



Focus Canada – Spring 2015

Canadian public opinion about immigration and multiculturalism

As part of its ongoing Focus Canada public opinion research program, the Environics Institute asked Canadians about immigration and multiculturalism to update its ongoing research on these topics dating back to the 1970s. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted with 2,003 Canadians between June 3 and 18, 2015. 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.

Executive summary

The last few years have not been good ones for immigrants and multicultural diversity – worldwide or in Canada. At the global level, the flow of migrants is now higher than at any time in human history. A growing part of this flow comes from refugees fleeing from conflict zones, placing increasing pressure on European countries that are struggling to maintain policies of openness and accommodation. Canada continues to accept more than 200,000 immigrants each year, but new federal government policies are tightening up the rules and making the country less welcoming than before. Some commentators have cited anecdotal evidence that the mainstream public is feeling less comfortable with the country's growing ethnic diversity. The Quebec Government's proposed Charter of Secular Values was a flashpoint in that province, and now appears ready for a comeback in a milder form.

In this context, it would be understandable if not expected to find that public opinion about immigration and multiculturalism has soured over the past several years, but this is not the case. The latest Focus Canada survey – updating trends dating back to the 1980s – shows that Canadian attitudes about these issues has held steady or grown more positive over the past three to five years. The public continues to believe that immigration is good for the economy, and are more confident than before about the country's ability to manage refugees and potential criminal elements. Canadians remain divided about accepting refugees who would not otherwise qualify under the rules, but opinions on this question have remained stable since 2010.

Multiculturalism continues to be seen as one the country's most important symbols, and this view has strengthened since 2010. The most significant ongoing public concern is about immigrants not adopting so-called Canadian values, but this sentiment has diminished in strength since 2012. Moreover, there is now broad consensus that someone born abroad is every bit as likely to be a good citizen as someone born in the country.

Another important trend is growing acknowledgement of the challenges facing visible minority groups in Canada. Increasing proportions say there is ongoing discrimination against Muslims, Aboriginal Peoples, and to a lesser extent Blacks and South Asians, and at a broader level there is growing recognition that ethnic and racial groups need support from society at large to address these challenges.

Across the country, opinions sometimes vary by group in a predictable pattern, but there are also counter-intuitive findings. Quebec is often seen as least hospitable to newcomers, and on some questions this proves to be the case. For example, Quebecers are more likely than other Canadians to say immigrants are not adopting the right values. But they are also the least concerned about the number of immigrants, and the most cognizant about systemic discrimination against Muslims. As well, in some cases the most notable growth in positive attitudes about immigration and multiculturalism is evident among Canadians with the lowest levels of education. Finally, across the political spectrum, those who currently support the Federal Conservative Party are among the least supportive of immigration and ethnic diversity (especially in comparison with NDP supporters), but on some measures they show the most positive movement in the past few years.

Important Canadian symbols

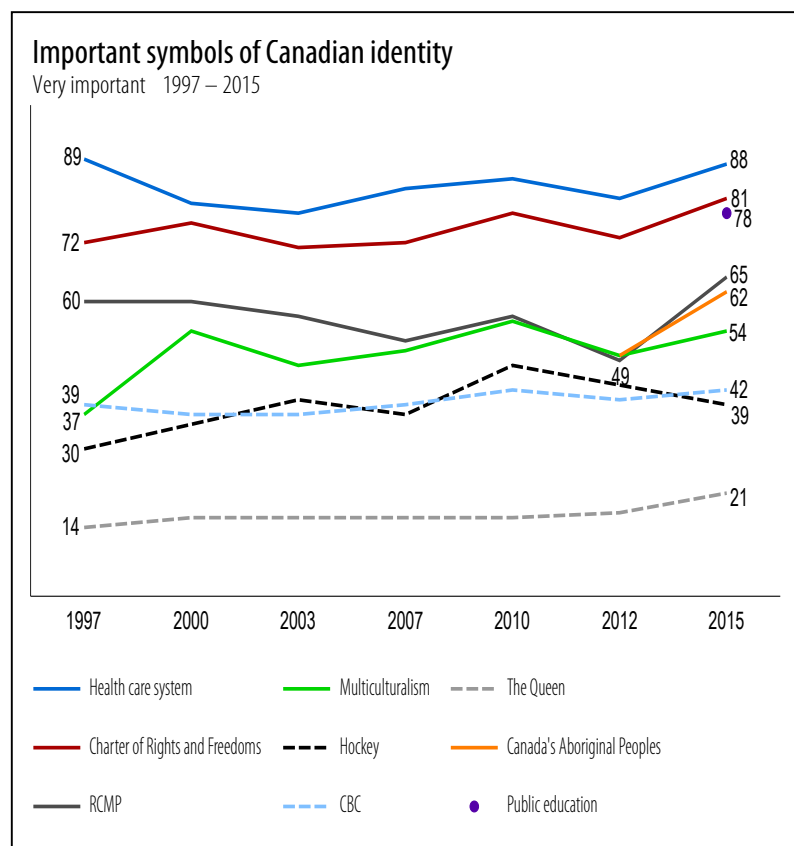
An increasing majority of Canadians identify multiculturalism as one of the most important symbols of the country's national identity. This view is most widespread in Ontario (recording the largest increase since 2012), and remains least so in Quebec, although opinions there have held steady or grown.

