, and seven points higher than in 2012.

The proportion of Canadians who say the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is very important to the Canadian identity has also cycled up and down, and was slightly higher than it is today when the

question was last asked in 2015. Nevertheless, the general trend is one of gradual increase over time; the proportion seeing the Charter as very important is now 15 points higher than in 1994 (78%, compared to 63% percent).

*Becoming less important to the Canadian identity*

Several items are becoming less likely to be seen as very important to the Canadian identity. This includes hockey: the proportion seeing Canada’s national pastime as being very important to the country’s identity increased at the start of this century, reaching a high of 47 percent in 2010 (the year of Canada’s overtime victory over the United States in the gold medal men’s hockey tournament at the Vancouver winter Olympics). But since then, the proportion has declined steadily, and currently stands at 35 percent.

How important are the following to the Canadian identity?  
1985 – 2022 Very important

	1985	1990	1991	1994	1996	1997	2000	2003	2007	2010	2012	2015	2022
National Anthem	68	62	62	67	61	67	65	60	62	66	61	–	54
RCMP	–	58	–	59	53	60	60	57	52	57	48	65	49
Bilingualism	40	34	30	32	35	37	45	38	40	46	37	–	42
Hockey	43	29	–	31	30	30	35	40	37	47	44	39	35
The CBC	34	33	31	35	31	39	37	37	39	42	40	42	33
The Queen	26	–	20	17	14	14	16	16	16	16	17	21	21

Q.6  
How important are the following to the Canadian identity: very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?

The proportion that says the national anthem is very important has fallen by seven percentage points since the last time it was asked, and 12 points since 2010, and is now at an all-time low. The proportion seeing the RCMP as very important to the Canadian identity has also been trending downwards over time (the sharp increase noted in 2015 has now been reversed).

The figures for the Canadian flag and the CBC are also lower than in the early- or mid-2010s (down 8 points since 2010 in the case of the flag; and down 9 points since 2015 in the case of the CBC). But in each case, the longer-term trend is not as clear, as opinions today are not that different from those evident in the 1990s.

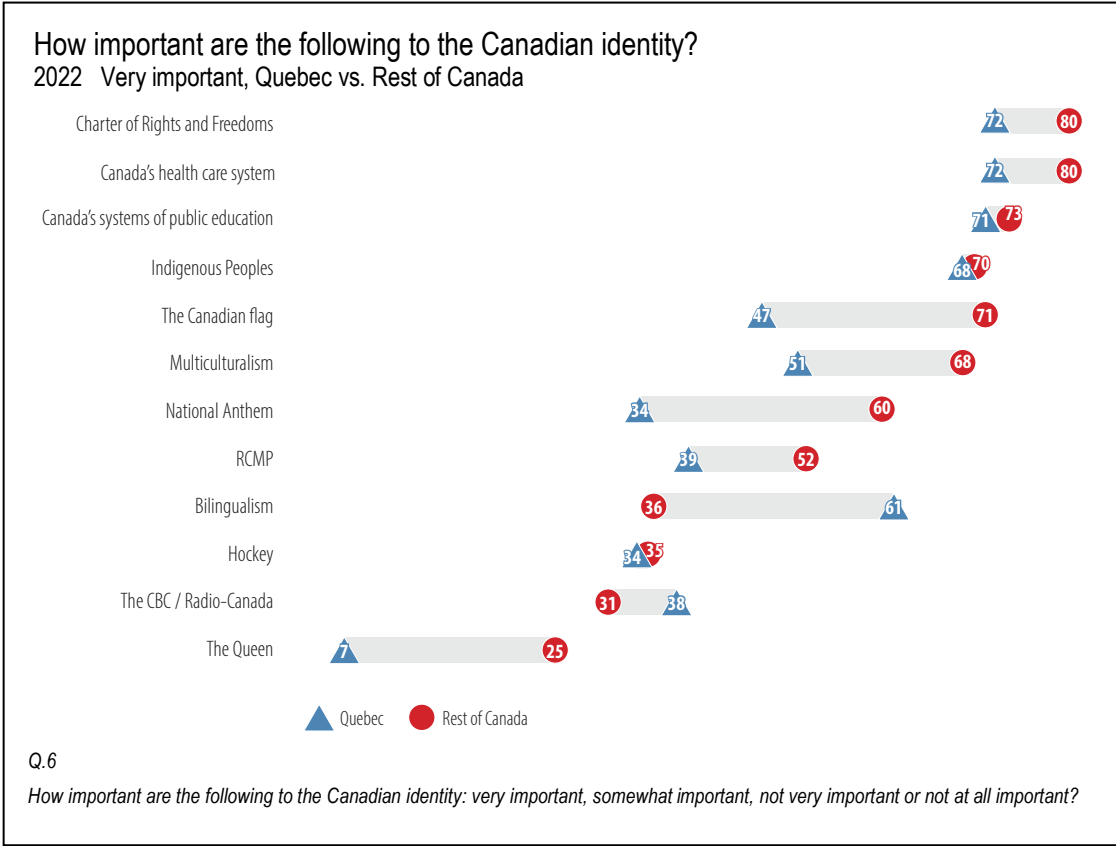
Taking these various trends into account, the following overall pattern emerges. Items relating to Canada’s diversity – such as multiculturalism, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (which protects equality rights), bilingualism and Indigenous Peoples – are all becoming more likely to be seen as important to the Canadian identity. More traditional items, such as the national anthem, the flag, the RCMP and the CBC have – at least more recently – become less important.

