

**Confederation  
of Tomorrow**  
SURVEY OF CANADIANS

**Relations with  
Indigenous Peoples**

June 2022

**Environics  
Institute**  
For Survey Research

**Confederation  
of Tomorrow**  
SURVEY OF CANADIANS

**La Confédération  
de demain**  
MENÉ AUPRÈS DES CANADIENS

The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys are annual studies conducted by an association of the country's leading public policy and social research organizations: the Environics Institute for Survey Research, the Centre of Excellence on the Canadian Federation, the Canada West Foundation, the Centre D'Analyse Politique – Constitution et Fédéralisme, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government. The surveys give voice to Canadians about the major issues shaping the future of the federation and their political communities. The 2022 study consists of a survey of 5,461 adults, conducted online in the provinces between January 18 and February 10; and by telephone in the territories between January 6 and 30. For more information about the survey, contact [info@environicsinstitute.org](mailto:info@environicsinstitute.org).

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# Executive summary

Previous Confederation of Tomorrow surveys have documented a gradual shift in Canadian public opinion toward greater support for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the process of reconciliation. The 2022 survey updates this information, highlighting how the opinions of both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians have continued to evolve, particularly in the wake of the discovery of the graves of hundreds of children on the sites of former Indian residential schools.

The 2022 survey shows that Canadians are increasingly likely to describe current relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada as negative rather than positive. At the same time, the proportion of Canadians who say that governments in Canada have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples has increased significantly since 2020. Additionally, a majority of Canadians continue to feel that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The proportion holding this view has edged downward slightly since last year, but remains higher than in 2019 and 2020.

In other areas, there has been little or no change. Most notably, despite the extensive public discussion that followed the discoveries of unmarked graves of children on the sites of former Indian residential schools, there was no significant change in the proportion of Canadians who say they feel familiar with the history of Indian residential schools in Canada. The fallout from the discovery of these graves also does not appear to have affected views on the prospects for achieving reconciliation: Canadians are neither more optimistic nor more pessimistic today than they were in 2021.

Finally, since 2019, the strength of the Indigenous identity has grown somewhat, as more Indigenous Peoples now consider themselves to be Indigenous only or first; this change is more noticeable for those who identify as Métis. A growing proportion of Indigenous Peoples also say that either their Indigenous government, or no government, best represents their interests, while fewer say that any non-Indigenous government (whether the federal government, their provincial or territorial government, or their municipal government) does.

# Sommaire

Les sondages précédents sur la Confédération de demain ont enregistré une évolution graduelle de l'opinion publique canadienne montrant un plus grand appui envers les droits des peuples autochtones et le processus de réconciliation. Le sondage de 2022 fournit de l'information à jour à ce sujet, et souligne comment l'opinion des peuples autochtones et des Canadiennes et Canadiens non autochtones a continué d'évoluer, particulièrement dans la foulée de la découverte des tombes de centaines d'enfants sur les sites des anciens pensionnats autochtones.

Le sondage de 2022 montre que les Canadiennes et les Canadiens sont de plus en plus susceptibles de décrire les relations actuelles entre les peuples autochtones et les non-Autochtones au Canada comme négatives, plutôt que positives. En même temps, la proportion de Canadiennes et de Canadiens qui disent que les gouvernements au Canada n'en ont pas fait assez pour faire progresser la réconciliation avec les peuples autochtones a augmenté considérablement depuis 2020. De plus, une majorité de Canadiennes et de Canadiens continuent d'être d'avis que chaque personne a un rôle à jouer dans les efforts pour favoriser la réconciliation entre les peuples autochtones et les non-Autochtones. La proportion de personnes qui sont de cet avis est légèrement à la baisse depuis l'année dernière, mais demeure plus élevée qu'en 2019 et 2020.