Every country has symbols that help shape the national identity, and for Canada this has included multiculturalism. The latest Focus Canada survey updates the importance that citizens place on a selected set of national symbols that have been tracked since 1997. In all cases but one, the strength of identification has increased since 2012, reversing a downward trend recorded between 2010 and 2012.

Of the nine symbols included on the latest survey, the ones most widely seen as very important to the Canadian identity continue to be the country's health care system (88%, up 7 points from 2012) and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (81%, up 8). Also considered very important by a strong majority of Canadians include the system of public education (78%, included for the first time), the RCMP (65%, up 18) and Aboriginal Peoples (62%, up 13).

More than half (54%) place this level of importance on **multiculturalism** (up 5 points from 2012), similar to what was recorded in 2010 and 2000). Fewer than half place strong importance on the CBC (42%, up 2), hockey (39%, down 4; likely due in part to the survey being conducted after the end of the NHL season for Canadian teams), and the Queen (21%, up 4).

Multiculturalism has strengthened as a national symbol since 2012 across most of the population, but especially among women, Canadians aged 18 to 29 (reversing a previous downward trend), residents of Toronto and those living in smaller sized communities. Multiculturalism is most widely seen as very important in Ontario (61%, especially in Toronto at 67%), among youth (63%), and least so among Quebecers (39%) although this level has held steady over the past three years. Those who would vote Conservative in an upcoming election are less apt to place strong importance on this symbol (49%), but this proportion has increased more noticeably since 2012 than in comparison with those supporting other parties.



An increasing proportion of Canadians also identify Aboriginal Peoples as a very important national symbol, with this trend most significant in Quebec and Ontario, but up in every province. This view is now most widespread in Ontario (71%; especially in Toronto at 76%), and remains least evident in Quebec (49%) despite the notable increase there. As with multiculturalism, Conservative voters are less likely than voters of other parties (excepting the Bloc Quebecois) to place strong importance on Aboriginal Peoples as a national symbol, but also show the most growth since 2012.

Immigration

Most Canadians continue to reject the notion that we are taking in too many immigrants and that they are a drain on the economy. There is increased public confidence that the system is keeping criminals from entering the country, and a reduced majority who now feel that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values.

Canada is a nation of immigrants – one in five were born elsewhere and the country welcomes more than 200,000 newcomers each year. Treatment of newcomers, and visible minorities in particular, has a troubled history, but opinions have improved significantly over generations. The latest Focus Canada survey reveals that public opinion remains divided on some aspects of immigration, but that attitudes have improved or held steady since 2012.

The results are based on responses to a set of “agree-disagree” statements that serve as key benchmark indicators of public attitudes about immigration.

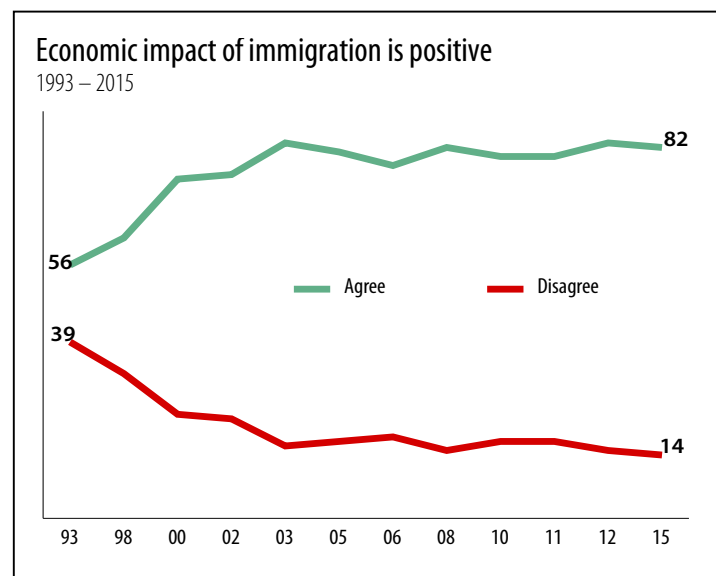
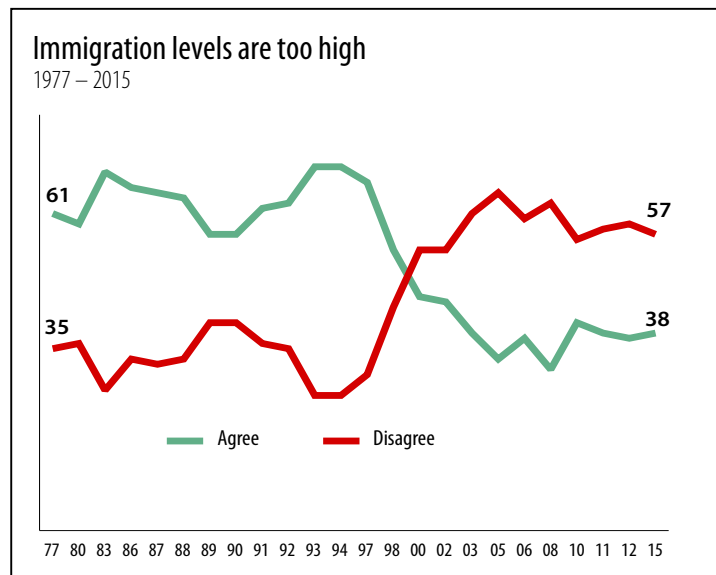
“Overall, there is too much immigration in Canada.” A clear majority (57%) of Canadians continue to disagree with this statement, compared with 38 percent who agree. These proportions are essentially unchanged from 2012, and generally reflect the balance of opinion dating back to 2005 (in contrast to the more negative sentiments expressed in the 1980s and 90s). Attitudes remain generally stable across the country, except for rising agreement with the statement in B.C.

