



# 2020 Survey of Canadians

## REPORT 3: IDENTITY, VALUES and LANGUAGE

### PART II: **VALUES, RELIGION & THE STATE**

#### **Final Report**

OCTOBER 2020

**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

**CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION**

  
CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE  
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

**IRPP**  
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH  
ON PUBLIC POLICY



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER  
UNIVERSITY  
BRIAN MULRONEY  
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

This study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the following organizations:

#### **THE CANADA WEST FOUNDATION**

The Canada West Foundation focuses on the policies that shape the West, and by extension, Canada. Through independent, evidence-based research and commentary, the Canada West Foundation provides practical solutions to tough public policy challenges facing the West at home and on the global stage. <http://cwf.ca>

#### **LE CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE – CONSTITUTION ET FÉDÉRALISME (CAP-CF) À L'UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL (UQAM)**

CAP-CF's mission is to stimulate research on constitutional politics and federalism, and to advance in innovative ways the analysis and understanding of contemporary constitutional issues in Canada and other federations.

<https://capcf.uqam.ca/>

#### **INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY**

Founded in 1972, the Institute for Research on Public Policy is an independent, national, bilingual, not-for-profit organization. The IRPP seeks to improve public policy in Canada by generating research, providing insight and informing debate on current and emerging policy issues facing Canadians and their governments. <http://irpp.org>

#### **THE BRIAN MULRONEY INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT**

Established in 2018, the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at St. Francis Xavier University aims to find creative solutions to complex national and global public policy and governance questions. Its public outreach activities, combined with its four-year undergraduate program in Public Policy and Governance, are intended to inform and shape national and international discourse on political, economic, security, and social issues.

[www.bmig.ca](http://www.bmig.ca)

---

#### **ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE FOR SURVEY RESEARCH**

Environics Institute for Survey Research conducts relevant and original public opinion and social research related to 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.



# Contents

- Executive summary ..... 1
- About this report ..... 3
- Introduction ..... 4
- Values: similarities and differences ..... 5
- Religion and belonging ..... 12
- Religion and the state: public servants wearing religion symbols ..... 13
- Parliament, the courts and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms ..... 16
- Perceptions of regional value differences ..... 20

# Executive summary

Regional tensions in Canada are often driven by conflicting economic interests, but may also be the product of differences in values. In recent years, attention has been drawn to potential value differences over religion and its place in public life. Francophone Quebecers are assumed to be more secular than other Canadians, and more adamant about the strict separation of church and state. This secularism (or *laïcité*) underpins public support for Quebec's Bill 21, a law adopted in 2019 that prohibits certain public officials from wearing religious symbols in the exercise of their official duties. The law was a frequent topic of discussion in the October 2019 federal election, as party leaders were pressured to pronounce on whether they would support efforts to challenge the province's law in court.

Against this background, this third report from the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey of Canadians explores the extent of value differences across the regions of Canada, particularly as they relate to religion and the question of how the state, in a secular society, should exercise its religious neutrality. It also examines whether recent debates about how to balance majority rule and minority rights in a democratic society have affected Canadians' attitudes toward the relationship between governments and the courts.

## Values: similarities and differences across Canada

On general questions relating to respect for authority and religiosity, the similarities in view across regions are more striking than the differences. For instance, a plurality in every jurisdiction (except Nunavut) says that it's somewhat (but not very) important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority, and a plurality in every jurisdiction (except Nunavut) disagrees that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly. Francophone Quebecers are less likely than Canadians outside of Quebec to agree that society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly; nevertheless, majorities of both

francophone Quebecers and other Canadians *disagree* with the proposition. Among those under the age of 35, there is relatively little difference in opinion on this question between Quebec francophones and their counterparts in the rest of Canada.

Similarly, Canadians agree that a person's strong religious belief should have no bearing on their belonging to the larger society – and this pattern holds both inside and outside Quebec. In Canada outside Quebec, three in four agree that a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less Canadian than anyone else. A majority of Quebecers also agree, regardless of whether the question refers to being “no less Canadian” or “no less of a Quebecer.” However, the level of agreement in Quebec is slightly lower than in the rest of Canada, and slightly lower in 2020 than in 2019.

In considering potential value differences in Canada, urban-rural differences are often assumed to be at least as important as regional or linguistic ones. In the case of questions relating to respect and obedience for authority, and attendance at religious services, however, the 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey shows that the views of Canadians living in one of the country's six biggest cities do not differ significantly from those living outside of them. While there are modest differences in values among Canadians, it's not correct to say that these amount to differences along an urban-rural divide.

## Religion and the state: public servants wearing religion symbols

In contrast to the similarities in opinion on general values questions, there is a sharp contrast between the views of francophone Quebecers and other Canadians on the specific question of how governments should exercise religious neutrality. The survey tested the relative appeal of two main versions of religious neutrality that governments in Canada might follow (approaches which, strictly speaking, are not mutually exclusive). One in two

Canadians outside Quebec prefer a version in which the government does not interfere with the practise of religion, while three in ten prefer a version in which it prohibits public servants from displaying their religious affiliation when performing their official functions. In Quebec, the pattern is reversed: only one in three choose the first option, while one in two prefer the second. Among Quebec francophones, even those who agree that strong religious adherence has no bearing on a person's belonging to Quebec society prefer that the government regulate the wearing of religious symbols by public servants.

Once again, however, there is greater similarity in the views among younger generations. Compared to their older counterparts, younger francophone Quebecers are less likely to favour the option of prohibiting people who work for the government from visibly displaying their religious affiliation when providing services to the public. As a result, the views of younger francophone Quebecers on this question resemble those of their counterparts in the rest of Canada (which is not the case for the older age groups).

## **Parliament, the courts and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms**

Since the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, several studies have found that Canadians are comfortable with the role of the courts in overruling legislatures to enforce the Charter's provisions, and uncomfortable with the existence in the Charter of a legislative override clause (Section 33). The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey confirms that, by and large, this pattern still holds.

In cases when Parliament passes a law, but the Supreme Court of Canada says it's unconstitutional on the grounds that it conflicts with the Charter, a majority of Canadians say that the Supreme Court should have the final say. In answer to a second question, a plurality also says that governments in Canada *should not* have the power to overrule the courts by passing a law which the courts have declared to be unconstitutional because it violates the Charter.

However, the proportion of francophone Quebecers that says that governments should not have the override powers has fallen since the early 2000s, widening the gap between the views of francophone Quebecers and other Canadians on this question. While it remains the case that, like other Canadians, the preponderance of opinion in Quebec is still on the side of the courts and their role in upholding Charter rights even if that means overruling the legislature, views in the province may be evolving, and could shift further should a measure such as Bill 21 find itself the subject of a Supreme Court ruling.

## **Perceptions of regional value differences**

Finally, one in two Canadians agree that people across the country basically have the same values, but two in five disagree. Agreement with this statement has fallen by seven points since 2019, with the drop being greater in provinces where the level of agreement had previously been higher than average. This change may reflect how supporters of different political parties view the outcome of the October 2019 federal election. While there's been no change between 2019 and 2020 in the extent to which Liberal Party supporters agree that people across the country basically have the same values, there have been significant drops among supporters of the opposition parties.