**How the Canadian identity differs among population groups**

Perspectives on national identity vary considerably among population groups within the country.

*Quebec and the rest of Canada*

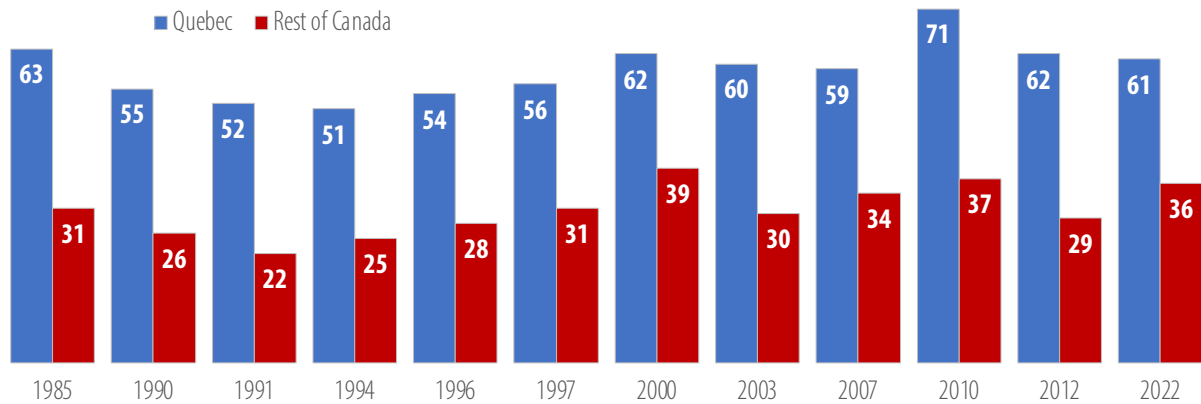
Among the most notable difference are those between Quebecers and those living in the rest of Canada. Quebecers are significantly less likely to say that a number of symbols of the Canadian state are very important to the Canadian identity, including the national anthem (a difference of 26 percentage points), the Canadian flag (a difference of 24 points), the Queen (a different of 18 points) and the RCMP (a difference of 13 points).



Quebecers are also much less likely to say that multiculturalism is very important to the Canadian identity: 51 percent in the province hold this view, compared to 68 percent in the rest of Canada (a 17-point difference). But conversely, Quebecers are much more likely to say that bilingualism is very important: 61 percent, compared to 36 percent in the rest of Canada (a 25-point difference).