As in 2012, the belief there is too much immigration is most evident among older Canadians, those with lower socio-economic status, and those who live in smaller-sized communities, along with those who support the

Federal Conservative Party and the Bloc Quebecois. While Quebecers are often portrayed as being least receptive of immigrants, they are in fact less likely than residents of other regions to say there is too much immigration.

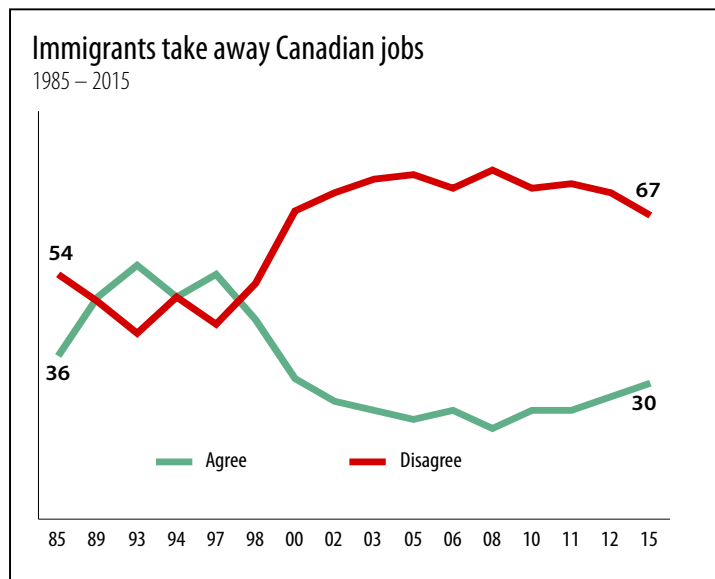
“Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada.” More than eight in ten (82%) Canadians continue to believe that immigration is good for the country’s economy, unchanged from 2012 and consistent with findings dating back more than a decade.

As before, this view is shared by at least three-quarters in every identified group across the country. Opinions have been largely stable since 2012, with increases in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (where 89% now agree with the statement), and decreases in Alberta (75%) and Vancouver (79%).



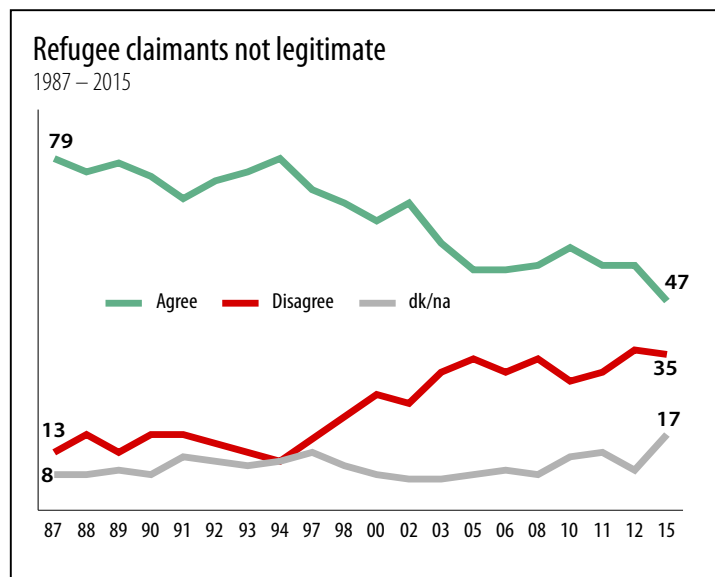
“Immigrants take away jobs from other Canadians.” Consistent with the previous statement, most (67%) Canadians reject the idea that immigrants take jobs away from other Canadians. However, there is a small but steady increase in the number who agree with the statement, a trend that dates back to 2008, that may relate in part to the onset of the international financial crisis.