# About this report

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

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

The third report is published in three separate parts. Part I explores the evolution of the Canadian identity. Part III addresses perceptions of the security of the French language in Canada.

This document constitutes Part II and focuses on the extent of value differences across the country, particularly as they relate to religion and the question of how the state, in a secular society, should exercise its religious neutrality. It also examines whether recent debates about how to balance majority rule and minority rights in a democratic society have affected Canadians' attitudes toward the relationship between governments and the courts.

## The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey of Canadians

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

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

# Introduction

The first two reports from the 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey examined many of the familiar issues that underpin regional cleavages in Canada, such as the distribution of federal transfers, or the management of natural resources. Regional differences in opinion on these issues are typically tied to differences between the provinces in terms of their wealth, the current state of their economies, and the types of industries on which they depend. Often, economic grievances are exacerbated by how the economy and the redistribution of the country's wealth are managed by Ottawa.

The question arises, however, as to whether regional differences in attitudes about the federation are driven not only by conflicting economic interests, but also by differences in values; that is, the general preferences that citizens have about the type of life they want to live as individuals, and the type of society in which they wish to pursue that life. Such value differences might anchor different regional political cultures – ones that the concept of federalism is designed to accommodate, but which can nonetheless fuel regional tensions within Canadian politics when the federal government appears more attuned to some value preferences than others.

In the Canadian context, it's generally accepted that Quebecers (and Quebec francophones specifically) have different values than other Canadians – they are assumed to be more collectivist, for instance (accepting higher levels of taxation in return for a more activist state), or more socially liberal. More recently, attention has been drawn to the assertion that francophone Quebecers are more secular than

other Canadians; that is, less comfortable with the presence of religion in public life, and more adamant about the strict separation of church and state.

The idea that different regions in Canada adhere to different values, however, extends beyond a consideration of Quebec. Earlier in 2020, at the time the Confederation of Tomorrow survey was wrapping up, a group of Alberta politicians issued a declaration advocating for a fairer deal for Alberta in Confederation. The declaration's authors argued that Alberta is distinct in Canada, not just in terms of its economy, but also its values, with a "culture of self-sufficiency, respect for the rule of law, and equality of opportunity," and a people who are "innovators, entrepreneurs, and risk takers."<sup>1</sup>

It is not the aim of this report to provide a comprehensive assessment of the extent of regional value differences in Canada. Rather, it will contribute more modestly to this ongoing discussion by analyzing the answers to several relevant questions from the Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey of Canadians. These include questions that touch on religion, and the question of how the state, in a secular society, should exercise its religious neutrality.

The survey shows that, in many cases, the similarities in views across regions in Canada are more striking than the differences. One key exception, however, is precisely on the question of how the state should exercise its religious neutrality. And differences in views on this question may be leading to other differences in opinion, such as on the issue of the appropriate relationship between legislatures and the courts.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Buffalo Declaration (February 20, 2020); accessed at <https://buffalodeclaration.com/the-buffalo-declaration>.

# Values: similarities and differences

On questions relating to values such as respect for authority and religiosity, the similarities in view across regions are more striking than the differences: a plurality in every jurisdiction (except Nunavut) says that it's somewhat (but not very) important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority; and a plurality in every jurisdiction (except Nunavut) disagrees that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.

The Confederation of Tomorrow 2020 survey includes two questions in particular that can be used to shed some light on the extent of value differences across the country. The first asks Canadians how important it is “to strengthen respect and obedience for authority.” The second asks whether Canadians agree or disagree that “our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.”

## Respect and obedience for authority

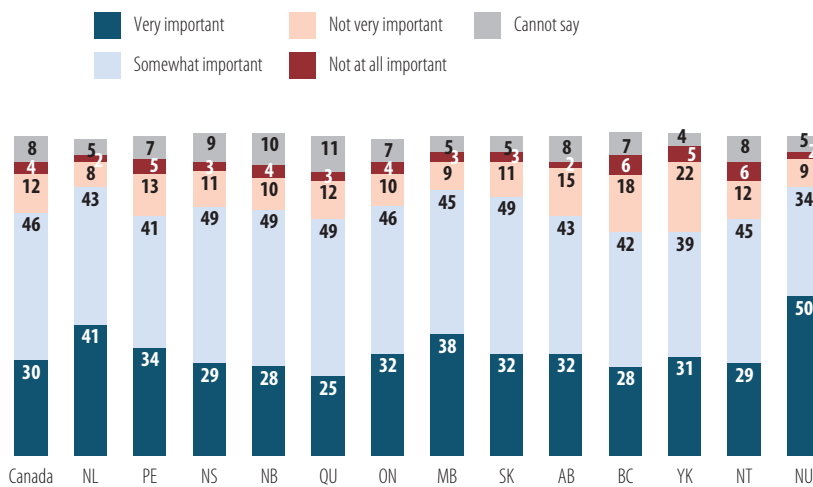
Thirty percent of Canadians say it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority, and an additional 46 percent say it's somewhat important. Only 16 percent say it's not very or not at all important, and eight percent cannot say.

There is some variation across the provinces, but the overall pattern is consistent. In most provinces, between 25 and 35 percent say it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority, between 40 and 50 percent say it's somewhat important, and between 10 and 20 percent say it's not very or not at all important.

The exceptions to this pattern are:

- The proportion saying it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority is somewhat higher in Newfoundland and Labrador (41%), and Manitoba (38%).
- The proportion saying it's not very or not at all important is somewhat higher in B.C. (24%).

CHART 1  
How important is it to strengthen respect and obedience for authority?



Q.7  
How important is it to strengthen respect and obedience for authority?



The three territories are very different from one another. Answers in the Northwest Territories follow the same pattern as those in most provinces. The Yukon resembles B.C. in that its residents are more likely than average (27%) to say that it's not very or not at all important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority – in fact, Yukoners are more likely than Canadians in any other jurisdiction to hold this view. Nunavut stands out in the opposite sense: 50 percent of Nunavut residents say it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority – and they are more likely than Canadians in any other jurisdiction to hold this view.

Opinions on this question also vary in important ways by age, immigration status and education.

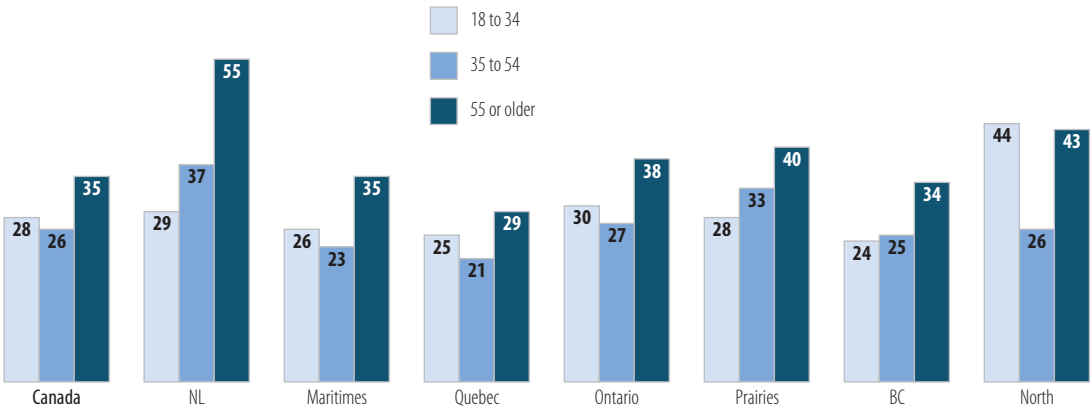
**AGE.** Older Canadians are more likely to say that it's *very important* to strengthen respect and obedience for authority. Twenty-eight percent of those under the age of 65 express this view, compared to 41 percent of those age of 65 and over. It is worth noting, however, that views are broadly similar among Canadians under the age of 65: for instance, among those in their early 20s and early 60s, the same proportion (29%) say that it's very important to strengthen respect and

obedience for authority. There is one exception to this pattern: younger residents of the North are more likely than their middle-age counterparts to say that it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority.