### Bilingualism is very important to the Canadian identity

1985 – 2022 Quebec vs. Rest of Canada

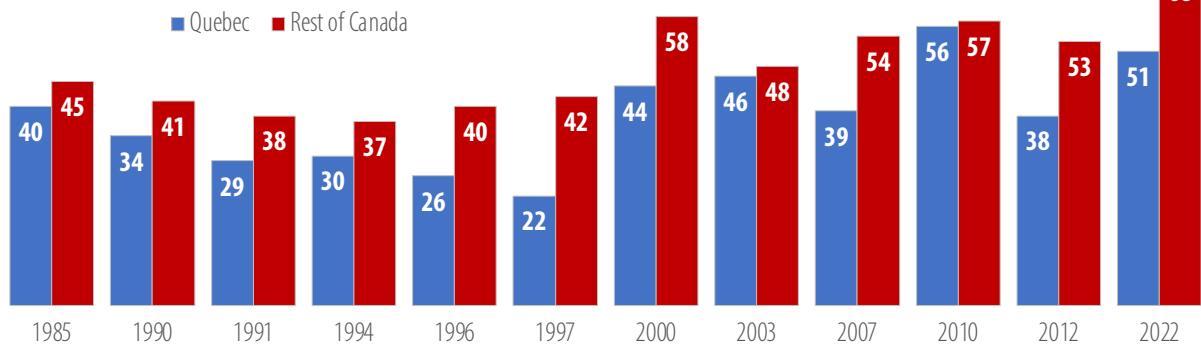


Q.6

*How important are the following to the Canadian identity: very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?*

### Multiculturalism is very important to the Canadian identity

1985 – 2022 Quebec vs. Rest of Canada



Q.6

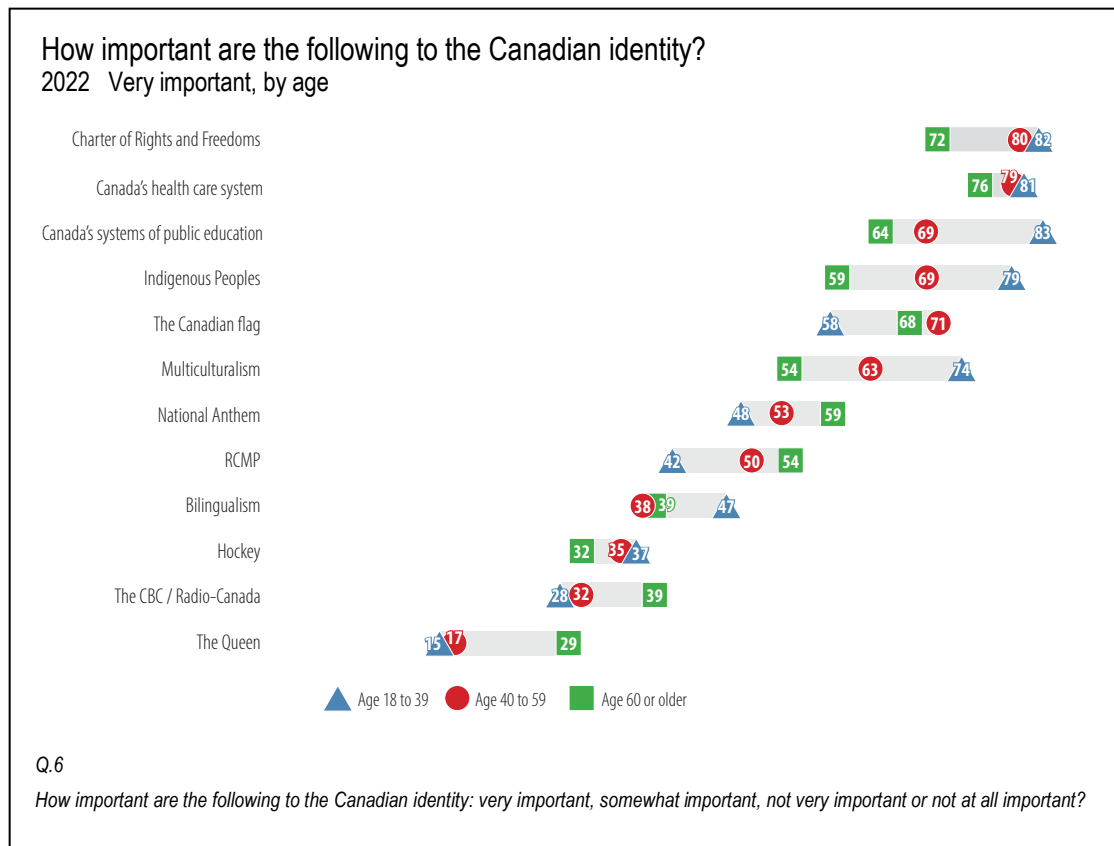
*How important are the following to the Canadian identity: very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?*

