

A
FOCUS
CANADA
REPORT

Canadian Public Opinion About Immigration & Refugees

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Environics
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For Survey Research



Century
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du Siècle



As part of its Focus Canada public opinion research program (launched in 1976), the Environics Institute updated its research on Canadian attitudes about immigration and refugees. This survey was conducted in partnership with the Century Initiative. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted (via landline and cellphones) with 2,002 Canadians between September 4 and 17, 2023. 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 Dr. Keith Neuman at keith.neuman@environics.ca



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. www.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; 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. www.centuryinitiative.ca

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Executive summary

2023 has been a year in which Canadians have become less satisfied with the direction of the country and more pessimistic about the state of the economy. At the same time as the country welcomed a record number of immigrants. Against this backdrop, the latest Focus Canada research shows there has been a significant increase in the belief that there is too much immigration to Canada, due in large part to a jump in the proportion citing concerns about how newcomers might be contributing to the current housing crisis. This reflects a dramatic shift since a year ago in terms of how the public views the number of immigrants being accepted, but there has been no comparable change in what Canadians think about immigrants themselves or to the contribution they make to their communities and the country.

Over the past year Canadians have become more negative about the direction of the country and the economy, and in governments' ability to plan for future challenges. Inflation and the cost of living, along with housing affordability and interest rates, are now seen as the top issues facing the country.

In 2023, Canada reached a historic milestone – the country's population surpassed 40 million people. The number of people living in Canada rose by more than one million in 2022 – 96 percent due to international migration. This represents the highest annual population growth rate since the post-war boom of 1957. Immigration now accounts for virtually all of Canada's net labour force growth. In addition to the meeting labour market needs, Canada's immigration system serves other goals, including humanitarian ones (in the case of refugees), welcoming international students, and bringing family members together.

This increase has taken place at the same time as growing financial stress for many Canadians who are struggling with high inflation and a so-called housing crisis, contributing to growing concerns about the direction of the economy. This past year has imposed further challenges on many Canadians due to an overly-stretched health care system and environmental disruption from flooding and devastating wildfires.

The result is a public that is now negative about the direction of the country, concerned about their economic prospects, and with diminishing confidence in governments' ability to address the country's challenges ahead. Inflation and the cost of living continue to be among the most important issues facing Canada, with housing affordability also now front and centre concern. As in past years, however, very few single out immigration or refugees as the top problem facing the country.

Canadians are now significantly more likely than a year ago to say there is too much immigration to the country, dramatically reversing a trend dating back decades. For the first time, a growing number of Canadians are questioning *how many* immigrants are arriving, rather than *who* they are and *where* they are coming from.

The latest Focus Canada research shows a significant jump in the proportion of Canadians who believe the country accepts too many immigrants, marking a dramatic reversal from a year ago when public support for immigration numbers stood at an all-time high, which at the time marked a rising trend stretching back three decades. Canadians are still more likely to disagree than agree that immigration levels are too high, but the gap between these two opposing views has shrunk over the past 12 months (from 42 percentage points to just 7). This shift in perspective has happened across the population, but especially in Ontario and B.C., as well as among top-income earners and first-generation Canadians.

A strong majority of Canadians continue to believe that immigration is good for the economy, but rising concerns about immigration numbers have weakened the public consensus on this point over the past 12 months. Fewer also now agree that immigration is needed to maintain the country's population growth, although this opinion remains more widely held in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada.

The true significance of this latest shift in public opinion lies in the fact that it is the first time in many decades (if ever) that a growing number of Canadians are questioning how many immigrants are arriving in the country, as opposed to who they are and where they are coming from, which has been the primary focus of public debate for much of the country's history.

This expanding view that Canada is taking in too many immigrants is driven in large part by rising concerns about how newcomers may be contributing to the housing crisis. At the same time, the public is now much less likely to say that too much immigration represents a threat to the country's culture and values.

Canadians who say the country is accepting too many immigrants cite various reasons for this view, but in 2023 they are most likely to express concerns about the arrival of so many newcomers contributing to the country's problems with housing availability and affordability; this view is much more prominent than a year ago. Less prominent are other concerns such as immigrants placing pressure on public finances, taking jobs from other Canadians, over-population, and insufficient screening. At the same time, the public is now much less likely than a year ago to say high immigration numbers pose a threat to Canada's or Quebec's culture and values.

Apart from rising concerns about the extent of immigration, there has been no corresponding change in how Canadians feel about immigrants themselves, how they integrate, and what they contribute to society. The public is much more likely to say that newcomers make their own communities a better place than a worse one.

Canadians have long been divided when it comes to issues around the legitimacy of refugees and the integration of some newcomers into Canadian society. This continues to be the case in 2023, but these opinions have changed little over the past year, suggesting that increased concerns about the number of immigrants arriving have not turned Canadians away from who they believe should be allowed to settle.

Moreover, many Canadians say they value the presence of immigrants in their local community and see benefits resulting from the multicultural diversity they bring, as well as their contribution to the economy and jobs. Few believe that immigrants make their community a worse place, and even within this group the perceived impact of newcomers on housing does not emerge as a principal complaint. This suggests that Canadians' recent concerns about immigration's effect on housing is more a function of national and regional media narratives about a housing crisis than locally-based developments and direct experience.

Canadian public opinion about immigration is broadly similar across the country, with some regional and group variation. As in past surveys, perspectives diverge most sharply across partisan political lines.

These latest research findings broadly reflect opinions across the country and among groups defined by demographic characteristics, with notable variation on some questions. Quebecers, who in the past have been among the most sensitive to the potential impact of newcomer integration, are now as likely as other Canadians to be comfortable with the country's growing diversity, as Ontarians and British Columbians have become a bit less so over the past year. Perspectives in Quebec have changed significantly since the 1990s when a majority expressed concerns that immigration threatened their culture; today that is the minority view.

Opinions about immigration and refugees continue to diverge most sharply along partisan political lines, with supporters of the federal Liberal, New Democratic and Green parties on one side with generally positive views, in contrast with federal Conservative party supporters on the other side, who are more likely to express concerns. This divide has widened on the issue of immigration numbers (although supporters of all parties are now less supportive than a year ago), but has remained more or less consistent with respect to refugees, integration, and the other issues covered on this survey.

General context

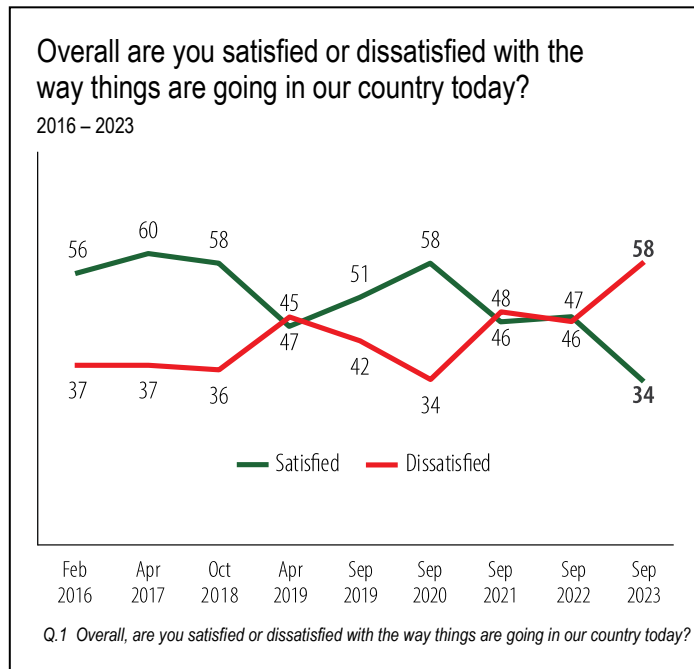
The past year has seen Canadians grow increasingly negative about the direction of the country and the economy, and in governments ability to plan for future challenges. Inflation and the cost of living, along with housing affordability and interest rates, are now seen as the most important issues facing the country.