Sur les autres questions on observe une intéressante stabilité. En particulier, malgré la discussion publique exhaustive qui a suivi la découverte des tombes non marquées d'enfants sur les sites des anciens pensionnats autochtones, aucun changement significatif n'a été observé quant à la proportion de Canadiennes et de Canadiens qui disent connaître l'histoire des pensionnats autochtones au Canada. Les répercussions de la découverte de ces tombes semblent aussi ne pas avoir eu d'incidence sur l'opinion des Canadiennes et Canadiens quant à la possibilité d'en arriver à la réconciliation : ils ne sont ni plus optimistes, ni plus pessimistes aujourd'hui qu'ils ne l'étaient en 2021.

Enfin, depuis 2019, l'identité autochtone a quelque peu gagné en force : plus d'Autochtones se considèrent maintenant comme Autochtones seulement, ou d'abord comme Autochtones. Ce changement est plus notable pour les personnes qui s'identifient comme métisses. Une proportion croissante d'Autochtones dit aussi que ce sont les gouvernements autochtones, ou aucun gouvernement, qui représentent le mieux leurs intérêts, alors que moins d'entre eux sont d'avis qu'un gouvernement non autochtone (qu'il s'agisse du gouvernement fédéral, de leur gouvernement provincial ou territorial ou de leur gouvernement municipal) représente le mieux leurs intérêts.

# Background

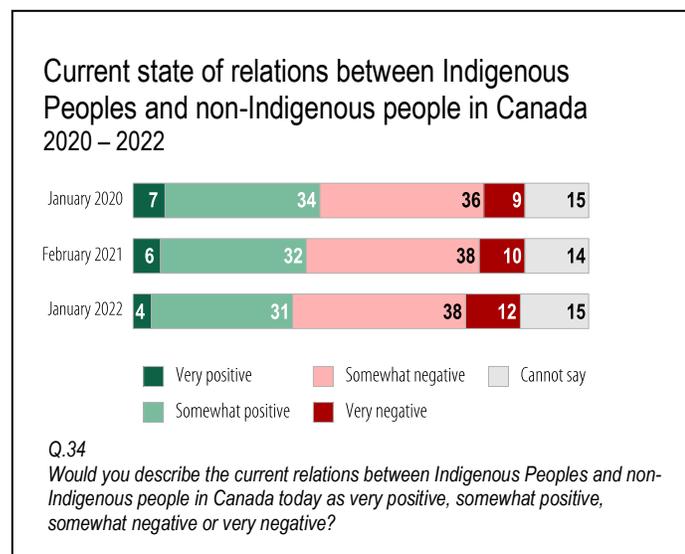
The period covered by the Confederation of Tomorrow annual surveys (which began in 2019) has been marked by a series of high-profile events relating to the history and current status of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In early 2020, a conflict over pipeline construction to the West Coast through the territory of the Wet'suwet'en nation sparked a dispute that eventually led to the blockade of railway lines at several locations across the country. In 2021, the discovery of the graves of hundreds of children at the sites of former Indian residential schools shone a light on the painful history and contemporary legacy of the residential school policy. At the same time, milestones toward reconciliation were reached, including the passage of [federal legislation](#) to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the appointment of [Mary May Simon](#) as the country's first Indigenous Governor General.

[Reports from earlier Confederation of Tomorrow surveys](#) have documented a gradual shift in Canadian public opinion toward greater support for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the process of reconciliation. The 2022 survey updates this information, highlighting how the opinions of both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians have continued to evolve.

## The state of relations

*Canadians are now less likely to describe relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada as positive, and more likely to describe these relations as negative.*