While Quebecers are less likely to view multiculturalism as very important to the Canadian identity, compared to their counterparts outside of the province, the proportion holding this opinion is generally increasing in both parts of the country. In Quebec, this proportion was trending downwards between 1985 and 1997, but has trended upwards since then. The proportion of Quebecers who say that multiculturalism is very important to the Canadian identity is currently more than twice as high as it was at its low point in 1997 (51%, compared to 22%).

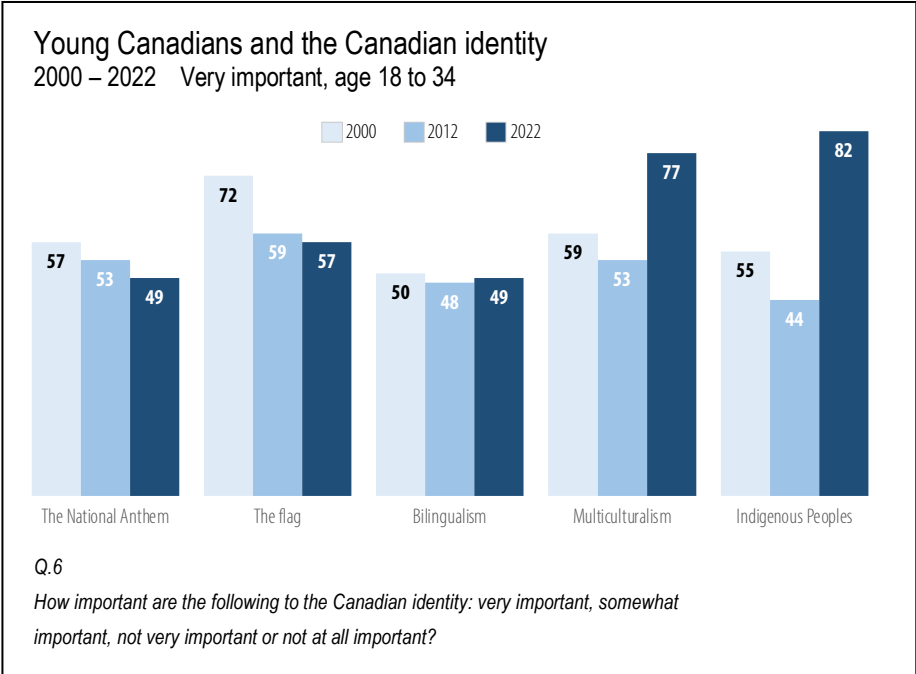
### Age groups

Many of the components of Canadian identity resonate more with younger Canadians (in this case, Canadians under the age of 40) than their older counterparts. This is the case in 2022, both with social programs such as health care and public education, as well as the items associated with Canada’s diversity, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Indigenous Peoples, multiculturalism and bilingualism. The largest differences between the proportions of those under the age of 40, and those age 60 and older, who say an item is very important to the Canadian identity are evident in the cases of multiculturalism (a difference of 20 percentage points), Indigenous Peoples (20 points), and public education (17 points).

Conversely, symbols associated with the Canadian state resonate more with older Canadians, including the national anthem, the RCMP and the Queen.