This latest shift is centred in Alberta, British Columbia, especially in Vancouver), as well as among the least educated Canadians, while largely unchanged among other parts of the country. Belief in the view that immigrants are taking away jobs is now most prevalent in Alberta (43%), among residents of smaller communities (37%), those without a college or university education, and Conservative Party supporters (38%). It is least widely shared by Quebecers (18%) and Canadians with a university degree (15%).



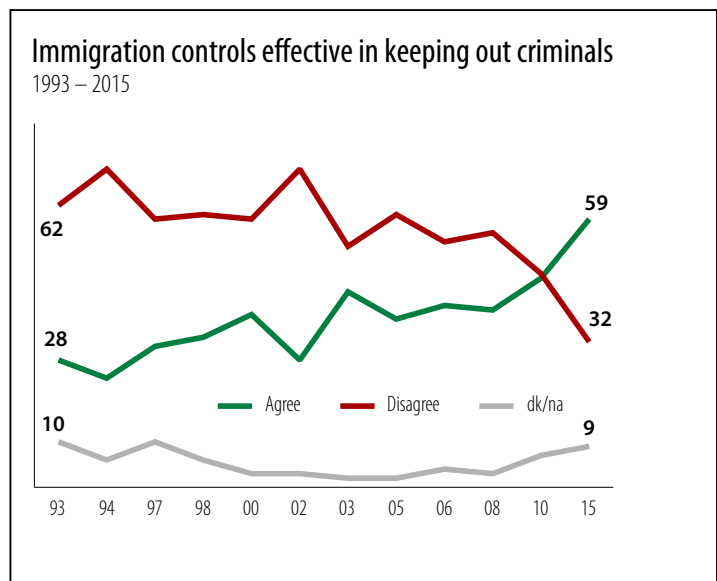
“Most people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees.” Canadians have long believed that most refugees coming to this country do not have a legitimate claim, but the proportion expressing this sentiment is now at an all time low. Fewer than half (47%) now agree with the statement, down noticeably since 2012 and well below the levels recorded in the 1980s and 90s. One-third (35%) disagree, while half as many (17%) are now uncertain about this question.

Declining agreement with the statement since 2012 is evident across almost groups, but especially among the youngest and oldest Canadians, Torontonians, those without a college or university education, and Conservative Party supporters. Belief that most refugees are not legitimate continues to be most widespread among men, Canadians 45 and older, those without a high school diploma, and Conservative Party supporters (60%; despite the sharp decline since 2012), in comparison with supporters of the Federal NDP (38%), Liberal Party (47%), Green Party (49%), Bloc Quebecois (39%) and those with no expressed party support (45%).



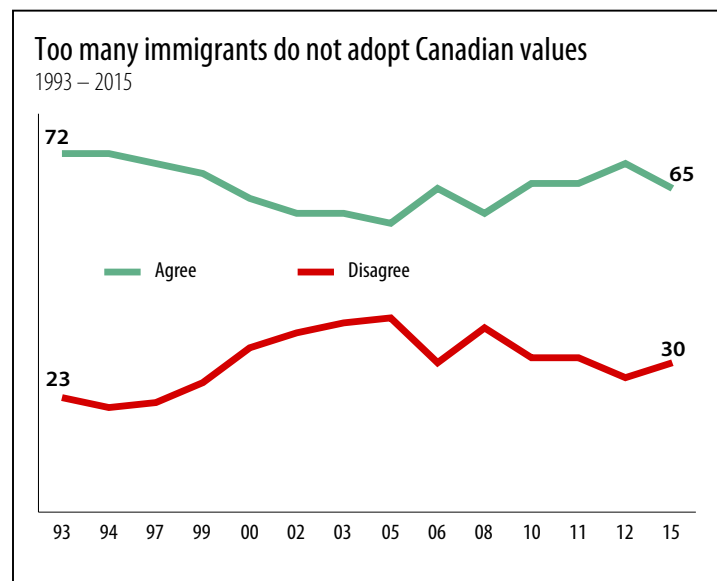
“Canada is doing a good job of keeping criminals and suspected criminals out of the country.” The most significant shift in attitudes about immigration since 2012 has been on this statement, reflecting a sharp rise in agreement that continues an upward trend dating back to 2008. Six in ten (59%) Canadians now express confidence in the immigration system weeding out criminal elements, compared with one-third (32%) who disagree.

This positive trend has taken place across the country, and especially in Ontario and the west, as well as among rural residents and those who support the Federal Conservative and Green parties. Confidence in the system is now strongest among Canadians 18 to 29 years of age (74%), Atlantic Canadians (67%) and Liberal Party supporters (67%), and weakest among British Columbians (49%).