**IMMIGRATION STATUS.** First-generation Canadians (37%) are more likely than their second-generation (26%) or third-plus generation (29%) counterparts to say that it's *very important* to strengthen respect and obedience for authority.

**EDUCATION.** Canadians with a university degree (25%) are less likely than those without this type of education (32%) to say that it's *very important* to strengthen respect and obedience for authority. And this difference helps to explain the difference among age groups, noted previously. Among university-educated Canadians, there is very little difference among age groups in the proportion saying it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority. Among those without a university degree, however, the portion holding this view increases significantly with age. Thus, the difference among age groups is partly an effect of the change in education attainment over time, as older Canadians are less likely than their younger counterparts to hold a university degree.

**CHART 2**  
**How important is it to strengthen respect and obedience for authority?**  
 Very important, by age



Q.7  
 How important is it to strengthen respect and obedience for authority?

## Religious services

Thirty-one percent of Canadians agree that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly, including 10 percent who strongly agree and 21 percent who somewhat agree. But a greater proportion – just over one in two (54%) – disagree, including 21 percent who somewhat disagree and 33 percent who strongly disagree. An additional 15 percent cannot say.

A plurality in every province (but not every territory) *disagrees* that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.

In three major regions of the country, the level of agreement with this statement is more or less the same: in the Maritimes (35%), Ontario (35%) and the Prairies (34%).

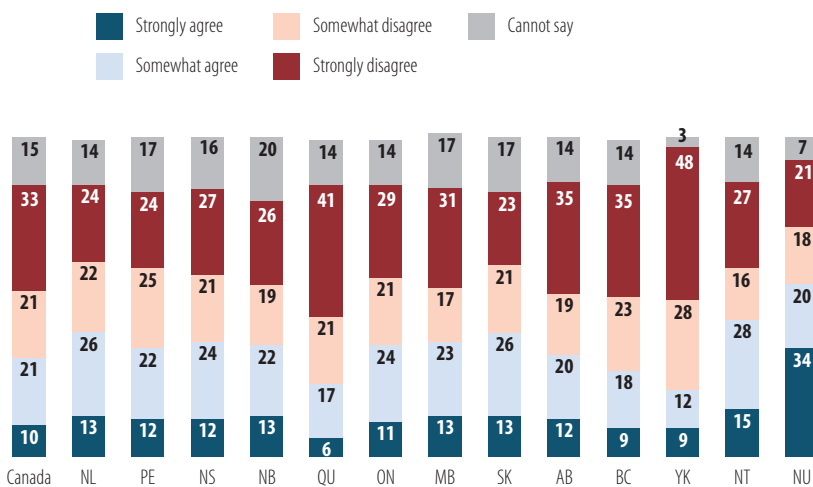
Among the provinces, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are the most likely to agree (40%) that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious

services more regularly. Among the provinces *outside of Quebec*, British Columbians are the least likely to agree (27%).

However, the provinces where agreement with the statement is lowest is Quebec, where only 23 percent agree and 63 percent disagree. The figures for francophone Quebecers are 22 percent and 65 percent, respectively.

Once again, residents in the three territories are very different from one another, with views in Yukon being the most weighted to one side, views in Nunavut being the most weighted to the other, and the Northwest Territories being somewhat in the middle. Only 21 percent of Yukoners agree that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly – the lowest level among all 13 jurisdictions – compared to 43 percent among residents of the Northwest Territories, and 54 percent among those in Nunavut – the highest level among all 13 jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup>

CHART 3  
Society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly



Q.5c

Agree/Disagree: Our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.

<sup>2</sup> These differences mirror differences in the proportion of each territory's population that is Indigenous and may, among other things, reflect differences in the timing and form of sustained contact with Canadian institutions and the role of Western religions in colonialism.

As was the case with the question about authority, opinions on this question vary according to a number of factors besides region.

**GENDER.** Men (34%) are somewhat more likely than women (29%) to agree that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.

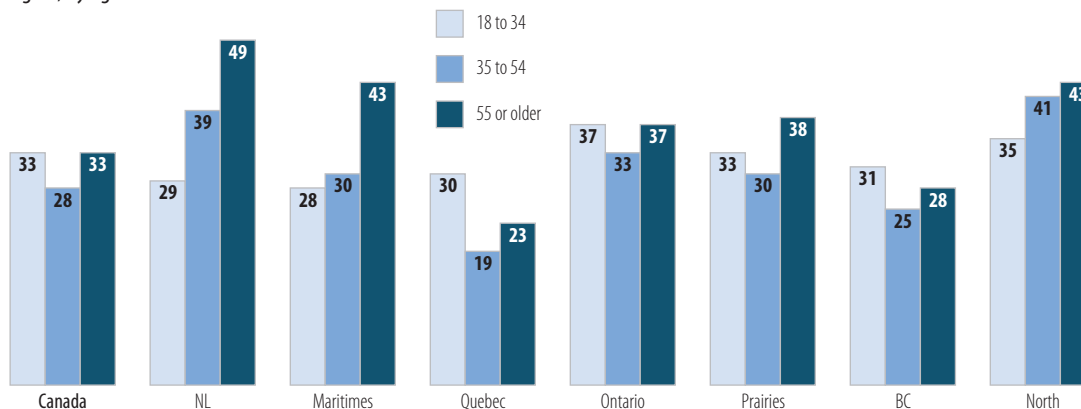
**AGE.** While some might expect that agreement as to the value of attending religious services would decline as age decreases, this is not the case. There are in fact few significant differences among age groups. If anything, those in the middle age groups (age 35 to 54) are slightly less likely to agree than either their older or younger counterparts. The one caveat is that the pattern is not uniform across the country. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Maritimes and the North, for instance, agreement rises with age. But this is not the case in the larger provinces, notably Ontario, Quebec and B.C. One effect of these different patterns is that, while the views of Canadians age 18 to 34 are very similar across the country, there are much larger differences across regions in the views of those in the older age groups.

**IMMIGRATION STATUS.** First-generation Canadians (42%) are more likely than their second-generation (33%) or third-plus generation (28%) counterparts to agree that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.

Taken together, the results of these two questions can be summarized as follows. First, while there are some differences in view across provinces and regions, in general the similarities in view are more striking; a plurality in every jurisdiction (except Nunavut) says that it's somewhat important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority, and a plurality in every jurisdiction (except Nunavut) disagrees that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly. While francophone Quebecers are less likely than Canadians outside of Quebec to agree that society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly, majorities of both francophone Quebecers and other Canadians disagree with the proposition. Second, there are other factors relating to opinions on these questions, such as age, educational attainment and immigration status, that are at least as important as region. Third, the picture becomes more complex when these different factors are combined: for instance, the differences among age groups are not consistent across regions.