General direction of the country. Changing public opinion on immigration can be understood in the context of broader trends taking place over the past year.

Canadians' general mood about their country has worsened noticeably over the past 12 months, and is now at its lowest point since 2016 (when this question was first asked on Focus Canada). Just one in three (34%) now say they are satisfied with the way things are going in our country today (down 13 points from 2022), compared with close to six in ten (58%) who express dissatisfaction (up 12).

This decline in satisfaction over the past year is evident across the population. The downward shift is most significant among Quebecers, first generation Canadians, those with a university education and supporters of the federal Liberal Party and Bloc Québécois, although these groups continue to be among the most positive about where they see Canada heading (in each case 40% or more are satisfied).

In comparison, a positive opinion about the country's direction is least evident among Albertans (26% satisfied) and supporters of the federal Conservative Party (16%), along with Canadians who are concerned about the direction of the economy (21%) and home affordability (21%).



Most important problem facing Canadians today. What problems do Canadians identify as the most pressing facing the country today (asked unprompted, with only one response recorded)? No one issue predominates, but as in 2022 the most common problems relate to inflation and the cost of living (24%), along with the economy and interest rates (13%).

What is new in 2023 is the rising salience of housing affordability (14%, up 8 percentage points from a year ago), an issue that barely showed up in the list before 2021). This attention on housing has shifted Canadians’ attention away from such issues as health care (9%, down 6) and environmental issues like climate change (8%, down 2).¹ As in past years, very few (2%) Canadians identify immigration or refugees as the most important problem facing the country today.

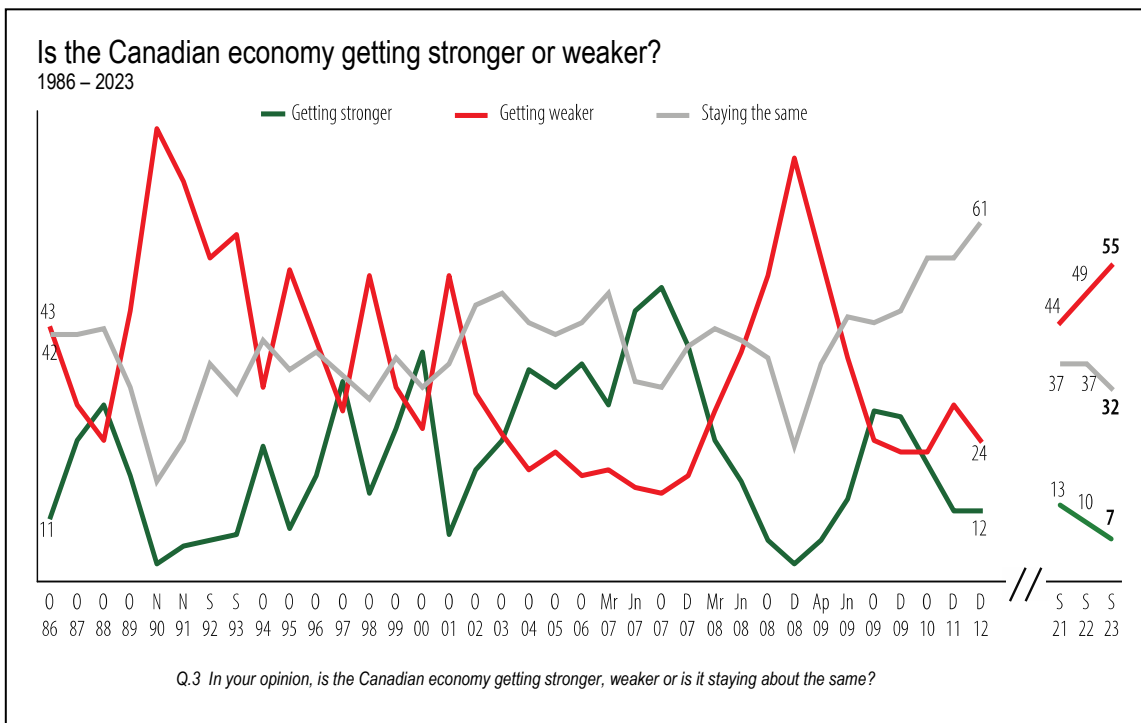
Most important problem facing Canadians today?						
2018 – 2023 Top mentions Unprompted responses						
	Oct 2018	Oct 2019	Oct 2020	Sep 2021	Sep 2022	Sep 2023
Inflation / cost of living / gas prices	4	8	1	3	22	24
Affordable housing	–	–	1	5	6	14
Economy / interest rates / unemployment	18	14	17	10	12	13
Health care	9	9	7	9	15	9
Environment / climate change	10	24	5	13	10	8
Poor government leadership	8	8	8	7	7	8
Immigration / refugees	5	2	1	1	1	2
COVID-19 pandemic	–	–	39	24	2	*

Q.2 In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing Canadians today?

The public’s focus on housing affordability is now most pronounced in Ontario (18%) and B.C. (19%), as well as among Canadians 18 to 29 years of age (23%), those who are first generation in the country (19%) and supporters of the federal New Democratic Party (19%). This issue attracts much less attention in Quebec (7%), where residents are more apt to mention the economy or health care; and in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (5%), where the focus is centred on inflation/cost of living.

¹ This question asks for and only accepts one response (*the* most important issue), as a way to measure the relative salience of problems. A different question allowing for multiple responses would undoubtedly result in Canadians identifying more than one problem as important ones facing the country.

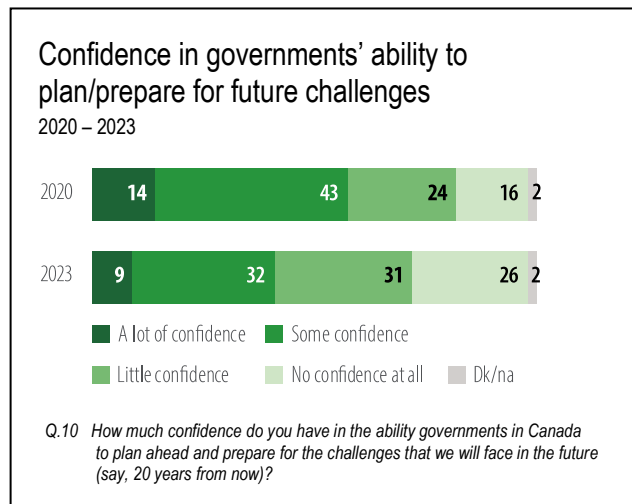
Direction of the Canadian economy. Canadians' growing concerns about inflation and interest rates are contributing to deteriorating public confidence in the country's economy. A rising majority (55%) believe the economy is getting weaker (up 6 points from 2022), with fewer now saying it is staying the same (32%, down 5) or getting stronger (7%, down 3). In historical terms, current public confidence in the country's economy is approaching a level of pessimism comparable to the 2008-09 recession and in previous economic downturns stretching back over the past four decades (see chart below).