“There are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values.” While most Canadians celebrate the country’s multicultural diversity and see immigration as strengthening the economy, many are also ambivalent about how newcomers fit in. Strong majorities have agreed with this statement starting in 1993 when the question was first posed on Focus Canada. However, the proportion who express this view in 2015 (65%) marks a notable decline since 2012 that reverses an upward trend and is now the lowest recorded since 2008.

Diminishing concern about newcomers adopting Canadian values has occurred across most groups, but especially in Alberta and Toronto and among Canadians without a high school diploma. As before, such concerns are most prevalent among Quebecers (72%), rural residents (74%), Canadians 45 and older (72%), those with a high school diploma (75%) and Conservative Party supporters (77%); in each case these percentages are lower than in 2012. This view is least apt to be shared by Canadians 18 to 29 (54%), those with a university degree (52%), and NDP supporters (55%).



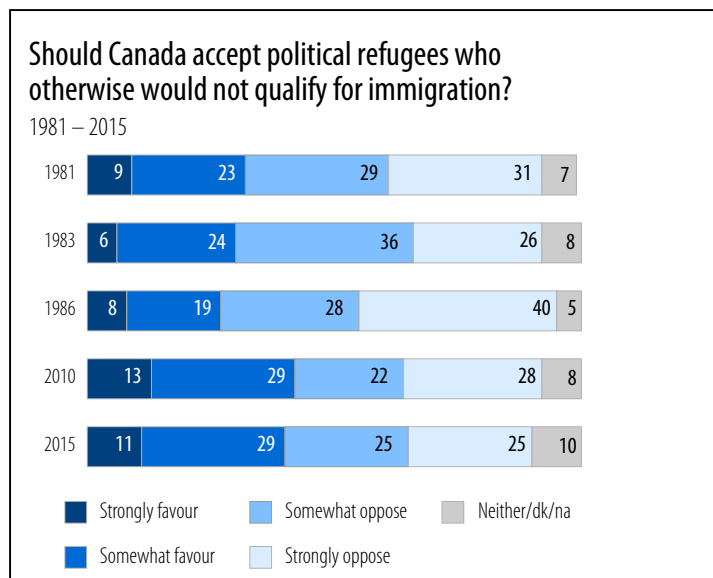
Canada's Refugee Policy

Canadians are divided on whether the country should accept political refugees that would not otherwise qualify for immigration through normal channels. Opinions are unchanged from 2012, but more favourable than in the 1980s. Support for accepting refugees is strongest in Toronto and among Canadian youth.

Refugees make up only a small percentage of the immigrants landing on Canada's shores, but tend to attract the most attention when they arrive in significant numbers. In 2012 a ship full of Tamil refugees arrived off the west coast that forced the federal government to come up with new ways to handle such numbers. More recently, the humanitarian crisis in Syria has sparked a new grassroots initiative to sponsor thousands of Syrian families that would be supported by individual Canadians and organizations, similar to an initiative in the late 1970s that resulted in the successful resettlement of many thousands of Vietnamese refugees.

Canadian public opinion remains divided on what to do with political refugees who do not otherwise qualify for immigration through the normal channels. Four in ten strongly (11%) or somewhat (29%) favour accepting such refugees, compared with a larger proportion who somewhat (25%) or strongly (25%) oppose such a policy. These results are essentially unchanged from 2010, but more supportive than was recorded in the 1980s (consistent with the broader shift in public attitudes towards immigration, as presented earlier in this report).

Support for accepting political refugees is strongest among men, younger Canadians, urban dwellers (especially in Toronto, with 48% expressing support), those with a university degree, and NDP and Green Party supporters. This view is least apt to be shared by Canadians without a high school diploma (31%) and Conservative Party supporters (34%). Since 2012 support has increased in British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, while declining among Canadians 18 to 29 and NDP supporters.



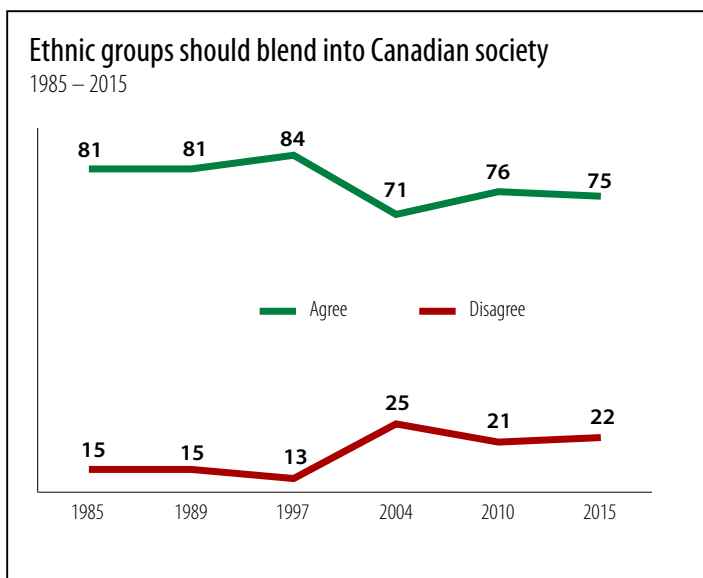
Integration of Ethnic and Cultural Groups

Most Canadians continue to believe that ethnic and racial groups should blend into Canadian society, but they increasingly acknowledge there are systemic barriers facing visible minorities that require a societal response. There is now a broad consensus that immigrants are as likely as native born to be good citizens.