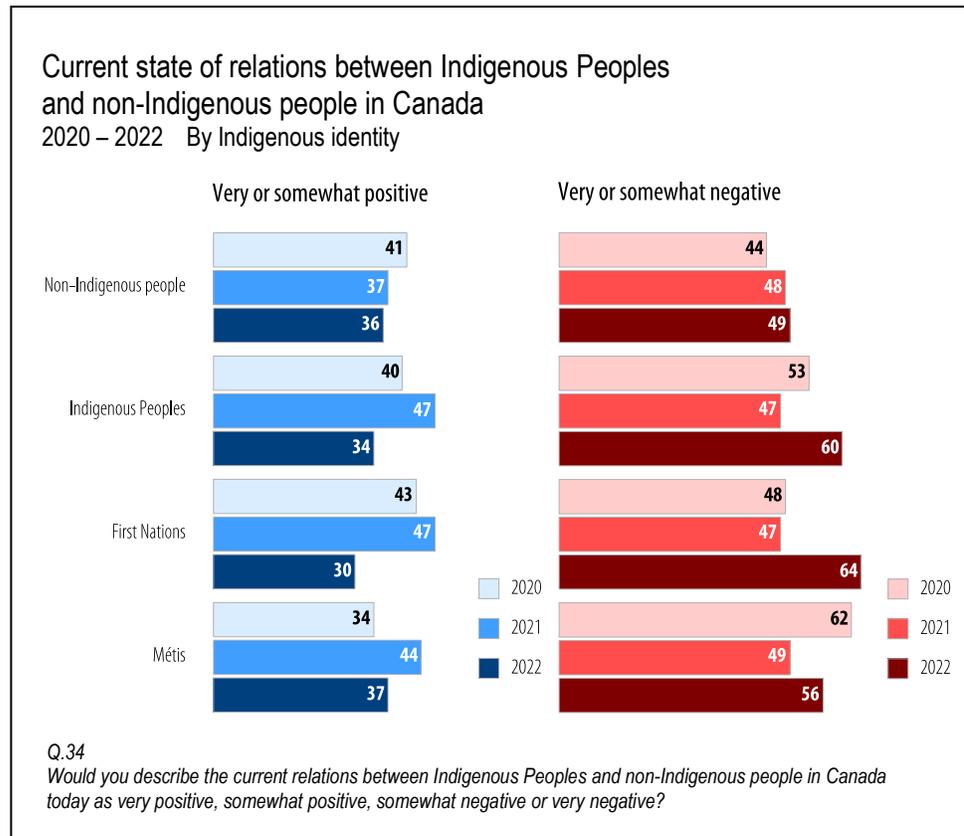
Since early 2020,<sup>1</sup> there has been a gradual decline (from 41% to 35%) in the proportion of Canadians describing current relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada as positive; and a gradual increase (from 45% to 50%) in the proportion describing these relations as negative. In 2020, Canadians were slightly more likely to see relations as negative rather than positive (4-point gap); but Canadians are now 15 points more likely to describe relations as negative rather than positive.



<sup>1</sup> The 2020 survey occurred in January of that year, just prior the escalation of the conflict over pipeline construction through Wet'suwet'en territory that brought the conflict to widespread public attention.

The change has been more dramatic among those who identify as First Nations. Since 2020, the proportion of First Nations people describing relations as positive has declined by 13 points (from 43% to 30%), while the proportion describing relations as negative has increased by 16 points (from 48% to 64%). Whereas opinion was divided in 2020, First Nations people are now more than twice as likely to say relations are negative as they are to say they are positive.

Across Canada’s regions, current relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people are most likely to be described as positive by those living in the North (55%). They are most likely to be described as negative by those living in the Prairies (57%), especially by Manitoba residents (63%).

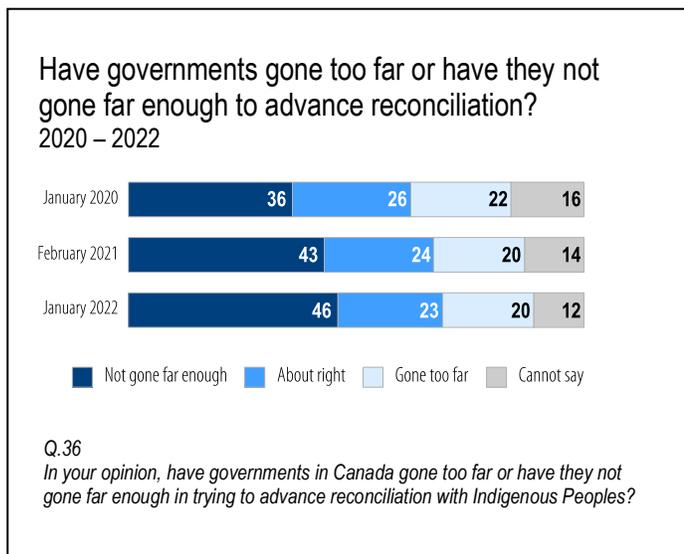


## Progress toward reconciliation

*The proportion of Canadians who say that governments in Canada have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples has increased significantly since 2020.*