Confidence in the economy has declined across the country, but since 2022 is most noticeable in Quebec and Alberta, as well as among Canadians ages 30 to 59. Economic pessimism is now most widespread among Albertans (63% say the Canadian economy is getting worse) and those ages 45 to 59 (63%). Views about the direction of the economy diverge sharply across the political spectrum with negative opinions most pronounced among Conservative supporters (74%), and least so among supporters of the federal Liberals (33%), with those who favour the NDP (44%), Green Party (48%) or Bloc Québécois (48%) somewhere in between.

Confidence in governments' ability to plan and prepare for the future. Citizens look to their governments (at all levels) to plan and prepare for the problems and challenges both current and future, and this becomes especially important in times of economic and social turmoil. Growing public concerns about the overall direction of the country and a worsening economy reflect reduced confidence in how governments are responding to such challenges.

The latest survey reveals that just four in ten Canadians have a lot of confidence (9%) or some confidence (32%) in the ability of their governments to plan ahead and prepare for the challenges they will face in the future. This proportion is 16 percentage points smaller than in fall 2020, when the country (and world) was grappling with the first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. A clear majority now say they have little (31%) or no (26%) confidence in what their governments can do to plan and prepare for the future (up 17 points).



This declining confidence in government is apparent across the country, but most significant in Atlantic Canada (42% express a lot or some confidence, down 22 points), Ontario (39%, down 22) and B.C. (39%, down 20), while negligible in Quebec (49%, down 4), as well as in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (47%, down 2).

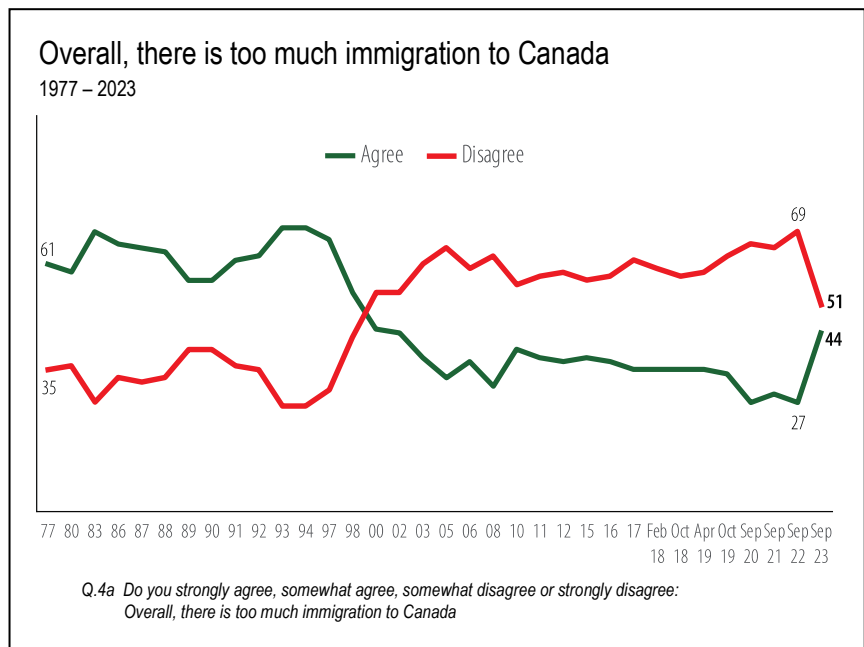
While this question was framed in terms of governments broadly defined (i.e., federal, provincial and municipal), opinions about ability to plan and prepare for the future are most clearly linked to federal political party support: A strong majority (69%) of Liberal Party supporters express a lot or some confidence in government ability to plan and prepare, in contrast to those who would place their vote with the Conservative Party (21%), with those endorsing the NDP (49%) or Bloc Québécois (48%) in between. Notably, confidence in governments declined by double digits among supporters of all federal parties since 2020, with the exception of those affiliated with the BQ (among whom such confidence increased by 8 points).

Overall level of immigration

In the past 12 months, a significantly greater minority of Canadians have come to believe there is too much immigration, dramatically reversing a trend dating back decades. This shift is driven in large part by rising concerns about the impact of immigration on housing availability and affordability.

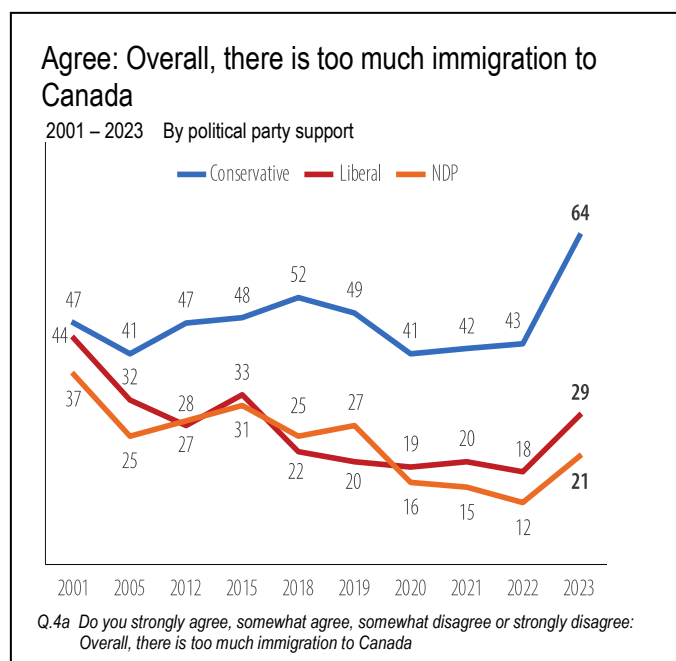
Agree-Disagree: “Overall, there is too much immigration to Canada.” For two decades a majority of Canadians have rejected the premise that the country accepts too many immigrants, and this sentiment has been largely unaffected by economic and political events. But the combination of a record high immigrant intake, high inflation and a declared “housing crisis” has dramatically altered the public’s view about current immigration levels.

More than four in ten Canadians now strongly (23%) or somewhat (21%) agree there is too much immigration to Canada, up 17 percentage points since one year ago, compared with just over half who somewhat (25%) or strongly (26%) disagree (down 18 points), with the remainder (5%) offering no clear opinion either way.² This shift in opinion since 2022 represents the largest one year change recorded for this question on Focus Canada since tracking began in 1977. The two points on this trend line are now the closest they have been since 2002.



This significant jump in concern about immigration numbers is evident across the country, with the proportion in agreement with the statement increasing over the past year by double digits in almost every identifiable group. This change in opinion is most notable in Ontario (up 20 percentage points), where agreement now outweighs disagreement (50%, versus 46%), as well as in B.C. (up 20), among Canadians in the top income brackets (up 18), men (up 18), and first generation Canadians (up 20).