It's fair to conclude, then, that it's important both to acknowledge regional variations – such as the greater differences across age groups in Newfoundland and Labrador, or the striking differences in opinions across the three northern territories – without exaggerating these by asserting that the country is stricken by significant regional value cleavages.

**CHART 4**  
Society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly  
Agree, by age



Q.5c  
Agree/Disagree: Our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.

## A Closer Look a Change Over Time

Views on whether society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly have changed significantly since the question was asked in the CRIC *Portraits of Canada* survey in 2003: agreement has fallen from 47 percent to 31 percent. Disagreement, however, has only increased slightly from 50 percent to 54 percent; what has risen more is the proportion offering no opinion (an increase from 4% to 15%).<sup>3</sup> However, the proportion that *strongly* disagrees has increased significantly, from 11 percent to 33 percent. In other words, among those who disagree, the intensity of disagreement has increased, with fewer “somewhat disagreeing” and more “strongly disagreeing.”

A comparison of the same age cohorts between 2003 and 2020 – that is, of the views of age groups in 2003 compared to those in age groups *17 years older* in 2020 – shows that the level of agreement fell for each cohort, and fell somewhat more sharply for the older cohorts. For instance, 35 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 24 agreed in 2003, compared to 28 percent of those 17 years older (between the ages of 35 and 41) in 2020 – a difference of seven points. Among those age 55 and older in 2003 – and 72 and older in 2020 – agreement fell from 60 percent to 41 percent – a difference of 19 points.

What this analysis shows is that views on the importance of attending religious services have changed over time, not because more religious older generations are being replaced by less religious younger generations, but because the views of each generation have changed – with the views of older generations shifting more significantly away from seeing religious service attendance as important.

---

<sup>3</sup> This is partly due to the change in the survey format, from a telephone survey to one conducted online; generally speaking, survey participants are less likely to say they “don’t know” or “cannot say” in telephone surveys compared to online surveys, partly because these responses are not prompted by the interviewer.

## Do Urban and Rural Canadians Have Different Values?

It's often assumed that there are significant differences in the values of Canadians living in the country's big cities and those living in smaller towns and rural areas. The results of the 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey caution against making such generalizations. The survey provides some evidence of urban-rural value differences, but also shows that the pattern differs from one region of the country to another.

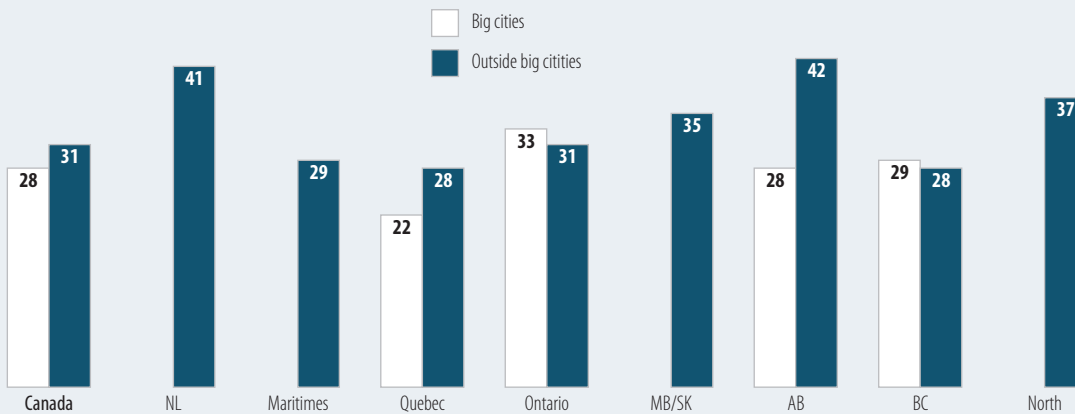
In the case of both questions – relating to respect and obedience for authority, and attendance at religious services – the views of Canadians living in one of the country's six biggest cities<sup>4</sup> do not differ significantly from those living outside of them. Twenty-eight percent of big city residents, compared to 31 percent of other Canadians, say it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority; 32 percent, compared to 30 percent, agree that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly. As is often the case in Canada, however, the national averages obscure variations across the country.

The proportion saying it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority is higher than average in some non-metropolitan areas of the country, such as non-metropolitan Alberta (42%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (41%), and lower in some metropolitan areas, such as Calgary-Edmonton (28%), Vancouver (29%) and Montreal (22%). But this does not mean that this is the principle cleavage across the country. For instance, the proportion saying it's very important to strengthen respect and obedience for authority is just as high in Quebec outside of Montreal as it is in the big city areas of Calgary-Edmonton and Vancouver. The proportion holding this view is higher in metropolitan Ontario (Toronto and Ottawa) than in the Maritimes. And, while there are significant urban-rural differences in Alberta, there is no difference between the views of those living inside and outside big cities in both Ontario and B.C.

CHART 5

### How important is it to strengthen respect and obedience for authority?

Very important, by community size



Q.7  
How important is it to strengthen respect and obedience for authority?

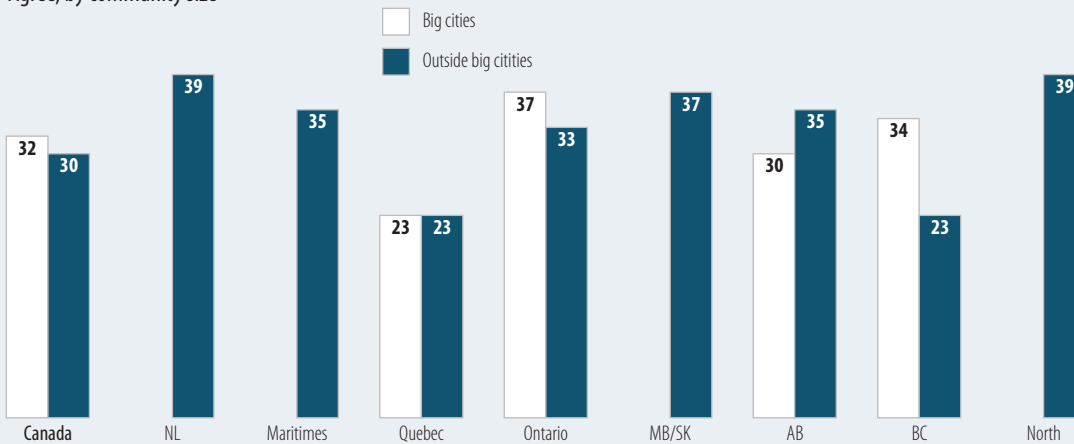
<sup>4</sup> These are the metropolitan areas with over a million residents: Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

There are also some unexpected results when it comes to views of the importance of attending religious services. Agreement that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly is higher than average in some of the less urbanized regions of the country, such as Newfoundland and Labrador (39%), the North (39%), and Saskatchewan (39%). But there is no difference in views in Quebec between those living inside and outside Montreal. More notably, big city residents in both Ontario and B.C. are *more* likely to agree than their counterparts living in other areas of each province. In other words, on this question, in those regions where there is a difference in opinion between those living inside and outside of big cities, the difference is opposite to the one expected (with the views of big city residents being more conservative or traditional). This is likely due to the concentration of immigrants in big cities such as Toronto and Vancouver (the differences between the views of immigrants and non-immigrants are noted in the main text accompanying this text box.)