While multiculturalism is considered to be among the most important symbols of Canadian identity, it is by no means fully embraced by everyone. The latest Focus Canada survey shows that the public continues to be divided on several key issues about the place of ethnic/racial groups in society, although attitudes have held steady or improved since 2010.

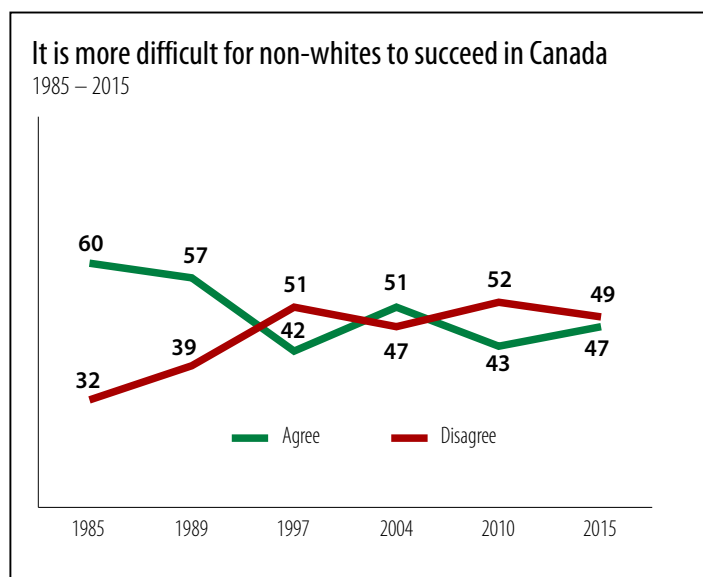
“Ethnic groups should try as much as possible to blend into Canadian society and not form a separate community.” Three-quarters (75%) of Canadians agree with this statement, unchanged since five years ago after having increased between 2004 and 2010. As before, this view is most prevalent among older Canadians (especially those 60 plus), Quebecers (but holding steady since 2010), and those with less education (although the gap across education levels has shrunk over the past five years).

Opinions vary significantly across the political spectrum, with agreement on this statement most pronounced among supporters of the Bloc Quebecois (94%) and Conservative (84%) parties, and least evident among those who would vote NDP (72%).

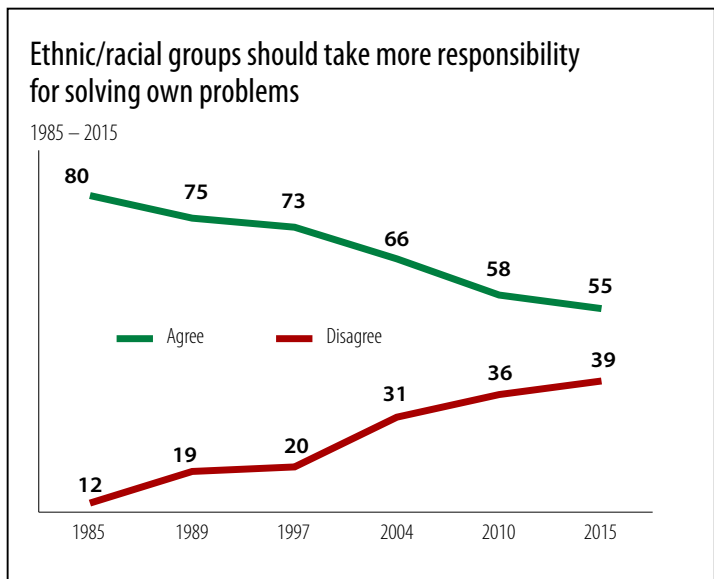


“It is more difficult for non-whites to be successful in Canadian society than it is for other groups.” The public-at-large is more evenly divided on acknowledging the systemic barriers facing non-white Canadians, although the last five years have seen a modest shift in the affirmative. Just under half (47%) of Canadians now agree with this statement (up 4 percentage points from 2010), compared with a slightly higher proportion (49%) who disagree. This reverses the trend recorded between 2004 and 2010, although the level of agreement remains lower than the 1980s.

Increased acknowledgment of systemic barriers is evident across much of the population, but noticeably among Canadians 60 and over, residents of Atlantic Canada, Ontario, Alberta and rural communities, while declining in Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Agreement is highest among Canadians 60 plus, Torontonians, and NDP supporters (all at 54%), and lowest among Manitoba/Saskatchewan (36%) and BC (40%) residents, as well as among Conservative Party supporters (40%).



