

Social Values and Canadian Millennials

Defining social values

The term “social values” today takes on many meanings and connotations, as for example “family values” whose precise nature is tacitly assumed if not well-defined. But the term also has a more conceptually coherent pedigree, starting in the 1960s when psychologist Milton Rokeach used social science to develop a definition of social values that are beliefs or conceptions about: a) desirable modes of conduct and how one should live (e.g., honesty, hard work); and b) social ideals and outcomes (e.g., peace, good health).

Such formative and fundamental beliefs about desirable means and ends are thought to be largely molded in adolescence and early adulthood experience. Social values are informed by people’s prevalent experiences and perceptions, gained through family and social contacts, as well as exposure to broader societal events and trends. Social values may have an idealistic and ideological dimension, but perhaps more importantly they serve pragmatically as an adaptation to, and justification for, current personal or cultural practices. In this way, values may best be described as deeply held beliefs that both determine and reflect a person’s responses to the world as he or she strives to meet basic and higher-order needs. In total, one’s social values represent a host of mental, emotional and motivational postures with which one navigates life, and interacts with others and oneself, as well as making moral decisions about what is good and bad.

Environics’ social values research

This concept of social values has been explored systematically starting in the 1960s in France, and later across Europe, to better understand socio-cultural trends in society. In the early 1980s, two research firms (Environics Research Group and Montreal-based CROP) adapted this social values research model for North America. Environics Research now conducts regular social values surveys of Canadians (annually) and Americans (every four years) on behalf of its clients. This work also provides for broader analysis of social values trends, and has served as the foundation for several books published by Michael Adams,

including *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium* (1997); *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* (2003), and *Stayin’ Alive: How Canadian Baby Boomers will Work, Play and Find Meaning in the Second Half of their Adult Lives* (2010).

The Environics Research social values methodology incorporates a set of 80 or so social value trends or “constructs,” based on the research and in-depth multivariate analysis. Examples of social values include:

- **Adaptive navigation.** Having the flexibility to adapt to unforeseen events that interfere with the realization of one’s goals. Being flexible in defining one’s expectations and ways of meeting one’s objectives.
- **Joy of consumption.** Intense gratification through consumption of consumer goods (other than basic necessities). Enjoying consumption for the pleasure of consumption (feeling more excited about the act of buying than by the use of the products purchased).
- **Acceptance of violence.** The belief that violence is an inevitable part of life. People strongest on this trend even accept violence as an outlet for letting off steam or as a way of getting what they want.

The individual social value trends are combined in terms of how they relate to one another, and collectively form an underlying structure that portrays higher-order world views. This analysis provides a distinct social values profile for particular segments of the population, such as a generation. Two decades ago, the book *Sex in the Snow* introduced the social values “tribes” of Canadian generations (Elders, Boomers, Gen-Xers). The premise of the book is that demography is no longer destiny; people and society can no longer be understood according to the traditional categories of gender, age and social class, and that social values are as important, if not more so, in what drives human behaviour and social trends.

Meet the Canadian Millennial social values tribes

In 2015, Environics Research identified the six distinct social values tribes of the Canadian Millennial generation, which are as follows:



Bros & Brittneys (32% of Canadian Millennials)

This is the largest group, making up one-third of the generation. Bros & Brittneys are avid risk-takers who pursue thrills and excitement, and are enthusiastic consumers. They are Millennials who work hard to get paid and have the lifestyle they want. They embrace technology and appreciate social connectivity. Looking good and being respected is important to them—and, as such, they like to stay current with the latest trends. These Millennials are not looking to change the world and sometimes they don't feel in control of their destinies. Time for an escape and a little fun like catching a concert, beer and HD sports in the man cave or a girls' night out are important to them

As the largest of all tribes, Bros & Brittneys tend to define the mainstream demographically. Compared with other tribes they are more likely to be Quebecers, male, a bit older, living with a partner (but in common-law rather than marriage), and employed full-time versus being in school. Bros & Brittneys are one of the tribes most likely to be born in Canada and ethnically white, but are also well-represented by ethnic Chinese. They have average level incomes and just below average educational attainment.



Diverse Strivers (20%)

To Diverse Strivers, 'making it' in life, and doing things that bring new and intense experiences are top priorities. These Millennials crave material success and they push themselves to achieve it in a number of ways. They work hard in their careers and pursue personal challenges (like marathons or marathon hot yoga sessions) in the off-hours. They strive to inspire respect in those closest to them by doing their duty, and being upstanding members of their families and communities. They take care to look good, and have the latest gadgets and toys to maintain a sharp and successful appearance. Diverse Strivers report high levels of vitality—they love crowds, attention and pursue intensity in all they do—and they need every bit of their energy to keep pushing

forward toward their goals; they never stop building their resumes to satisfy their ambitions and impress others.