The likelihood of agreement about too much immigration is now roughly comparable by community size, age cohort, household income, and generation in Canada. Homeowners



²The significance of the shift is amplified by the fact that across the data points the largest changes since 2022 have been in an increase in those who *strongly* agree that immigration levels are too high (up 11 points) and a corresponding decline among those who *strongly* disagree (down 12).

very worried about the affordability of their current home are almost twice as likely to say there is too much immigration (64%) compared with those who are not worried (36%).

As before, opinions about immigration diverge most sharply across federal political party lines, and this divide has widened noticeably over the past 12 months. Agreement that there is too much immigration to Canada has jumped to 64 percent among federal Conservative Party supporters (up 21 points since 2022), with smaller increases among those who would vote for the federal Liberal Party (29%, up 11), NDP (21%, up 9) and Bloc Québécois (44%, up 12).

Reasons for too much immigration. Those who agree with the statement that Canada accepts too many immigrants were asked why they believe this (in an open-ended question, without offering prompting response options). As in 2022, a range of reasons are offered for this opinion, but the emphasis given to some has changed significantly since a year ago. Those holding this view are now most likely to say there is too much immigration because of concerns about immigrants affecting the availability and/or affordability of housing (38%, up 23 points) (this represents 17% of all Canadians responding to the survey).

Other reasons given remain largely the same as a year ago, in terms of immigrants placing a drain on public finances (25%), being bad for the economy and employment (25%), concerns about over-population (19%), and the belief that immigration is being poorly managed by government (10%).

Notably, Canadians are much *less likely* than in 2022 to say that immigration levels are too high because it represents a threat to Canadian or Quebec culture, identity and values (8%, down 16 points). As before, few cite reasons pertaining to security or public health threats, or to the number of immigrants coming as students to study in Canadian universities and colleges.

Housing concerns are now the most widely cited reasons for too much immigration across the country, reflecting double digit increases across all identifiable groups, and most noticeably in Atlantic Canada and Alberta. Conversely, concerns about

threats to identity and culture have dropped across the population as well, and most dramatically in Quebec (where only 11% cite this reason for too much immigration, down 27 points from 2022).

Although opinions about overall immigration levels differ sharply across federal party lines, this is not reflected among those who agree with the statement. Supporters of the main federal parties who say that immigration levels are too high all give the same types of reasons for this view, in roughly the same proportions.

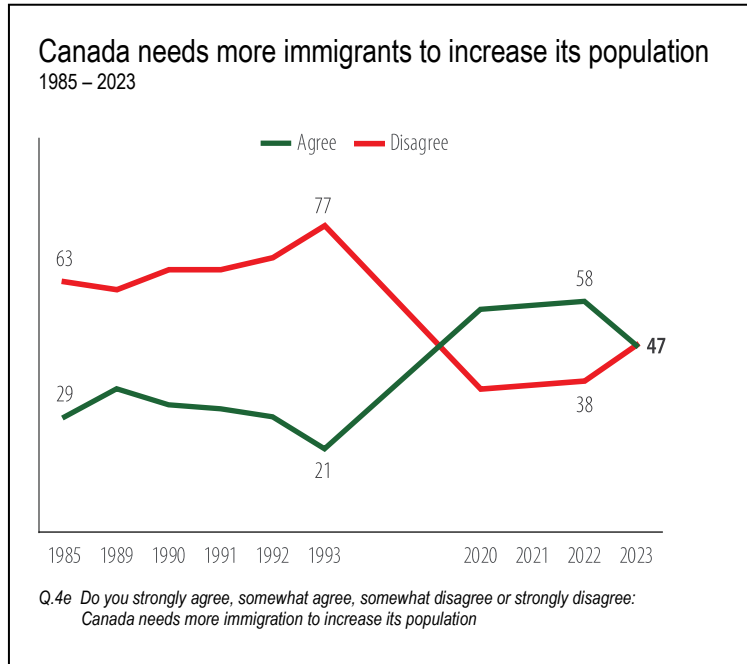
	2022	2023
Immigrants drive up housing prices / less housing for other Canadians	15	38
Immigrants are a drain on public finances / cost too much	23	25
Bad for economy / take jobs from other Canadians	21	25
Over-population / already too many people in Canada	19	19
Immigration is poorly managed by government / lack of screening	13	10
Threat to Canadian / Quebec culture (identity / language / values)	24	8
Immigrants are a security risk / risk of terrorism / extremism	3	4
Too many foreign students	*	4
Immigrants are a public health risk / COVID-19 threat	1	1
Other reasons	5	3

Q.5 Why do you say there is too much immigration to Canada?

Agree-Disagree: “Canada needs more immigration to increase its population.” Over the past few years, Immigrants have made up almost all of the country's population increase. Along with new concerns about immigration numbers, Canadians are now less convinced than before that immigrants are needed to maintain population growth.

The public is now evenly divided between those who agree (47%) and disagree (47%) with the statement that “Canada needs more immigration to increase its population.” This represents an 11 percentage point decline in agreement from a year ago, reversing an upward trend recorded between 1993 and 2022.

Agreement with Canada needing immigrants to increase its population has declined since 2022 across the population, and most noticeably in Ontario (43%, down 18 points), among Canadians in the top income brackets (49%, down 18), and first generation Canadians (57%, down 16). Only in B.C. (50%, down 3) is the downward trend negligible.



Agreement with the statement is now strongest among Quebecers (54%), Canadians with a university degree (55%), and those who support the federal Liberal Party (65%) or NDP (59%). This view is least apt to be shared among Albertans (38%), Canadians with no post-secondary education (39%), residents of rural communities (38%), and those who support the federal Conservative Party (33%). Agreement is also low among homeowners who say they are very worried about being able to pay for their home (26%), reflecting the growing concerns about the impact that immigration is having on housing affordability.

Economic impact of immigration

A large but declining majority of Canadians believe that immigration has a positive impact on the country's economy, a change that reflects growing public concerns about the economy and how it could be further affected by a record number of newcomers now arriving.

Agree-Disagree: "Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada." Public support for immigration is grounded in part in the belief that it supports the country's economy. For two decades a decisive majority of Canadians have adopted this view, and this continues to be the case today. However, recent concerns about the number of immigrants arriving have weakened this consensus.

Three-quarters now strongly (36%) or somewhat (38%) agree with the statement about immigration having a positive impact on the country's economy (down 11 points from 2022), compared with one in five who now somewhat (11%) or strongly (10%) disagree (up 8), and another four percent with no clear opinion either way (up 1).

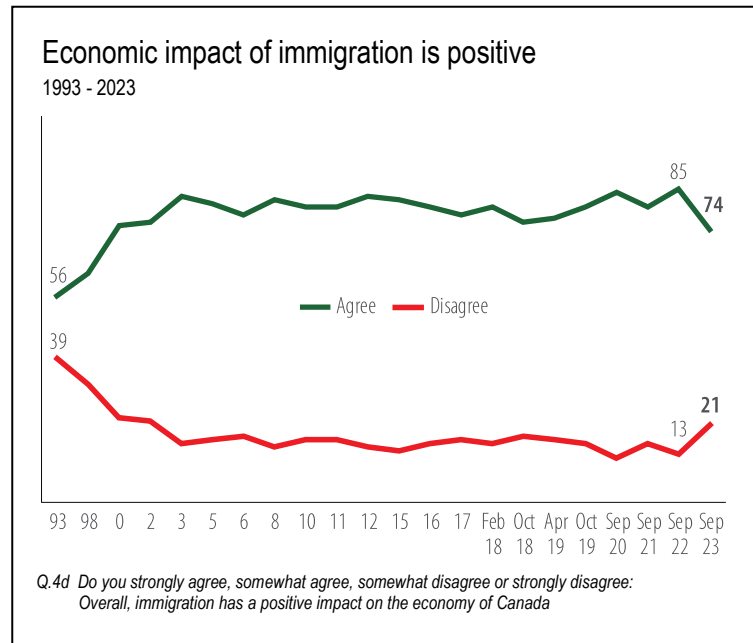
Overall agreement with the statement is now at its lowest point since 1998.