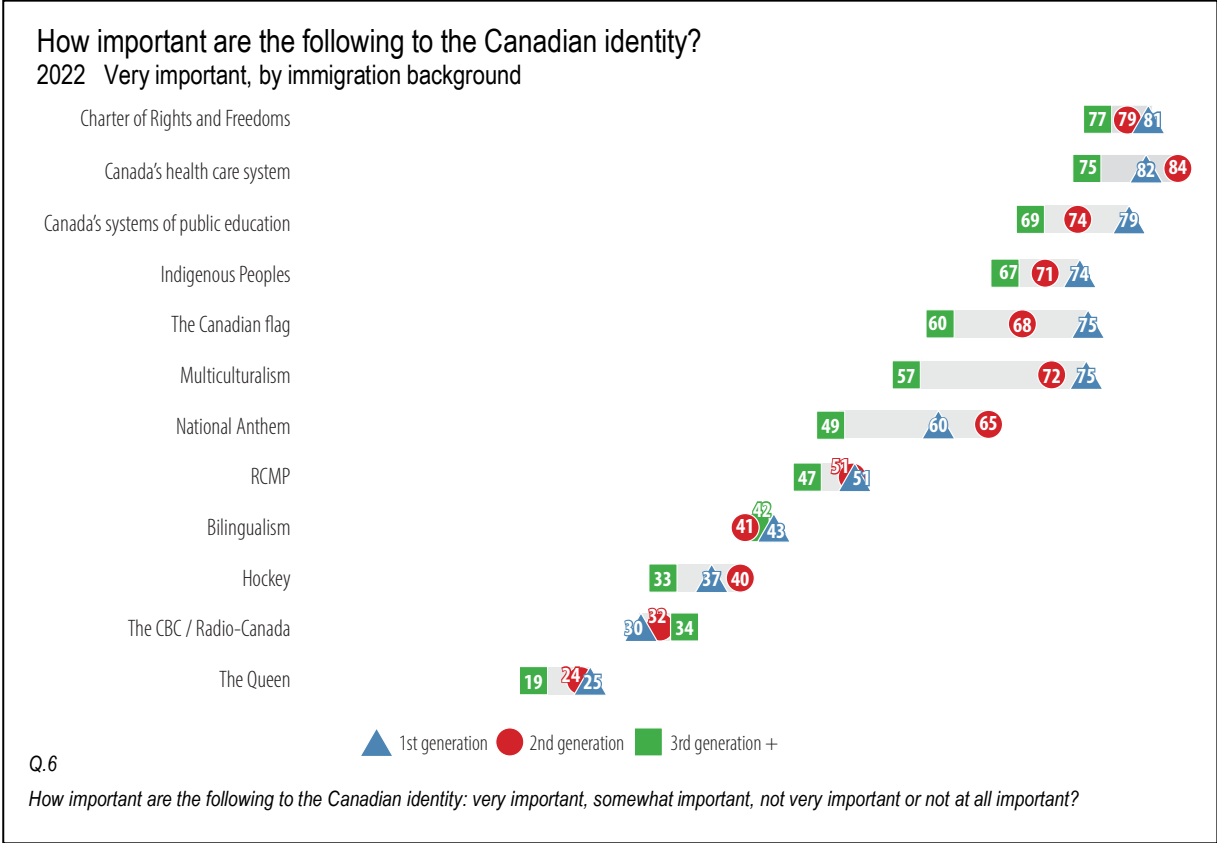
Over time, items associated with Canada’s diversity have grown in importance for younger Canadians, while symbols associated with the Canadian state have become less important. In both 2000 and 2012, for instance, Canadians age 18 to 34 were either just as likely, or more likely, to say that the national anthem or the Canadian flag are very important to the Canadian identity, as they were to say this of



multiculturalism or Indigenous Peoples. But this is no longer the case: in 2022, younger Canadians are much more likely to say that multiculturalism or Indigenous Peoples are very important to the Canadian identity than they are to say this of the national anthem or the flag.