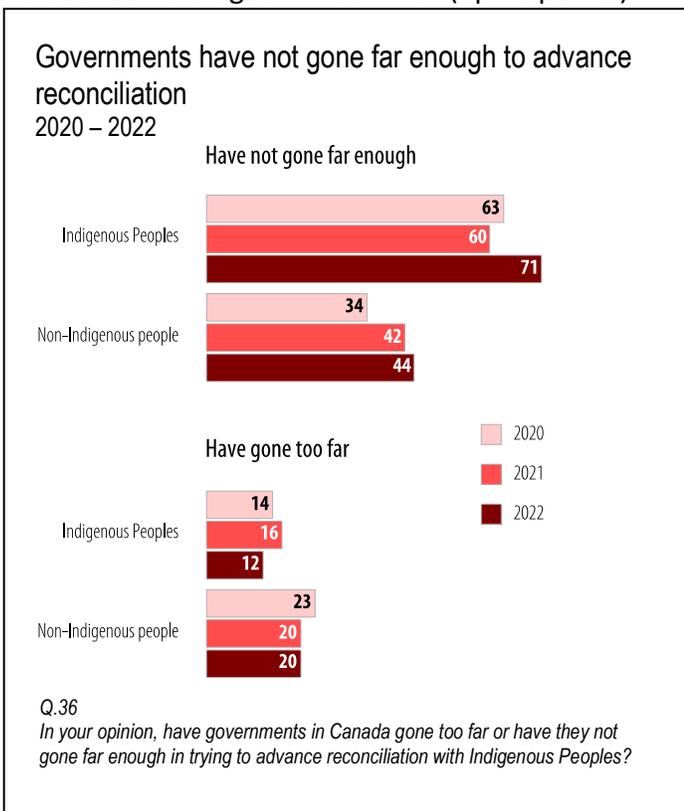
The fact that a growing proportion of non-Indigenous Canadians see relations with Indigenous Peoples as negative is not in and of itself an unequivocally negative development. It may arguably be seen as a sign of greater public awareness of the historical and contemporary impact of government policies on Indigenous Peoples, and of the work left to be done to advance reconciliation.

In this context, it is notable that the proportion of Canadians who say that governments in Canada have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples has increased significantly since 2020, from 36 percent to 46 percent. Among non-Indigenous Peoples, the increase has been from 34 percent to 44 percent. One in five Canadians (20%) say that governments have gone too far (down 2 points since 2020), and a total of 35 percent say that things are about right or do not offer an opinion either way (down 7 points since 2020).



The proportion saying that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation has increased in all regions of the country (except in the North, where this proportion was already higher than elsewhere in Canada). It has also occurred across all age groups, though it is more pronounced among younger Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34 (up 15 points). The increase is also sharper among those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents (up 13 points) than among first- or second- generation immigrants (up 6 points).

There remains a significant difference in opinion between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians on this issue: Indigenous Peoples (71%) are far more likely (by 27 points) than non-Indigenous Canadians (44%) to say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation. That said, comparatively few among either group feel that governments have gone too far: this view is held by only 12 percent of Indigenous Peoples and 20 percent of non-Indigenous Canadians.