Notably, the most significant change over the past year is a drop in the proportion who *strongly* agree with the statement (down 14).

As with the other questions in this section, the change in public opinion is evident across the population (rather than centred within specific groups). The decline in *strong* agreement with the statement is most notable in Ontario (38%, down 19 points) and among residents in the country's largest cities (36%, down 18).

Despite this latest shift, overall agreement that immigrants help the economy remains the view of at least two-thirds of Canadians across all groups except supporters of the federal Conservative Party (63%) and homeowners very worried about housing affordability (59%).

Predictably, belief in the positive economic benefits of immigration is closely tied to opinions about current immigration numbers. Among who disagree that immigration levels are too high, almost all (93%) agree on immigration benefitting the economy, with 73 percent in *strong* agreement. By comparison, among those say immigration to Canada is too high, only 58 percent believe in positive economic benefits (19% who *strongly* agree).

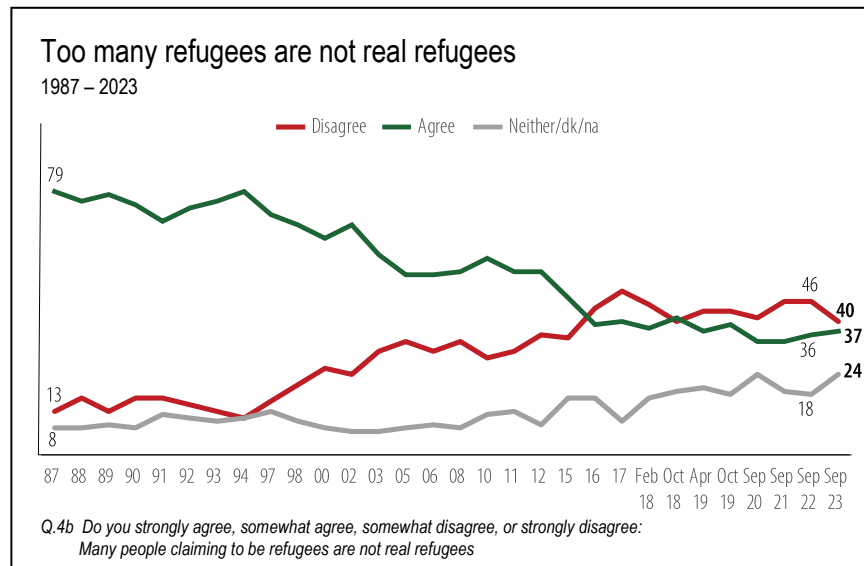


Refugee policy

Canadians continue to be largely divided on whether all refugees are legitimate, and place a strain on the country's welfare system. Opinions have held largely steady despite increased concerns about the number of immigrants arriving in the country.

Agree-Disagree: “Many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees.” Refugees make up a very small proportion of the newcomers arriving in Canada each year, so it is unlikely that they are the focus of growing public concerns about the country's capacity to absorb large numbers from abroad. But opinions continue to be divided as to whether all refugees are legitimate.

Just over one in three Canadians strongly (16%) or somewhat (21%) agree with the statement that “many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees”, up one percentage point from a year ago and similar to what was recorded back to 2020. But opposition to the statement has declined since 2022, with four in ten now somewhat (20%) or strongly (20%) in disagreement (down 6 points), with a corresponding rise in those who do not have a clear opinion (24%, up 6).



Across the country, declining rejection of the premise of illegitimate refugees is most evident in Ontario (38%, down 7 points), Manitoba and Saskatchewan (38%, down 12) and B.C. (44%, down 11), along with Canadians ages 18 to 29 (52%, down 10) who nevertheless continue to be among the most positive about refugees. As before, agreement with the statement continues to be most prevalent among men, Canadians ages 60 plus, those who are first generation immigrants, and those with no post-secondary education.

As with immigration levels, opinions about the legitimacy of refugees divides along partisan political lines, but with no significant shifts over the past year. Rejection of the claim that some refugees are not legitimate continues to be strongest among supporters of the federal Liberal (54%), New Democratic (62%) and Green (61%) parties, and weakest among those who would vote for the federal Conservative Party (26%, versus 49% who agree with the statement; both percentages are down 4 points since 2022). The increase since last year among those without a clear opinion on this question is most pronounced among Conservative supporters (up 9 points) and those with no clear vote preference (up 10)

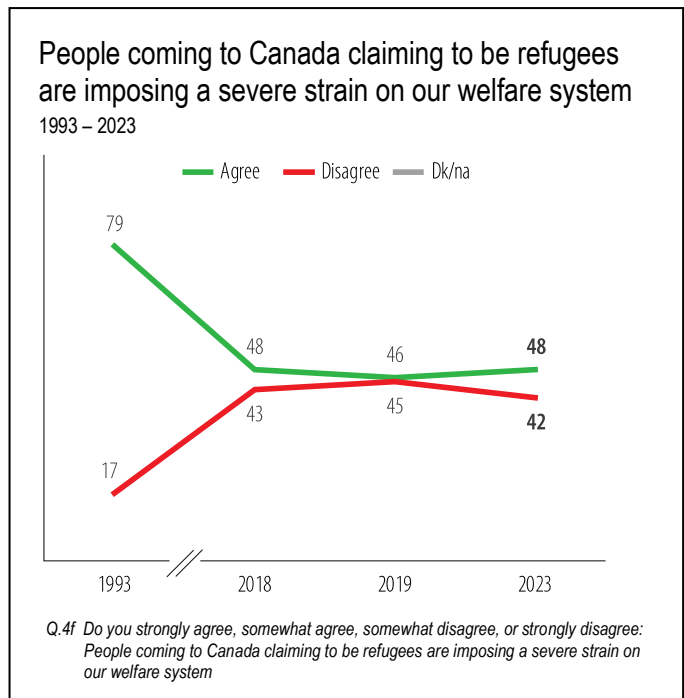
Agree – Disagree: “People coming to Canada claiming to be refugees are imposing a severe strain on our welfare system.” Are Canadians concerned about the impact that refugees are having on the country's capacity to look after citizens who require government assistance? The survey included a question from previous Focus Canada surveys just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2018 and 2019), as well as in 1993.

As with the question about refugee legitimacy, public opinion is divided. Just under half strongly (23%) or somewhat (25%) agree with the statement (up 2 points since 2019), compared with four in ten who somewhat (22%) or strongly (20%) disagree (down 3), essentially returning to 2018 levels. One in ten (up 2) have no clear opinion on this question.

Opinions on this question vary somewhat across the country. Concerns about refugee impacts on the welfare system are most evident among older Canadians, men, those without a university degree, and residents of rural communities. Agreement with the statement is strongest in Ontario and Alberta (52% in each province), and weakest in Quebec (43%, versus 48% disagree) and B.C. (43%).