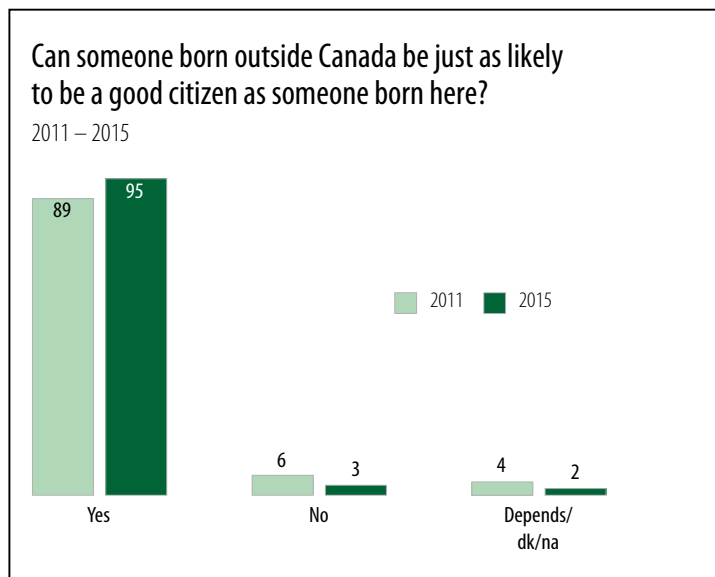
“Ethnic and racial groups should take more responsibility for solving their own economic and social problems.” The most notable trend in public opinion is on the importance placed on self reliance in resolving the problems facing the country’s ethnic and racial minorities. In the 1980s and 90s, strong majorities of Canadians voiced the opinion that these groups should take more responsibility for solving their problems, but this view has been steadily declining. In 2015, a bare majority (55%) now agree with this statement, compared with four in ten (39%) who disagree.



Agreement with this statement has declined most significantly since 2010 among men, Canadians aged 30 to 44, residents of Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, urban dwellers and those with more education and income. This sentiment remains most prevalent among older Canadians, rural residents, those with no more than a high school education and Conservative Party supporters. By comparison, disagreement now outweighs agreement among Torontonians, Canadians under 45, and NDP supporters.

Can someone born outside Canada be just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born here? On this question (first posed on the Environics Institute survey on citizenship in 2011), there is now a clear public consensus in the affirmative.

Almost all (95%) Canadians now say that immigrants are just as likely to be good citizens as native born individuals, up from 89 percent who expressed this view in 2011. This view is now held consistently across the population, voiced by more than nine in ten from every identifiable group.



Discrimination against minority groups

Canadians increasingly believe there is ongoing discrimination in society against ethnic and racial groups in this country, especially Muslims and Aboriginal peoples, and to lesser extent Blacks, South Asians, Jews and Chinese people. There has been a sharp decline in perceptions of frequent discrimination against gays and lesbians.

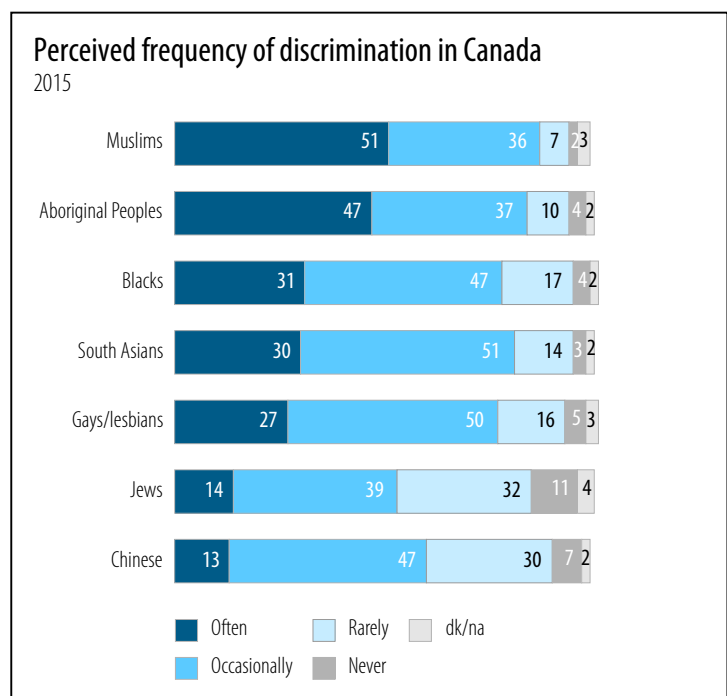
Canadians take pride in their country being one that accepts if not celebrates its ethnic and cultural diversity. But at the same time there is widespread understanding that some groups experience ongoing discrimination in society today. Perceptions of discrimination have been largely stable over the past decade with a few notable shifts over the past four years.

The survey asked about each of seven specific ethnic or minority groups and asked about the level of discrimination in Canadian society today. In all cases, a majority say each of the groups experiences discrimination at least “sometimes”, and in all cases but one this view has increased since 2011.