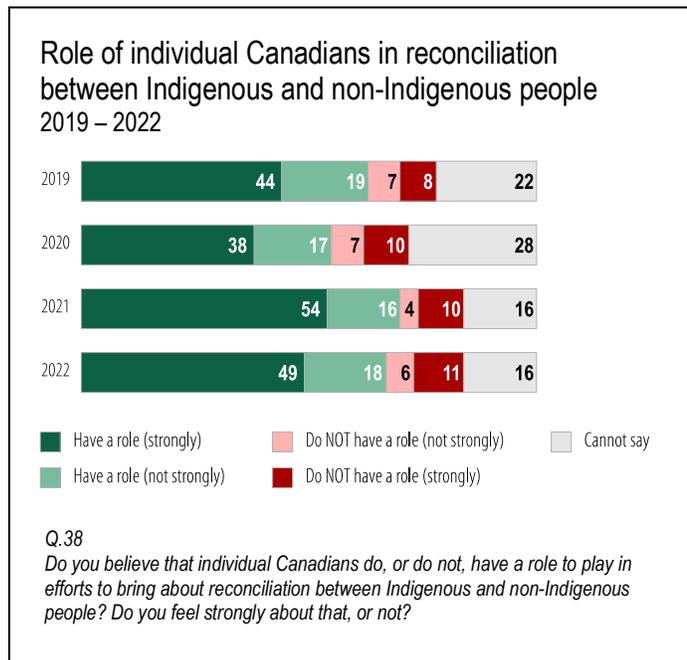


# The role of individual Canadians

*Two in three Canadians feel that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.*

While much of the discussion about reconciliation focuses on government policy, reconciliation is also underpinned by a greater public understanding of the history and current circumstances of Indigenous Peoples. As such, it is a process that involves citizens as well as governments.

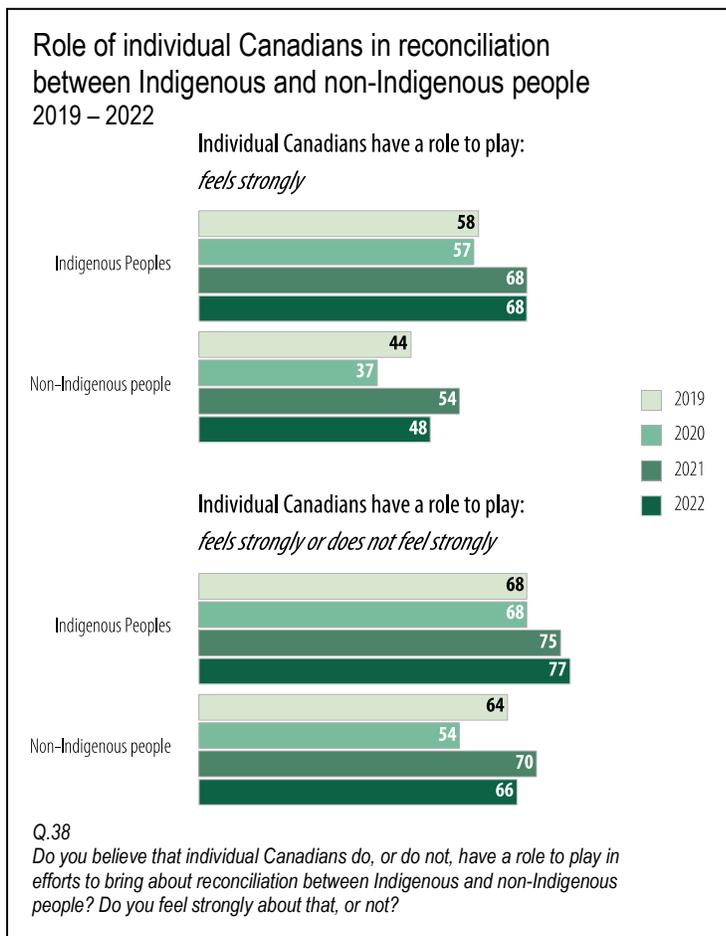
This is recognized by a majority of Canadians. In 2022, two in three Canadians (67%) feel that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, including one in two (49%) who feel strongly that this is the case. Fewer than one in five (17%) do not believe individual Canadians have a role to play in reconciliation, including one in ten (11%) who feel strongly that there is no role for individuals.