### CHART 6

#### Society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly

Agree, by community size



Q.5c

Agree/Disagree: Our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly.

The conclusion, then, is that while there are some urban-rural differences on these questions in some parts of the country, this is not consistently the case in all regions. Moreover, the views of non-metropolitan Canadians in various regions often differ from one another, as do the views of metropolitan Canadians. There are modest differences in values among Canadians, but it's not correct to say that these amount to differences along an urban-rural divide.

# Religion and belonging

In Canada outside Quebec, three in four agree that a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less Canadian than anyone else. A majority of Quebecers also agree, regardless of whether the question refers to being “no less Canadian” or “no less of a Quebecer.”

In order to explore attitudes toward religion, the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow included a question asking whether Canadians agreed with the notion that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less Canadian than anyone else.” Three in four (76%) Canadians agreed, and only 18 percent disagreed (6% offered no opinion). Notably, Quebecers (72%) were only slightly less likely than other Canadians (77%) to agree. Seven in ten (70%) francophone Quebecers agreed, compared to 22 percent who disagreed.

It’s possible that some Quebecers who are supportive of the separation of religion from public institutions in Quebec (*laïcité*) were more inclined to agree with the statement because it referred to “being Canadian” rather than “being a Quebecer” – in other words, because the frame of reference was neither Quebec society nor the Quebec state. To test this hypothesis, the question was asked again in the 2020 survey, but with a variation in Quebec. Half of the survey participants in the province, chosen at random, along with those outside Quebec were asked the same question as in 2019. The other half of Quebec participants were asked if

they agreed that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less of a *Quebecer* than anyone else.”

Outside Quebec, results in 2020 are similar to those in 2019: 75 percent agree that a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less *Canadian* than anyone else. Roughly three and four agree in each region of the country (outside Quebec), with little variation by gender, age, immigration status or education.

In Quebec, agreement with this statement (referring to being “no less Canadian”) is slightly lower than last year: 63 percent agree, compared to 72 percent in 2019 (the level of agreement in 2020 is also 63% among Quebec francophones). Importantly, however, agreement among those Quebecers asked the second version of the question (referring to being no less of a *Quebecer*) is exactly the same: 63 percent (62% among Quebec francophones); fewer than one in four (23%, or 24% among francophones) disagree. Agreement is just as high (63%) even among supporters of the Bloc Québécois, the party that most staunchly defended the concept of *laïcité* during the October 2019 federal election campaign.

Thus, a majority of Quebecers support the notion that strong religious affiliation does not detract from one’s belonging to a shared society, regardless of whether that society is framed in terms of Canada or Quebec – although the level of support in Quebec is slightly lower than in the rest of Canada, and slightly lower in 2020 than in 2019.

# Religion and the state: public servants wearing religion symbols

Thinking about how governments should exercise religious neutrality, one in two Canadians outside Quebec prefer the option of non-interference with the practise of religion, while three in ten prefer the option of prohibiting public servants from displaying their religious affiliation. In Quebec, the pattern is reversed: only one in three choose the first option, while one in two prefer the second.

In 2019, the Quebec government adopted Bill 21, a law entitled “an Act respecting the laicity of the State,” that, in the interest of the separation of church and state and of religious neutrality, prohibits certain public officials (such as those working in the justice or education systems) from wearing religious symbols in the exercise of their official duties.<sup>5</sup> In order to more directly address the controversy the Bill provoked, the 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey asked Canadians to choose between two different notions of state neutrality with respect to religion.

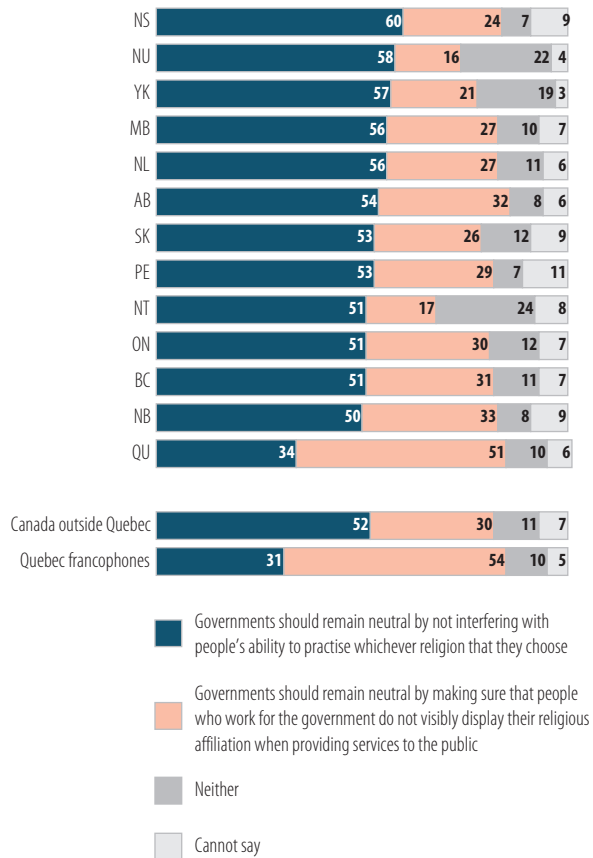
The survey question read as follows:

*Our society is made up of people from many different religions, as well as many people who do not belong to any religion at all. Thinking about governments and religions, which of the following approaches do you prefer?*

- a) *governments should remain neutral by not interfering with people’s ability to practise whichever religion that they choose;*
- b) *governments should remain neutral by making sure that people who work for the government do not visibly display their religious affiliation when providing services to the public;*
- c) *neither of these.*

Strictly speaking, the first two options are not mutually exclusive: one could opt for both. But the question was designed to test the relative appeal of the two main approaches that governments in Canada might follow.

CHART 7  
Preferred approach to religious neutrality  
By region



Q.8  
*Our society is made up of people from many different religions, as well as many people who do not belong to any religion at all. Thinking about governments and religions, which of the following approaches do you prefer?*

<sup>5</sup> The text of the Act can be found at <http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2019C12A.PDF>



Overall, a plurality of Canadians – almost one in two (48%) – prefer the first option, where governments remain neutral by not interfering with people’s ability to practise whichever religion that they choose. Just over one in three (35%) prefer the version of neutrality, wherein governments make sure that public servants do not visibly display their religious affiliation when providing services to the public. One in ten (11%) prefer neither version, and seven percent cannot say.