*Immigration background and racial identity*

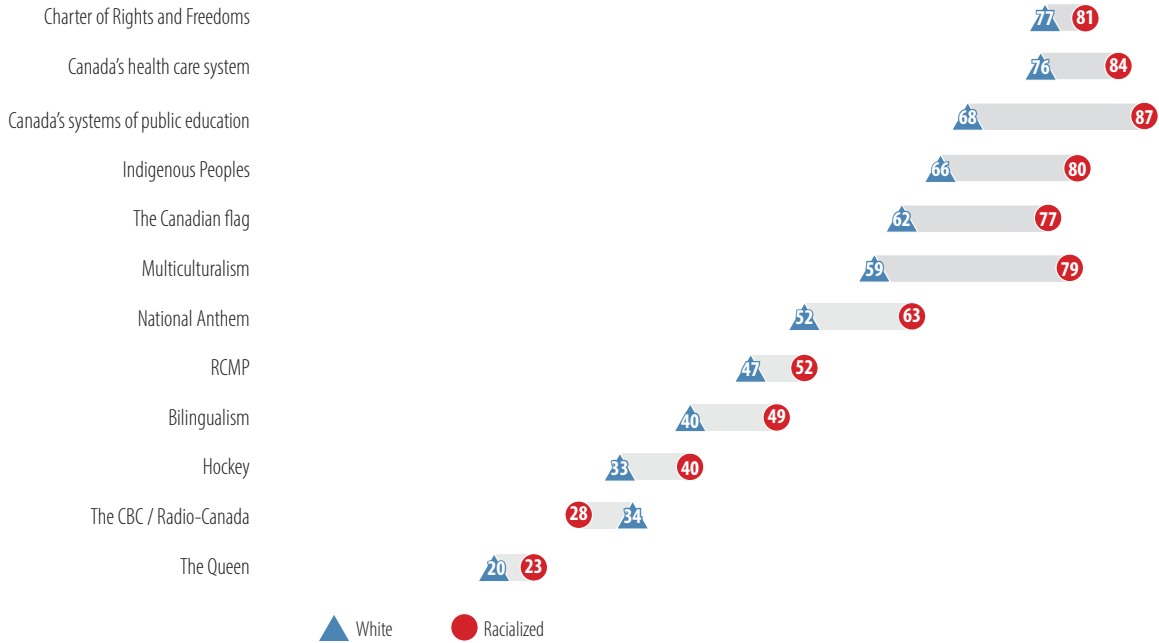
Almost one in four Canadians were born outside the country. And these immigrants are more likely to express attachment to many of the components of the Canadian identity than those born in Canada. This is the case, as might be expected, with multiculturalism: 75 percent of first-generation immigrants, and 72 percent of second-generation immigrants, say this is very important to the Canadian identity, compared to 57 percent of those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents. But it is also the case with other symbols of the Canadian state, such as the flag and the national anthem.



It is notable that both first- and second-generation immigrants are more likely than third-generation-plus Canadians to say that Indigenous Peoples are very important to the Canadian identity. And there are no significant differences among the three groups in the proportions that say that bilingualism is very important.

More than one in four Canadians identify as racialized. A majority of this racialized population is either first- or second-generation immigrants. It is not surprising then that the differences in opinion between racialized and non-racialized Canadians resemble those between immigrants and non-immigrants. Once again, the largest difference is in the case of multiculturalism: 79 percent of racialized Canadians say this is very important to the Canadian identity, compared to 59 percent of those who identify as white. But racialized Canadians are more likely than their non-racialized counterparts to say that every other item included in the survey is very important (including items such as public education, the flag and Indigenous Peoples), with the exception of the CBC.