The largest divide continues to be along political partisan lines, although less so than in 2019: Two-thirds (66%) of Conservative supporters agree with this statement (down 2 points), compared with fewer among those who support the Bloc Québécois (49%, unchanged), the Liberal Party (39%, up 8), the NDP (23%, down 11), and the Green Party (29%, down 4).

Not surprisingly, opinions about refugee impacts on the country's welfare system are tightly linked to views about immigration numbers and refugee legitimacy: Among those who believe refugees strain the public welfare system, large majorities also agree that there is too much immigration (71%) and that some refugees are not legitimate (73%).



Integration of immigrants into society

Canadians remain evenly divided on whether some newcomers are doing enough to integrate into Canadian society. At the same time native-born and foreign-born Canadians largely agree on what values immigrants need to adopt when they move to this country.

Agree-Disagree: “There are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values.” The aspect about immigration that has been most contentious for Canadians is how newcomers are seen to be integrating (or not) into Canadian society, especially when it comes to religious practices and gender equity. For much of the past three decades, a majority has expressed concerns about some immigrants not doing enough to fit in; this sentiment is now less widespread since a decade or so ago, but opinions have been evenly divided over the past few years.

In 2023, close to half of Canadians strongly (25%) or somewhat (23%) agree with this statement about too many immigrants not adopting Canadian values (up 3 points since 2022), compared with a slightly smaller proportion who somewhat (23%) or strongly (22%) disagree (down 4). This marginal change over the past year reverses a previous trend and returns to the balance of opinion recorded in 2021 (48% agree versus 46% disagree). Close to one in ten (8%, up 4) now have no clear view either way.

Views on this issue have changed over the past year among some groups, but not all in the same direction. Agreement with the statement about some immigrants not adopting Canadian values has strengthened in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, among Canadians ages 18 to 29 and 45 to 59, while weakening in Alberta, as well as among those ages 30 to 44 and 60 plus. Agreement continues to be somewhat more evident among men (52%), Canadians with no post-secondary education (56%) and those living in rural areas (56%). Attitudes in Quebec -- where issues of cultural integration have in historical terms been the most sensitive -- largely match the national average, with little change over the past year (49% agree, versus 44% disagree; both down 2 points since 2022).

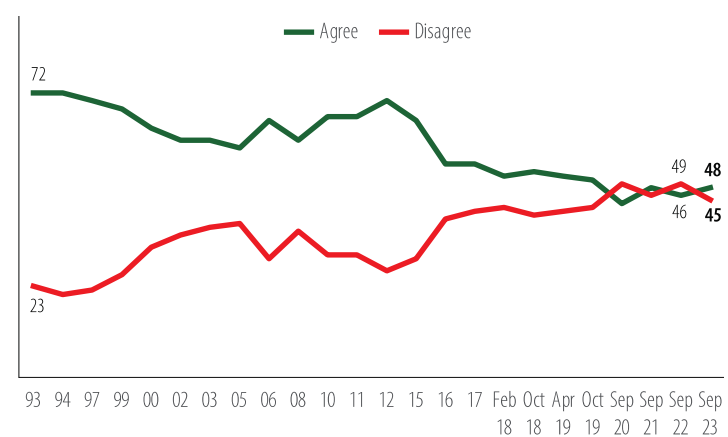
As before, attitudes about immigrant integration are shaped by political affiliation: Agreement with the statement continues to be most prevalent among Conservative supporters (64%, up 1 from 2022), in contrast to those who would vote for the Liberals (37%, down 3), NDP (27%, unchanged) or Green Party (30%, down 8). In between are those supporting the Bloc Québécois (56%, down 11) and those with no clear vote preference (45%, up 3).

Agree-Disagree: “Canada is doing a good job integrating immigrants into Canadian society.” This year’s survey included a question last covered by Focus Canada in 1993 about how the country is doing in integrating immigrants into Canadian society (asked to those living outside of Quebec).

Over three decades, opinions on this issue have not changed significantly, although Canadians outside Quebec are now somewhat more positive in their assessment. Half strongly (15%) or somewhat (35%) agree with the statement about Canada doing a good job of integrating immigrants into society (up 4 points since 1993), compared with just over four in ten who somewhat (20%) or strongly (23%) disagree (down 6). Another six percent have no clear opinion (unchanged).

Too many immigrants do not adopt Canadian values

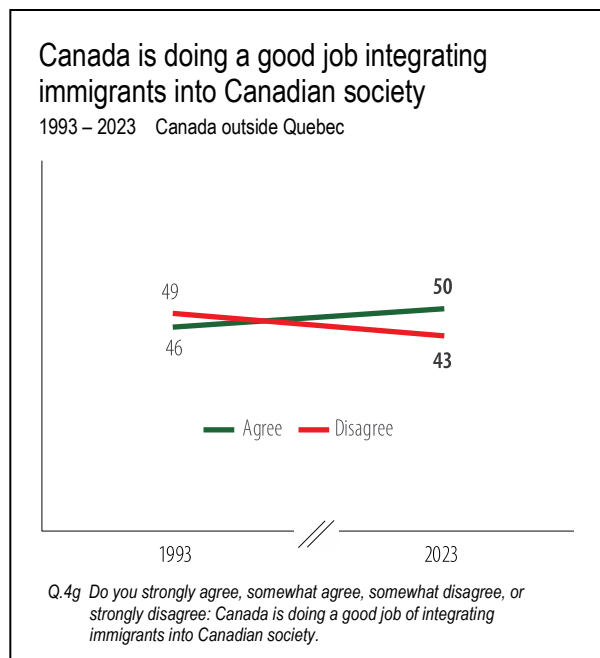
1993 – 2023



Q.4c Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree:
There are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values

Across the country, agreement with the statement is most prevalent in Atlantic Canada (61%) and among first generation Canadians (57%), and least evident in Ontario (45%) and those who are second generation in the country (38%).

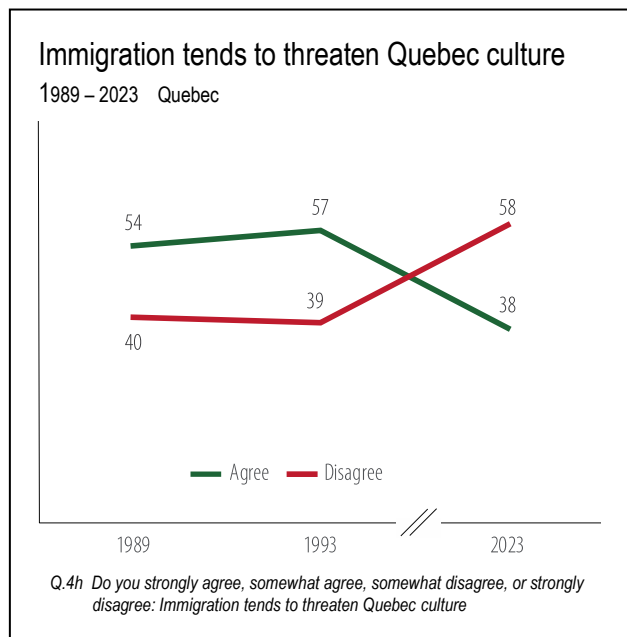
As on other issues, opinions divide along partisan lines, with majority agreement expressed by those supporting the Liberals (66%) and NDP (60%), in contrast to those who support the Conservatives (34%). This stands in sharp contrast to perspectives in 1993, when supporters of the three traditional federal parties were in close agreement on the integration of immigrants, with Reform Party supporters as the outliers.