Diverse Strivers are the most multicultural of the Millennial tribes. They are most likely to be born in another country, and to have a non-white ethnic background, especially South Asian but also others (Black, Latino, Chinese). This group is also more male than female, younger in age than most other tribes, and tends to be concentrated in Ontario (especially in the GTA). Despite being younger, they are as likely as average to be married (but not common-law) and to have children; Diverse Strivers not yet married or parents are among those most keen to want this in their future. Being younger, they are more likely to be students, although they have average employment and household income levels.



Engaged Idealists (17%)

Engaged Idealists are Millennials on steroids: engaged, sociable, energetic, experience-seeking and idealistic. They believe in contributing as much as possible to their relationships, careers and communities—and the reward for their efforts is personal growth and development. These Millennials believe that their actions matter, shaping their lives and the world around them. They recognize that their environment is complex, but feel confident in their ability to navigate it. They want interesting, meaningful careers that let them express themselves and use the creativity that is central to their identity. Money is nice, but the quality of their work experiences is a higher priority. They also try to have time for spontaneous fun, which they see as an important part of a happy, balanced life.

Engaged Idealists are primarily Canadian-born and mostly identify ethnically as white. They are the most female of the groups (at 60%), a bit younger than average, and are most present in Ontario (but also with solid western representation). Engaged Idealists are among those most likely to be living with a partner or spouse (versus with family or roommates), but no more likely to be married/common-law, and less apt to have children (being somewhat younger). They are among the most educated of tribes (behind only Critical Counterculturists) and have slightly higher than average household incomes.



Lone Wolves (16%)

Deeply skeptical of authority, and lacking strong social and emotional connections, Lone Wolves resemble the stereotypical Gen Xers of the 1990s: cool and standoffish. These Millennials are solitary, and favour keeping life simple and straightforward. They are seldom involved in community events and rarely feel strongly connected to what's going on in society at large. Still, whereas some people feeling disconnected from society are angry or hostile to others, Lone Wolves are low-key (e.g., they are not xenophobic or sexist). If disaffected Gen Xers' motto was "Whatever," perhaps the Lone Wolves' words to live by are "I'm not hurting anyone. Just let me be."

Despite stereotypes, Lone Wolves are equally likely to be male or female, as well as being somewhat older than average, and most concentrated in Quebec. They are among the most native-born and ethnically white of tribes (along with Engaged Idealists). Their domestic arrangements are comparable to Millennials overall in terms being married and having children; but Lone Wolves not yet settled in this way are by far the least interested of any tribe in getting married or having kids. Among the tribes, they are least likely to be employed full-time or currently in school, and among those most apt to be not looking for work (along with New Traditionalists, but for different reasons). This tribe has the highest proportion of Millennials without post-secondary education and household incomes under \$30K.



New Traditionalists (11%)

As their name suggests, New Traditionalists hold many values that would not be out of place in the 1950s—but their outlook also reflects some distinctly 21st century concerns, including an interest in environmental issues. These Millennials are more religious and spiritual than others: Religion is an important part of their lives and central to their identity. They believe in staying true to the values with which they were brought up, particularly towards conservative family and gender roles. New Traditionalists also value traditional modes of etiquette and propriety: appropriate dress, good manners, respect for elders, a tidy home. They respect authority figures more so than their peers, report a stronger sense of duty, and a greater sense of identification with their family roots and ancestors.

New Traditionalists are the oldest and most established of the Millennial tribes. They are also more likely than average

to be female, to be married (but not common-law) and have children (and those who are not yet married or parents are most likely to want these in their future). This tribe is slightly over-represented in Alberta and Manitoba. Along with Diverse Strivers, this group has a high proportion of immigrants, and a broad ethnic mix (especially those identifying as Black). New Traditionalists are somewhat less apt to be employed full-time, with a higher than average number not looking for work (likely stay-at-home mothers). They have a higher than average level of education, and the highest household incomes of any tribe (in part because of being older and married).



Critical Counterculturists (4%)

Millennials in the Critical Counterculture segment are the engaged, critical young people sometimes featured in stories about 20-somethings building businesses, pursuing groundbreaking online activism, and otherwise shaking up the world. They share many of the same progressive values as Engaged Idealists: They believe in gender equality, are at ease with diversity of all kinds, and reject discrimination and injustice. But while Engaged Idealists see the world through a social and emotional lens – pursuing authentic relationships and experiences, and striving to express their true selves – the gold standard for Critical Counterculturists is clear-eyed rationality. They reject status and authority they see as illegitimate or superficial; they don't mind leading when they can add value to a project, but would hate for someone to judge them by their jeans or smartphone.

This is by far the smallest of the Millennial tribes. Critical Counterculturists are equally likely to be male or female, they are most likely to fit into the middle age range (27 to 31), and present in British Columbia. They stand out most as being the least family-oriented of tribes: They are most likely to be single and have no children, and are most keen to keep it that way. Critical Counterculturists are also by far the most educated group (one in five has a graduate degree), although their household incomes are a bit below average. This tribe is one of three (along with Diverse Strivers and New Traditionalists) with a higher proportion of immigrants, but most also identify ethnically as white (e.g., anglophones arriving from the USA and Europe).

Further details about how the social values of Millennials compare with other generations of Canadians are provided in the appendix to this report.