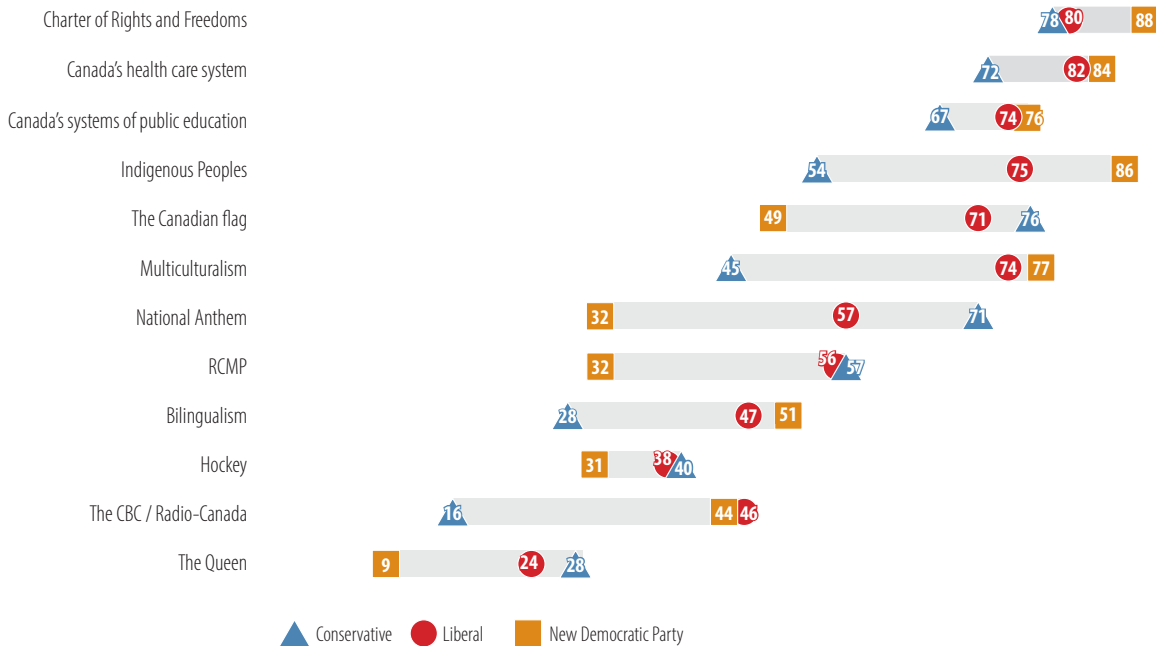
### How important are the following to the Canadian identity? 2022 Very important, by racial identity



Q.6

How important are the following to the Canadian identity: very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?

### How important are the following to the Canadian identity? 2022 Very important, by federal political party support



Q.6

How important are the following to the Canadian identity: very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?

### *Differences among political partisans*

There are important differences in the opinions of supporters of the main federal political parties. Not surprisingly, Conservative Party supporters are more likely than Liberal Party or NDP supporters to say that items traditionally associated with the Canadian state are very important to the Canadian identity, including the flag, the national anthem and the Queen. Items associated with Canada's diversity, such as Indigenous Peoples, multiculturalism and bilingualism are more likely to be seen as very important by Liberal Party or NDP supporters. (Both Liberal and Conservative supporters are more likely than NDP supporters to say the RCMP is very important to the Canadian identity.)

There is also a significant difference of opinion when it comes to the CBC: 46 percent of Liberal Party supporters and 44 percent of NDP supporters say this is very important to the Canadian identity, compared to only 16 percent of Conservative Party supporters.