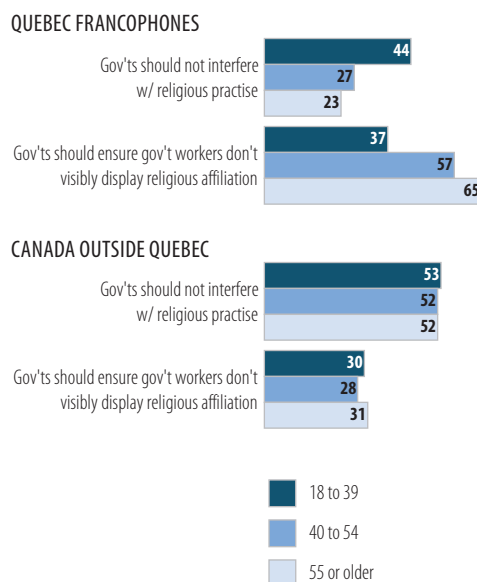
On this question, however, views in Quebec are significantly different from those outside the province. Outside Quebec, 52 percent prefer the option of non-interference with the practise of religion, and 30 percent prefer the option of prohibiting public servants from displaying their religious affiliation – a gap of 22 points. In Quebec, 34 percent prefer the first option and 51 percent prefer the second – a gap of 17 points in the opposite direction. (Among Quebec francophones, the figures are 31% and 54%, respectively.)

While there are some differences among jurisdictions outside Quebec – with preference for the option of non-interference with the practise of religion ranging from a low of 50 percent in New Brunswick to a high of 60 percent in neighbouring Nova Scotia – it’s nonetheless accurate to say that the other 12 jurisdictions more or less cluster together, while Quebec stands apart.

Within Quebec, however, there are important differences in opinion among different population groups.

**AGE.** Compared to their older counterparts, younger Quebecers are less likely to favour the option of prohibiting people who work for the government from visibly displaying their religious affiliation when providing services to the public: 37 percent of francophone Quebecers under the age of 40 favour this option, compared to 57 percent of those between the ages of 40 and 54, and 65 percent of those age 55 and older. A plurality of those under the of 40 (44%) favour the other option (the government not interfering with people’s ability to practise whichever religion that they choose). There is no comparable difference among age groups in the rest of Canada. Notably, the views of younger francophone Quebecers on this question resemble those of their counterparts in the rest of Canada, which is not the case for the older age groups: there is a only a nine-point difference in support for the option of “non-interference” among those between the ages of 18 and 39, compared to a 29-point gap among those age 55 and older.

**CHART 8**  
Preferred approach to religious neutrality  
By age group



Q.8  
Our society is made up of people from many different religions, as well as many people who do not belong to any religion at all. Thinking about governments and religions, which of the following approaches do you prefer?

**IMMIGRATION STATUS.** Quebecers who are first- or second-generation immigrants (34%) are much less likely than Quebecers born in Canada to Canadian-born parents (55%) to favour the option of prohibiting people who work for the government from visibly displaying their religious affiliation when providing services to the public. In contrast, there is only a very small difference in views on this question between these two groups in the rest of Canada.

**EDUCATION.** In Quebec, those with a university education are *more likely* than average to favour the option of prohibiting people who work for the government from visibly displaying their religious affiliation when providing services to the public. Outside Quebec, those with a university education are *less likely* than average to favour this option.

There is also – not surprisingly – a connection between views on how the state should express its religious neutrality, and views on the place of religion in society in general, but with a notable difference between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

As noted earlier, **outside Quebec**, three in four agree that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less Canadian than anyone else.” Among those who hold this view, a majority (60%) prefer that the option of the government not interfering with people’s ability to practise whichever religion that they choose. However, among Canadians outside Quebec who *disagree* that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less Canadian than anyone else,” only 27 percent prefer the option of government non-interference in religion.

Among **francophones in Quebec**, it’s also true that those who agree that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less of a Quebecer than anyone else” are more likely to prefer to option of the government not interfering with people’s ability to practise whichever religion they choose. In fact, they are more than twice as

likely as those who disagree with this statement to hold this preference (the figures are 35% and 16%, respectively). Despite this difference, it remains the case that majorities among both groups – that is, both those who agree and those who disagree that “a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less of a Quebecer than anyone else” – prefer the option of prohibiting people who work for the government from visibly displaying their religious affiliation when providing services to the public (the figures are 54% for those who agree, and 63% for those who disagree). In other words, among francophones in Quebec, even those who agree that strong religious adherence has no bearing on a person’s belonging to Quebec society prefer that the government regulate the wearing of religious symbols by public servants.

The extent of the difference in views between francophone Quebecers and other Canadians on this particular question should be contrasted with the broad similarities in views on the other questions about religion, reviewed previously. While francophone Quebecers are less likely than other Canadians to agree both that our society would be better off if people attended church or other religious services more regularly, and that a person who has a strong attachment to their own religion is no less Canadian (or no less of a Quebecer) than anyone else, these differences are relatively modest; most importantly, majorities in both parts of the country are of the same view (disagreeing with the first statement, and agreeing with the second). Only on the question of whether governments should prohibit of the wearing of religious symbols by public servants do most francophone Quebecers disagree with most other Canadians. Taken together, these findings suggest that the greater support in Quebec for restrictions on the wearing of religious symbols is rooted not so much in a difference in attitudes toward religion or religious minorities *per se*, but more specifically in a difference in interpretation of the meaning of religious neutrality.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Note that this conclusion is consistent with those of a separate study by Luc Turgeon and colleagues, which found that the difference in support for restrictions on minority religious symbols in Quebec and the rest of Canada can be explained by the fact that two different interpretations of liberal values predominate in the two parts of the country (rather than by the predominance of “illiberalism” or intolerance in Quebec): “Whereas in Quebec, holding stronger liberal values is associated with greater support for restrictions on minority religious symbols, in the rest of Canada, stronger liberal values are associated with weaker support for such restrictions.” See Luc Turgeon, Antoine Bilodeau, Stephen E. White and Ailsa Henderson, “A Tale of Two Liberalisms? Attitudes toward Minority Religious Symbols in Quebec and Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* (2019), 52: 247–265.

# Parliament, the courts and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

In cases when Parliament passes a law, but the Supreme Court says it's unconstitutional on the grounds that it conflicts with the Charter of Rights, a majority of Canadians say that the Supreme Court should have the final say. In answer to a second question, a plurality also says that governments in Canada should not have the power to overrule the courts by passing a law which the courts have declared to be unconstitutional because it violates the Charter.

Controversial legislation such as Quebec's Bill 21 raises the question of how a democratic society should balance the principles of the rule of majority and the protection of the rights of minorities. This question was also at the heart of constitutional debates in Canada leading to the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. The Charter's protections of rights and freedoms imposes limits on the powers of federal and provincial legislatures; however, the Charter also contains an "override" section (Section 33) which gives legislatures the ability to conditionally and temporarily suspend the application of certain of the Charter's provisions. Quebec's Bill 21 applies the override, ensuring that the law cannot be struck down by the courts on the grounds that it violates Charter rights.

Since the adoption of the Charter, Canadians have been surveyed about how they view the relationship between Parliament and the courts, and about their support for the existence of the Charter's override clause. While court decisions in Canada striking down legislation found to violate the Charter are sometimes controversial, previous surveys have found that a substantial majority of Canadians believe that the Supreme Court, and not Parliament, should have the final say in such cases, and that only a minority support the existence of Section 33.