Agree-Disagree: “Immigration tends to threaten Quebec culture.” How do Quebecers feel about the integration of immigrants in their province? This year’s survey included a question previously asked in 1989 and 1993, and – in contrast to opinions elsewhere in the country – the results reveal a dramatic change in perspective from three decades ago.³

In 2023, fewer than four in ten Quebecers strongly (15%) or somewhat (23%) agree that “immigration tends to threaten Quebec culture” (down 19 points since 1993), compared with a majority who now somewhat (31%) or strongly (27%) disagree (up up 19). Another five percent have no clear opinion either way (unchanged).

Across the Quebec population, agreement with this statement increases with age, and decreases with level of education. Across the political spectrum in the province, concern about immigration affecting culture is most pronounced among Bloc Québécois supporters (57%).



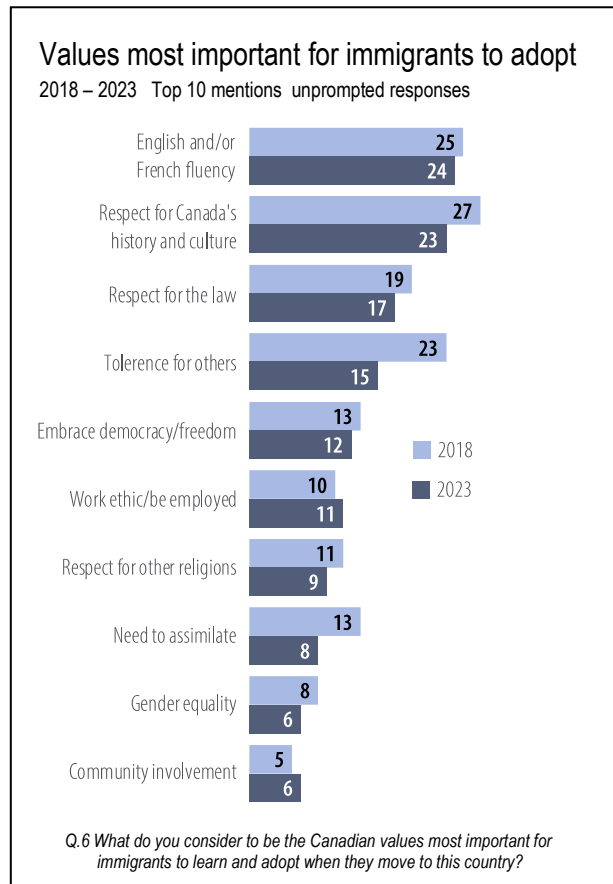
³ The question used on the 1989 survey used the term “French-Canadian culture.”

Which Canadian values are most important for immigrants to adopt? What exactly do Canadians expect of newcomers in terms of integrating into local society? This year’s survey repeated a question from previous Institute research (in 2011, 2016 and 2018) aimed at addressing this question by asking people to identify (unprompted, without offering response options) what Canadian values they believe are most important for immigrants to learn and adopt when they move to this country. As before, Canadians identify a number of values they consider to be important, with the list and relative priority assigned to each generally consistent with what was recorded in previous years.

At the top of the list of desirable Canadian values is language fluency (either English or French) (24%), followed closely by respect for the country’s history and culture (23%). Other important values include respect for the law (17%), tolerance of others (15%), embracing democracy and freedom (12%) and a strong work ethic or becoming employed (11%). One in ten say there are no such values that immigrants need to adopt (4%) or otherwise offer no response to the question (8%).

Results in most cases are comparable to those recorded in 2018, with the exception of fewer identifying respect for history and culture (down 4 points), tolerance of others (down 8) and the need to assimilate (down 5).

Opinions about important Canadian values for immigrants to adopt are largely similar across the population, with a few notable exceptions. The emphasis placed on language fluency is most prevalent in Quebec (39%, up 7 points from 2018), respect for history and culture is most apt to be mentioned by Conservative party supporters (29%, down 4), and mention of gender equality is most evident in Quebec (11%, down 3), as well as in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (11%, up 8).



Notably, there is little relationship between the values identified as important for immigrants to adopt and the extent to which people believe immigrants are adopting Canadian values. Those who agree with the statement that too many are not doing so are only marginally more apt to emphasize language fluency and respect for history and culture, while those who disagree are a bit more likely to prioritize tolerance for others.

Since 2018, references to tolerance of others have declined across most groups but most noticeably among residents of Ontario (18%, down 11) and B.C. (15%, down 13), as well as among Canadian ages 18 to 29 (16%, down 18).

How do views on this question compare between native-born and foreign-born Canadians? The list of identified values and their rank order are notably similar, with a few differences. Native-born Canadians are more apt to emphasize language fluency, while foreign-born give somewhat greater attention to respect for the country’s history and culture, respect for the law, and tolerance of others (with these differences widening somewhat since 2018).

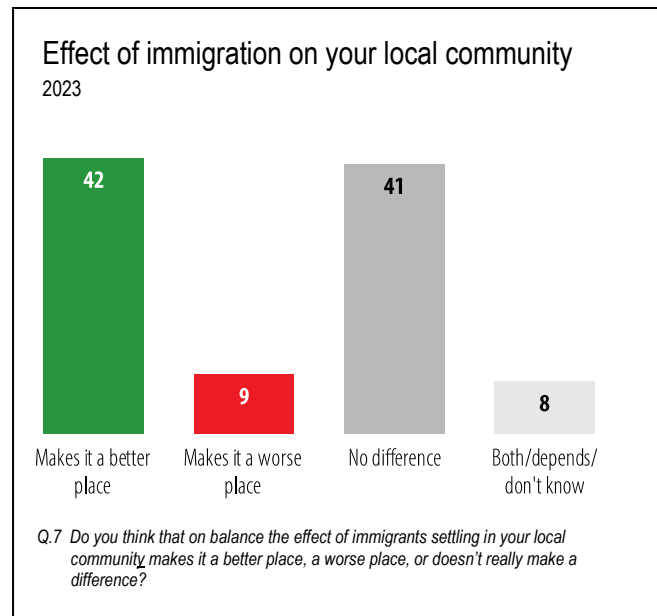
Local impacts of immigration

Canadians are much more likely to believe that immigrants make their local communities a better place than a worse one – by a four-to-one margin. What people value most is the multicultural diversity that immigration provides, along with economic and population growth benefits.

The Focus Canada research on immigration and related issues has framed questions primarily at the broad national picture. This year's survey included new questions to understand how Canadians look at immigration at the local level. Survey participants were asked if on balance they believe the effect of immigrants settling in their local community makes it a better place, a worse, or makes no difference at all.⁴ The results reveal that immigrants are much more likely to be valued for what they contribute to Canadian communities than what they may be seen to take away.

More than four in ten (42%) say that immigrants make their community a better place, compared with fewer than one in ten (9%) who believe they make things worse. The remainder maintain that immigrants make no difference in the end (41%), or volunteer a more nuanced response (both better and worse – 2% or depends – 3%). Three percent did not provide any response to the question.