The view that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation is held much more strongly by Indigenous Peoples (68%) than by non-Indigenous Canadians (48%). However, the gap narrows when comparing those who agree that Canadians do have a role, regardless of whether they feel strongly about this or not. In this case, majorities of both groups (77% of Indigenous Peoples and 66% of non-Indigenous Canadians) hold the same view.

The proportion believing that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation increased significantly between 2020 and 2021, suggesting that high-profile events such as the blockade of railway lines in support for the Wet'suwet'en nation produced greater awareness and support of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The proportion holding this view has edged back very slightly since then (from 70% in 2021 to 67% in 2022), but remains higher than in 2019 or 2020.

Currently, the view that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation (whether or not this is strongly held) is widely shared across different groups of the population, including by majorities in each region of the country, across all age groups, and among supporters of each of the main federal political parties. However, this view is somewhat more likely to be felt *strongly* by younger Canadians: among non-Indigenous Canadians, 54 percent of those age 18 to 34 feel strongly that individual Canadians have a role to play, compared to 44 percent of those age 35 to 54, and 47 percent of those age 55 and older. It is also somewhat more likely to be felt *strongly* by those with a post-secondary education: among non-Indigenous Canadians, 51 percent of those with a college or university education feel strongly that individual Canadians have a role to play, compared to 42 percent of those who did not continue their education past high school.



## Familiarity with the history of Indian residential schools

*The extensive public discussion sparked by the discoveries in 2021 of unmarked graves of children on the sites of former Indian residential schools was not followed by an increase in the proportion of Canadians who say they feel familiar with the history of Indian residential schools in Canada.*

[The previous Confederation of Tomorrow survey](#), conducted in early 2021, found that, while a majority of Canadians say they have some familiarity with the history of Indian residential schools in Canada, a significant minority do not – suggesting there is still work to be done on the “truth” component of the truth and reconciliation process.

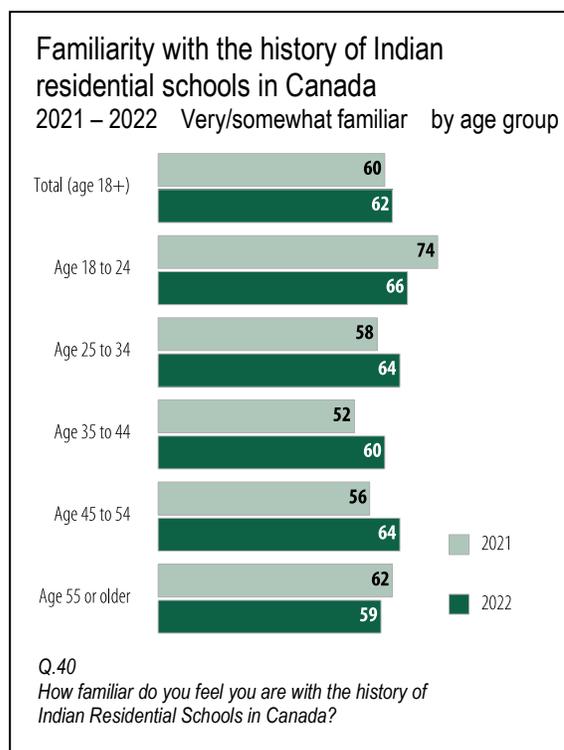
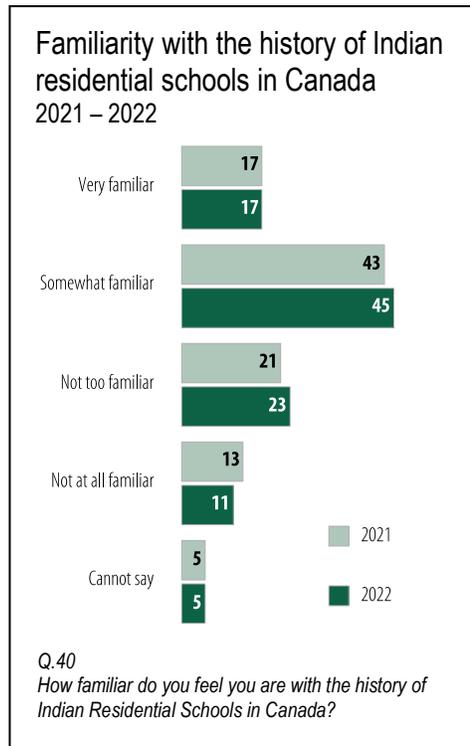
In the months following the survey, discoveries of unmarked graves of children on the sites of former residential schools led to extensive public discussion of the Indian residential schools policy. This development, however, did not lead to an increase in the proportion of Canadians who say they feel familiar with the history of Indian residential schools in Canada. Currently, 62 percent say they feel very or somewhat familiar, which is similar to the 60 percent who felt this way a year earlier. One in three (33%) say they feel not too or not at all familiar with this history, virtually unchanged from the 35 percent who felt this way in 2021.