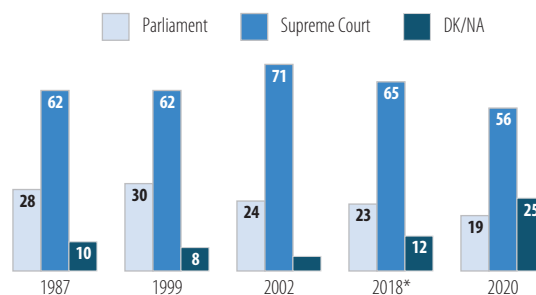
The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey, conducted after the passage of Bill 21 in Quebec, shows that this pattern remains largely unchanged. Specifically:

- In cases when Parliament passes a law, but the Supreme Court of Canada says it's unconstitutional on the grounds that it conflicts with the Charter of Rights, a majority of Canadians (56%) say that the Supreme Court should have

the final say. One in five (19%) say that Parliament should have the final say, and one in four (25%) offer no opinion.

- In response to a second question on the topic, a plurality (46%) say that governments in Canada should not have the power to overrule the courts by passing a law, even though the courts have declared that law to be unconstitutional because it violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Fewer Canadians (27%) say that government should have this override power, and an identical proportion (27%) cannot say.

**CHART 9**  
Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Charter:  
Who has the final say?  
1987 - 2020



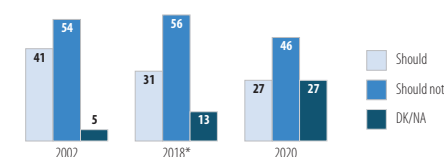
\* 2018: Question asked only to those who had heard of the Charter (85% of total sample)

1987 data: York University; 1999 data: IRPP; 2002 data: CRIC

Q.44

When Parliament passes a law but the Supreme Court of Canada says it is unconstitutional on the grounds that it conflicts with the Charter of Rights, who should have the final say, Parliament or the Supreme Court?

Should governments be allowed to override Charter?  
2002 - 2020



\* 2018: Question asked only to those who had heard of the Charter (85% of total sample)

Q.45

As you may know, in certain cases, the Canadian Constitution gives governments the power to overrule the courts by passing a law, even though the courts have declared it to be unconstitutional because it violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Do you think that governments should or should not have this power?

The main difference between this survey and the ones that preceded it is that, for both questions, the proportion opting not to provide an answer is now much larger. This is likely due to the change in survey format, from telephone to online.<sup>7</sup>

As the proportion saying they cannot say has increased, the proportion taking either position – that is, either in favour of Parliament or in favour of the courts – have both decreased somewhat compared to previous surveys (although the preponderance of opinion still rests with the courts and the Charter). This means, however, that at the very least, there is no evidence that the accumulation of court decisions enforcing the Charter (including in highly controversial cases, such as those striking down restrictions on assisted suicide or prostitution) has resulted in an increase over time in support for the ability of Parliament to overrule the courts.

This pan-Canadian trend notwithstanding, the question remains as to whether the debate over Bill 21 has prompted a shift in position on these questions in Quebec. In this regard, the two survey questions provide different results.

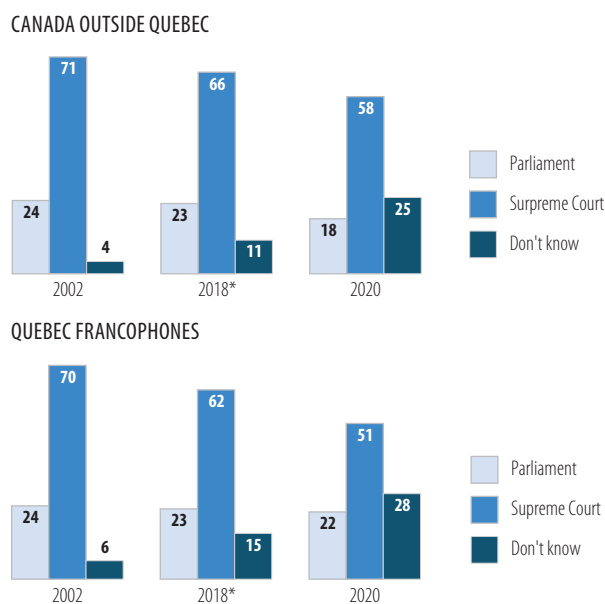
The first of the two questions asks who should have the final say when Parliament passes a law, but the Supreme Court of Canada says it's unconstitutional on the grounds that it conflicts with the Charter of Rights. (In the context of this discussion of opinions in Quebec, it's important to note that the question refers to the federal Parliament, and not the provincial Parliament (*l'Assemblée nationale*) in Quebec City.) In the case of this question:

- Previously, there was no difference between the views of Quebec francophones and other Canadians. In the 2020 survey, however, Quebec francophones (51%) are slightly less likely than other Canadians (58%) to say that the Supreme Court should have the final say. That said, the overall pattern is the same, with Quebec francophones and other Canadians being much more likely to say that the Supreme Court should have the final say than they are to say it should be Parliament.
- Both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, views on who should have the final say do not relate to views on the question of how the government should exercise its

religious neutrality. There is no significant difference in views on the relationship between the courts and Parliament between those who prefer that the government not interfere with religion, and those who prefer that the government prohibit public servants from visibly displaying their religious affiliation.

The second question asks whether governments in Canada should or should not have the power to overrule the courts by passing a law, even though the courts have declared that law to be unconstitutional because it violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In this case, the views of Quebecers appear to be diverging somewhat from those of other Canadians.

**CHART 10**  
**Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Charter:**  
**Who has the final say?**  
 2002 - 2020



\* 2018: Question asked only to those who had heard of the Charter (85% of total sample)

2002 data: CRIQ

Q.44

*When Parliament passes a law but the Supreme Court of Canada says it is unconstitutional on the grounds that it conflicts with the Charter of Rights, who should have the final say, Parliament or the Supreme Court?*

<sup>7</sup> The proportion of survey participants who say they “don’t know” or “cannot say” in response to a question – especially a question about which participants may have little direct knowledge or experience – is typically lower in the case of surveys conducted by phone, partly because these options are not prompted by the interviewer.

Overall, as mentioned, the biggest change over time is the increase in the proportion of Canadians who offer no opinion on the question – which is likely a result of the fact that the most recent survey was conducted online rather than by telephone. This means the proportion saying that governments should have the override power, and the proportion saying that they should not, have both decreased.

In Canada outside of Quebec, the bigger change is in the proportion saying that governments *should* have this power: down 17 points (from 42% to 25%) since 2002. The proportion saying that governments *should not* have this power fell only four points (from 53% to 49%) over that period.

In contrast, among francophone Quebecers, the bigger change is in the proportion saying that governments *should not* have this power: down 19 points since 2002 (from 56% to 37%). The proportion saying that governments *should* have this power dropped only six points (from 39% to 33%) during that period.

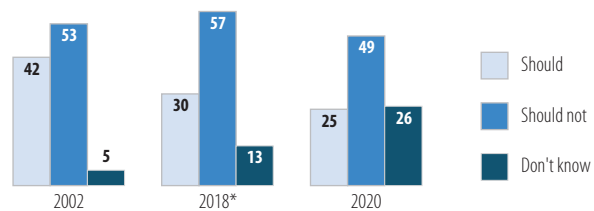
The net result is a widening gap between the views of francophone Quebecers and other Canadians on this question. In 2002, francophone Quebecers were three points *more likely* than other Canadians to say that governments should not have the override power; in 2020, they are 12 points *less likely* to express this view.

Furthermore, in both Quebec and in the rest of Canada, views on this question are related to views on the question of how the government should exercise its religious neutrality – but the relationship is stronger in Quebec.