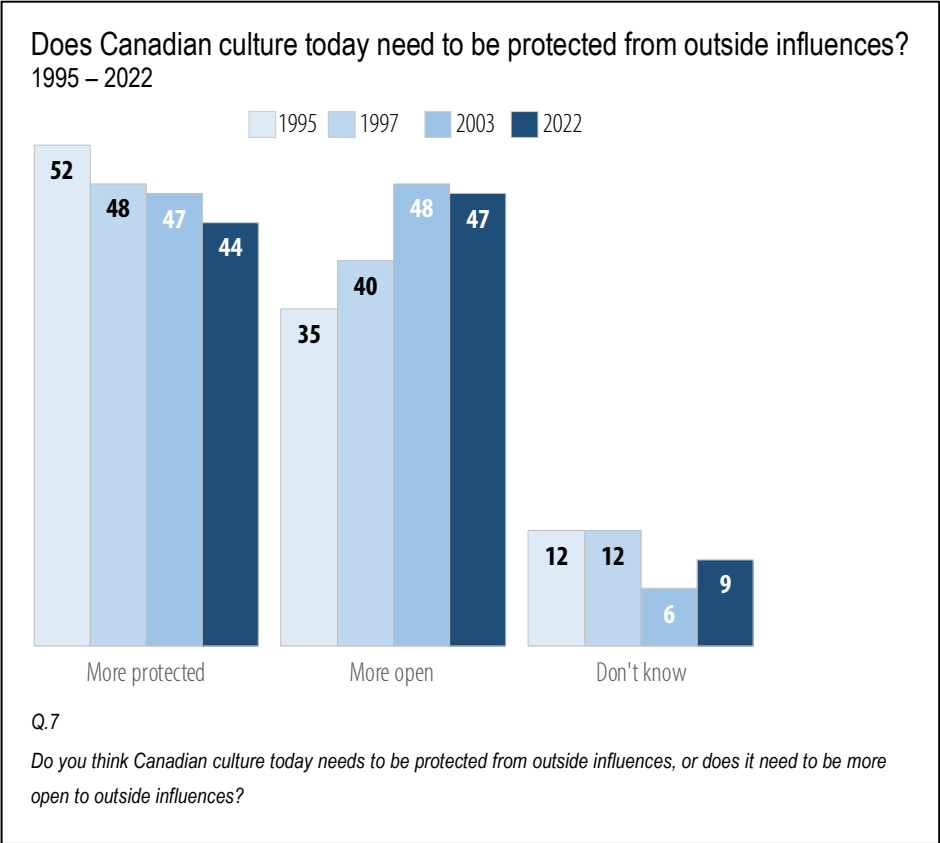
The proportion of supporters of each of the main federal political parties who say that the CBC is very important to the Canadian identity has fluctuated somewhat over time. But in the case of both Liberal Party and NDP supporters, the proportions holding this view today is very close to the average across the 12 previous surveys conducted over three decades (from 1985 to 2015). In the case of Conservative Party supporters, however, the proportion holding this view today is the lowest ever recorded, and about half as large as the average from the 12 previous surveys (it is also lower than the proportion of Reform Party supporters who held this view in the 1990s).

## **Protecting Canadian culture**

*Over time, younger Canadians have become much more likely to agree that Canadian culture should be more open to outside influences.*

***Does Canadian culture need to be protected from outside influences?*** Canadians today are divided on the question of whether Canadian culture needs more protection from outside influences, or need to be more open to outside influences. Currently, 44 percent favour more protection, but only a slightly higher proportion (47%) favours more openness. About one in ten (9%) are unsure and choose neither option.

The proportion of Canadians who say that Canadian culture needs to be protected from outside influences has declined gradually, from 52 percent in 1995 (when this question was first asked), to 44 percent today. In 1995, Canadians were 17 percentage points less likely to say that Canadian culture should be more open to outside influences than they were to say it needs to be protected; today, Canadians are slightly more likely (by 3 points) to prefer more openness.



Canadians between the ages of 18 and 29 (68%) are currently twice as likely as those age 60 and older to favour more openness to outside influences. The preference for more openness is also higher among those with a university degree, compared to those with a high school or college diploma. Supporters of the federal NDP (66%) and Green Party (57%) are more likely than supporters of the other main federal parties to favour more openness, while supporters of the Conservative Party (34%) are less likely to do so.

The patterns related to both age and federal party support have changed significantly over time. Since the mid-1990s, younger Canadians have become much more supportive of more openness: Canadians between the ages of 18 and 29 are now 30 percentage points more likely than in 1995 to say that Canadian culture should be more open to outside influences, whereas there has been essentially no change among those age 60 and older.

Support for more openness has also increased much more sharply among supporters of the federal NDP (from 38% in 1995, to 66% today) than among Liberal Party (from 40% to 49%) or Conservative Party (from 33% to 34%) supporters.