As in 2021, familiarity in 2022 is higher among Indigenous Peoples than non-Indigenous people. However, while familiarity has increased by only two points since 2021 among non-Indigenous people (from 59% in 2021 to 61% in 2022), it has increased by seven points among Indigenous Peoples (from 77% in 2021 to 84% in 2022), and by 13 points among those who identify as First Nations specifically (from 73% in 2021 to 86% in 2022).

Familiarity with the history of Indian residential schools in Canada varies somewhat across regions of the country. In 2022, it is higher in the North (84%) and the Prairies (69%), and lower in Atlantic Canada (59%) and Quebec (55%). (Notably, in the North, large majorities of both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people say they are very or somewhat familiar with the history of Indian residential schools.)

Younger Canadians are slightly more likely to say they are familiar than are older Canadians (66% of 18 to 24-year-olds say they are very or somewhat familiar, compared to 59% of those age 55 and older; the figures for those saying they are very familiar are 25% and 14%, respectively).

Familiarity is also higher among those with a university education (70%), compared to those who did not continue their education past high school (54%). Finally, familiarity is higher among those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents (66%) than among second-generation (61%) or first-generation (52%) immigrants.



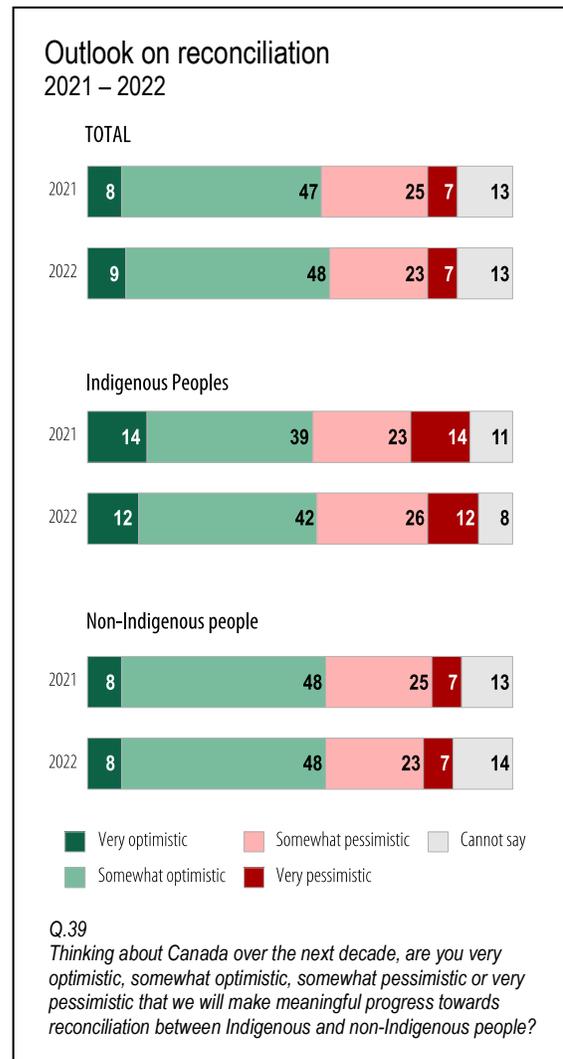
# Outlook on reconciliation

*Majorities of Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians remain optimistic that we will make meaningful progress toward reconciliation over the next decade.*