Views about local immigration impacts vary somewhat across the country. Those most likely to say that immigrants make their community better include residents of Atlantic Canada (49%) and B.C. (51%), Canadians with a university degree (55%), and supporters of the federal Liberal (52%) and New Democratic (61%) parties. This perspective is much less evident among Canadians with no post-secondary education (27%), homeowners very concerned about housing affordability (29%), and Conservative Party supporters (30%).



In no group do more than one in six say that immigrants make their local community worse, but this view is most apt to be expressed by Conservative Party supporters (16%); among other groups this percentage is no more than 12 percent. Opinions do not vary significantly by community size, with rural residents only marginally less likely to say immigrants make their community better (36%, versus 11% who say it is worse). Across the country, it is in Quebec (4%), Manitoba and Saskatchewan (5%) where the fewest believe immigrants have a negative impact on their community, in comparison with those living in Ontario (12%) and B.C. (11%).

How immigrants make local communities better. Canadians who say that immigrants make their country either better or worse were asked why they think so (unprompted, without offering response options). Among those who believe that immigrants make their communities a better place (42% of the population), most (75%) say they value what immigrants contribute in terms of multiculturalism and diversity.

Others emphasize the practical benefits to the local economy (33%) (e.g., new businesses, new customers, adding to the labour force) and helping the local population grown (12%). Others focus on more intangible benefits of newcomers in terms of their presence showing that people in their community are caring (11%) or otherwise enhancing its reputation (7%).

⁴ In 2021 Focus Canada posed a similar question about how Canadians believed immigration made the country a better or worse place.

Reasons for valuing immigrants locally are similar across the country, with multiculturalism most widely cited in Alberta (81%) and boosting the economy in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (46%). Rural residents are marginally more apt to emphasize benefits of population growth, and a bit less so in terms of adding to multiculturalism and diversity.

Why do you say immigrants make your community a [better/worse] place?
 2023 Unprompted responses

BETTER PLACE (42%)		WORSE PLACE (9%)	
	%		%
Adds to diversity / multiculturalism	75	Immigrants weaken local culture / identity	41
Helps economy grow	33	Hurt the economy / cause unemployment	21
Helps local population grow	12	Drain on public finances	17
Shows people in my community care	11	Drive up housing prices	15
Enhances community reputation	7	Over-population / too many people here already	13
Immigrants appreciate Canada	4	Immigrants not screened well enough	8
Other reasons	4	Immigrants are a security risk	6
		Other reasons	13

Q.8 Why do you say that new immigrants make your local community a [better / worse] place?

How immigrants make local communities worse. Among the much smaller group (9%) that says immigrants make their communities a worse place, the most prominent reasons pertain to their impact on weakening local culture or identity (41% of this group, or 4% of all Canadians). Others maintain that immigrants hurt the local economy (21%), place a drain on public finances (17%), drive up housing prices (15%, or 1% of all Canadians), or otherwise contribute to over-population (13%). Smaller proportions raise issues with a lack of proper screening and security concerns. The proportion of Canadians who see immigrants as harming their community is too small to support analysis of subgroup differences.

It is notable that more Canadians are now connecting the housing crisis to immigration, but very few see this happening on the ground in their own communities. This suggests that increasing concerns about too many immigrants may stem from generalized reaction to broader issues (e.g., inflation) rather than the arrival and presence of newcomers where they live.

Immigration category priorities

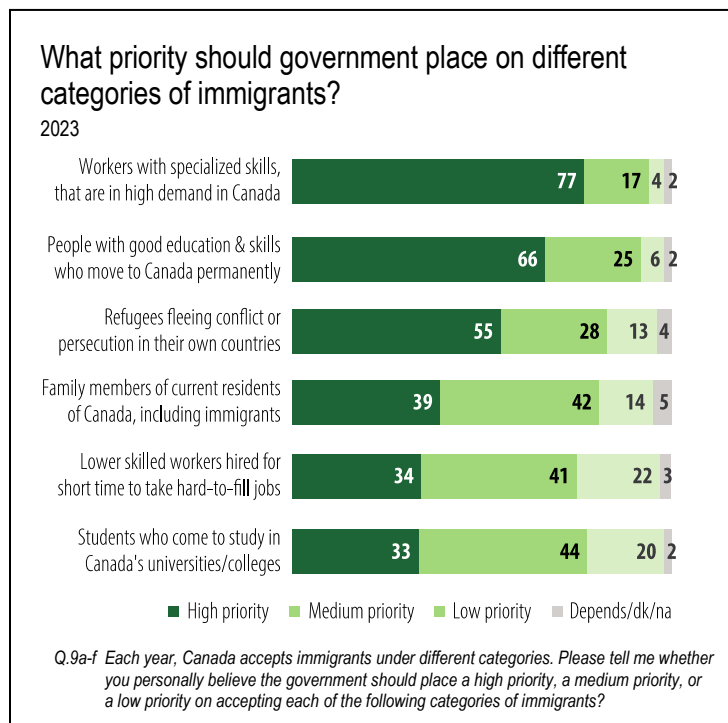
Canadians are most likely to want government to prioritize immigrants who contribute to the economy (those with specialized skills and good education), followed by refugees fleeing persecution and family members of current residents. Lower priority is given to temporary workers and foreign students.

Canada accepts immigration across a number of different categories that encompass both permanent and temporary status upon arrival. This year's survey asked Canadians what priority they feel the government should place on each of six streams of newcomers, reflecting the importance or value each is seen to offer the country.

Of the six categories, Canadians are most likely to assign a high priority to workers with specialized skills in high demand (77%), with most of the remainder giving this category a medium priority (17%). Two-thirds (66%) believe a high priority should be placed on people with good education and skills who move to Canada permanently, while just over half (55%) give a high priority to refugees fleeing conflict or persecution in their own countries.

By comparison, fewer than half say the country should give high priority to the other three categories of immigrants: family members of current Canadian residents (including immigrants) (39%), lower skilled workers hired to come to Canada for a short time to take on hard-to-fill jobs (34%), and students who come to study in Canadian colleges and universities (33%).

Public perspectives on the importance of immigration categories are very similar across the population when it comes to the two most valued categories (workers with specialized skills, people with good education and skills). More notable (but not significant) differences appear in how Canadians view the remaining four types of immigrants:



- Refugees fleeing persecution and conflict are most likely to be seen as high priority among Atlantic Canadians (65%), women (64%), and supporters of the three “progressive” political parties (especially the NDP at 71%), while somewhat less evident among first generation Canadians (47%) and Conservative party supporters (43%);
- Family reunification is most apt to be prioritized by Canadians ages 30 to 44 (48%), those with a university education (46%), women (46%), and supporters of the federal NDP (55%). This view is least apt to be shared by Conservative supporters (30%, versus 22% who assign these immigrants a low priority);
- Lower-skilled workers attract the strongest public support in Quebec (44%), and only half as much in Alberta (21%); and
- Foreign students coming to study in Canadian colleges and universities are most apt to be valued by Atlantic Canadians (40%) and Quebecers (43%), as well as Canadians ages 18 to 29 (40%), first generation immigrants (45%) and Green Party supporters (43%); this view is least evident among Conservative Party supporters (26% high priority, versus 30% low priority).