As before, Canadians are most likely to say that it is Muslims who experience discrimination often (51%), and this reflects a noticeable increase since 2011 (up 9 percentage points). Almost as many now attribute the same level of discrimination to the country’s Aboriginal Peoples (47%, up 5 points), compared with 14 percent who say it happens rarely or never (down 7 from 2011).

Three in ten say that discrimination happens often to Blacks (31%, up 4) and South Asians (30%, up 1), in both cases with increasing proportions indicating the frequency is “sometimes” (with shrinking minorities maintaining these groups experience little to no discrimination).

By comparison, just over one in ten Canadians continue to say that Jews (14%) and Chinese people (13%) experience frequent discrimination (both unchanged since 2011). In both cases, the proportion saying it happens “sometimes” has increased modestly.

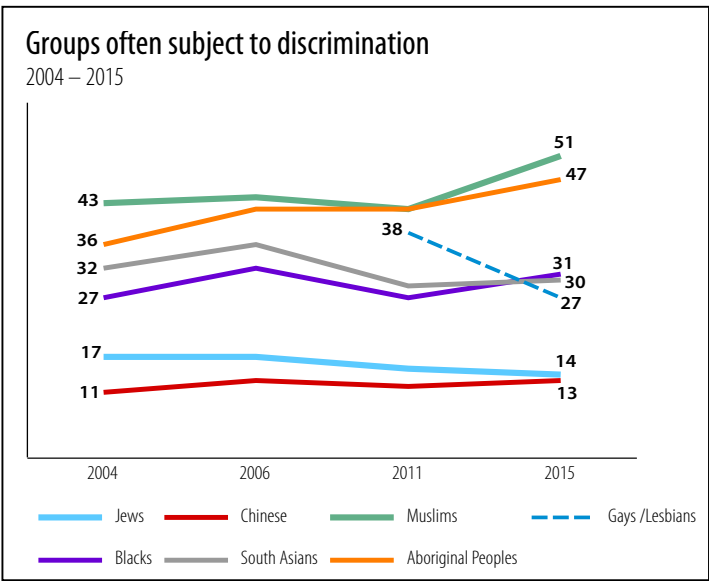


In sharp contrast, there has been a significant decline in Canadians’ perception of frequent discrimination against gays and lesbians in this country. The proportion who believe this happens often dropped to 27%, down 11 points since 2011), with a comparable increase in the proportion who say it occurs “sometimes” 50%, up 12). One in five continues to maintain that discrimination is rarely or never experienced by gays and lesbians in Canada.

Across the country, increasing perceptions of systemic discrimination against minority groups is evident across most of the population, and varies somewhat across segments:

- Rising concerns about treatment of Muslims is most evident in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, as well as among Canadians living in smaller sized communities and those with less education; this view is now most widespread among Canadians 18 to 29 (60%), Quebecers (68%) and Federal NDP supporters (62%), and least evident in Vancouver (40%) and among Conservative Party supporters (40%);

- Perceptions of frequent discrimination against Aboriginal peoples is up most noticeably in Montreal and Vancouver, and among Canadians with a high school diploma. This view is now most prevalent in Alberta (53%), among Canadians with a university degree (52%) and NDP supporters (57%), and least so among Canadians without a high school diploma (39%) and Conservative Party supporters (38%);



- Sensitivity to frequent discrimination against Blacks has increased especially in Ontario and eastern Canada and among the university educated, and is now most widespread in Quebec (notably in Montreal at 47%) and Toronto (41%), and lowest among Manitoba/Saskatchewan residents (13%) and Conservative Party supporters (23%);

- Rising concerns about the treatment of South Asians is most evident among Canadians 18 to 29, residents in smaller sized communities and those with lower levels of education. Belief such discrimination happens often has declined among Canadians with a university degree, as well as in Vancouver (to 18%, down 8) where a majority say it occurs sometimes.

- Belief in frequent discrimination against Jews is most prevalent in Quebec (23%; 25% in Montreal), while lowest in Vancouver (6%) and among Canadians with a university degree (9%).

- Perceptions of ongoing poor treatment of Chinese people is marginally higher in Vancouver (18%), but has declined since 2011, while increasing modestly in Montreal. Canadians 18 to 29 (20%) are twice as likely to agree with this view as are those 45 and older (10%), with the difference being in the proportion who say discrimination happens sometimes;

- Declining perceptions of frequent discrimination against gays and lesbians is across the board, but especially among younger Canadians, residents of Alberta and British Columbia, and NDP supporters. This view is now most widespread among BQ (40%) and Green Party (39%) supporters, and lowest in B.C. (16%);

About the Environics Institute for Survey Research

The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established by Michael Adams in 2006 to promote relevant and original public opinion and social research on important issues of public policy and social change. The focus of the Institute’s mandate is to survey individuals and groups not usually heard from, asking questions not normally asked. For further information see www.EnvironicsInstitute.org, or contact Dr. Keith Neuman at 416-969-2457 or keith.neuman@environics.ca