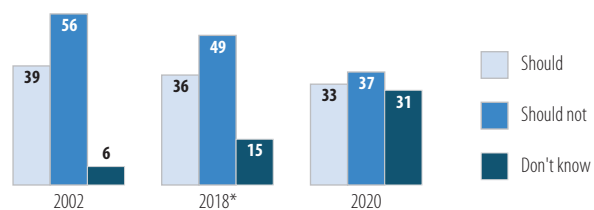
- In the **rest of Canada**, those who prefer that the government not interfere with religion are somewhat less likely to support the Charter’s override clause, compared to those who prefer that the government prohibit public servants from visibly displaying their religious affiliation (the figures are 24% and 32%, respectively). Importantly, however, both groups are more likely to say that governments should not have this override power.

**CHART 11**  
**Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Charter:**  
**Should governments be allowed to override Charter?**  
 2002 - 2020

CANADA OUTSIDE QUEBEC



QUEBEC FRANCOPHONES



\* 2018: Question asked only to those who had heard of the Charter (85% of total sample)

2002 data: CRIC

Q.45

*As you may know, in certain cases, the Canadian Constitution gives governments the power to overrule the courts by passing a law, even though the courts have declared it to be unconstitutional because it violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Do you think that governments should or should not have this power?*

- **Francophones Quebecers**, however, are more divided. First, the difference between the two groups is larger; among francophone Quebecers, the override power is supported by 25 percent of those who prefer that the government not interfere with religion, compared to 42 percent of those who prefer that the government prohibit public servants from visibly displaying their religious affiliation. Second, the preponderance of opinion differs within each of the two groups. Among those who prefer that the government not interfere with religion, a plurality (45%) says that governments *should not* have the power to override the Charter. Among those who prefer that the government prohibit public servants from visibly displaying their religious affiliation, a plurality (42%) says that government *should* have this power.

It would appear, then, that in Quebec, the first of the two survey questions – which relates specifically to the relationship between the federal Parliament and the Supreme Court – does not tap into views on *laïcité* and Bill 21, perhaps because, to date, the debate about Bill 21 has largely unfolded within Quebec and involved only Quebec’s political institutions. The second question, however, refers more generally to governments and the courts, and so could be interpreted as referring to governments and courts in Quebec. In this case, the opinions of francophone Quebecers are more divided, and more closely tied to views on controversial issues such as Bill 21. While it remains the case that, like other Canadians, the preponderance of opinion in Quebec is still on the side of the courts and their role in upholding Charter rights even if that means overruling the legislature, views in the province may be evolving, and could shift further should a measure such as Bill 21 find itself the subject of a Supreme Court ruling.

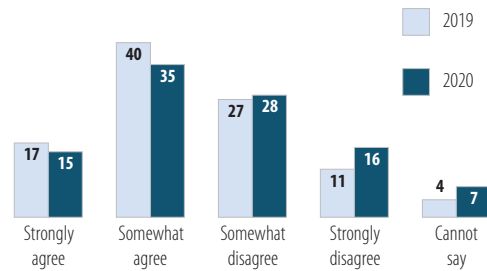
# Perceptions of regional value differences

One in two Canadians agree that people across the country basically have the same values, but two in five disagree. Agreement with this statement has fallen by seven points since 2019, with the drop being greater in provinces where the level of agreement had previously been higher than average.

The 2020 Confederation of Tomorrow survey also addressed the issue of value differences across the country by asking Canadians whether or not they agree that “Canadians basically have the same values regardless of which region of the country they live in.” Views on this question are somewhat divided, with one in two (50%) Canadians agreeing that people across the country basically have the same values, and 43 percent disagreeing (7% cannot say either way).

Agreement that Canadians basically have the same values, regardless of which region they live in, is highest in Nunavut (64%), Newfoundland and Labrador (56%), Ontario (55%) and Prince Edward Island (55%); and lowest in New Brunswick (47%), Alberta (44%), Yukon (42%) and Quebec (42%) (slightly lower among Quebec francophones (40%)). The level of agreement is similar among both Indigenous Peoples (53%) and non-Indigenous people (50%). Agreement is higher among first-generation immigrants (62%) than among their second-generation (51%) and third-generation-plus counterparts (46%).

CHART 12  
Do Canadians in all regions have the same values?  
2019 - 2020



Q.5b  
Agree/Disagree: Canadians basically have the same values regardless of which region of the country they live in.

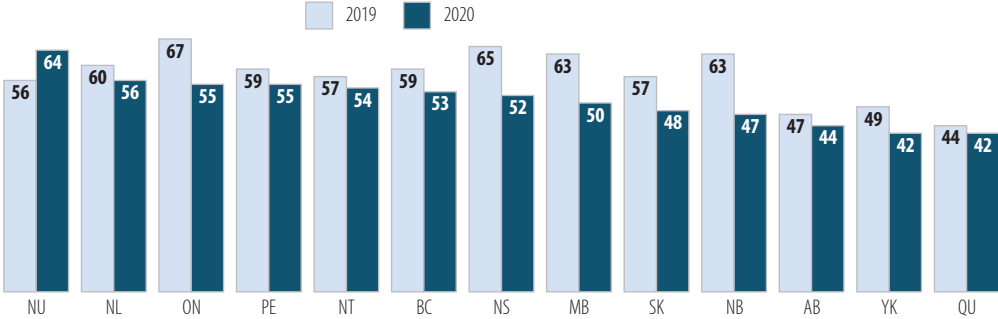
<sup>8</sup> Note that the surveys provide two distinct snapshots (in early 2019 and 2020), and do not track the same voters over time. The survey cannot say whether Canadians who support one of these opposition parties changed their minds on this question; or whether Canadians who agreed or disagreed with this question shifted their support from one party to another.

Agreement with this statement has fallen by seven points, from 57 percent to 50 percent, since 2019. The declines are most significant in Manitoba (down 13 points, from 63% to 50%), Ontario (down 12 points, from 67% to 55%) and the Maritimes (also down 12 points, from 63% to 51%). This means that the drop was greater in provinces where the level of agreement had previously been higher than average.

The reasons for this drop are not immediately clear. It is possible, however, that the change reflects how supporters of different political parties view the outcome of the October 2019 federal election. There is no change in agreement

among supporters of the federal Liberal Party, with agreement being higher than the Canadian average in both 2019 (63%) and 2020 (62%). But there has been a significant drop among supporters of the opposition parties, including the Conservatives (from 58% to 46%), the NDP (from 59% to 48%) and the Bloc Québécois (from 35% to 26%).<sup>8</sup> It is possible, then, that compared to Liberal Party supporters, Canadians who did not vote for the current government are more struck by or concerned about the regional variations in party support (such as the Liberals being shut out of Alberta and Saskatchewan, or the resurgence of the Bloc Québécois) that characterized the 2019 election result.

**CHART 13**  
**Do Canadians in all regions have the same values?**  
 2019 - 2020 Agree, by province/territory



Q.5b  
 Agree/Disagree: Canadians basically have the same values regardless of which region of the country they live in.



**Environics  
Institute**

**The Environics Institute  
for Survery Research**

900-33 Bloor Street East  
Toronto, ON M4W 3H1

416 969 2457  
[www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org)