The fallout from the discovery of unmarked graves of children at the sites of former Indian residential schools also does not appear to have affected views on the prospects for achieving reconciliation: Canadians are neither more optimistic nor more pessimistic today than they were in 2021.

Currently, a majority of Canadians (56%) are very or somewhat optimistic that we will make meaningful progress toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people over the next decade. This figure is virtually unchanged from a year ago (55%). Three in ten (30%) are very or somewhat pessimistic (the figure in 2021 was 32%). Notably, relatively few Canadians have strong views either way: in 2022, only nine percent are *very* optimistic, and only seven percent are *very* pessimistic.

On this question, there is little difference in the level of optimism expressed by Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians: 54 percent of Indigenous Peoples, and 57 percent of non-Indigenous people, say they are very or somewhat optimistic that we will make meaningful progress toward reconciliation over the next decade. Indigenous Peoples, however, are somewhat less likely than non-Indigenous people to express no opinion, and slightly more likely to say they are pessimistic (38%, compared to 30%).



# Indigenous identity and representation

*The proportion of Indigenous Peoples selecting any non-Indigenous government as the one that best represents them has declined sharply.*

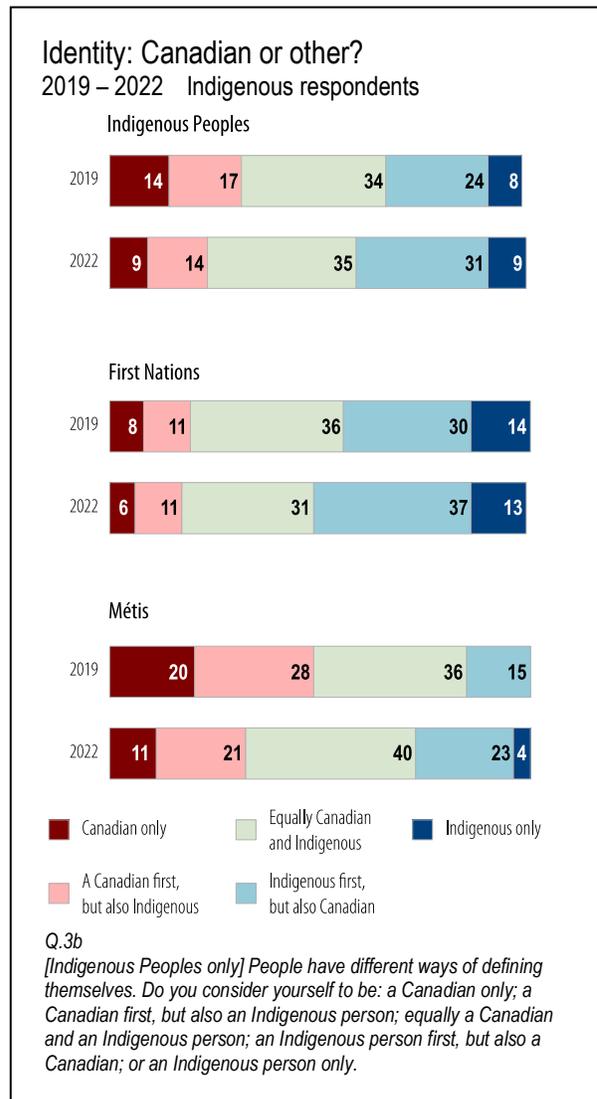
The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys include questions about Indigenous identity and Indigenous governments. Both types of question suggest that gradual changes are taking place in the ways in which Indigenous Peoples see themselves in the Canadian context.

## Identity

Those who study political identities in Canada often ask about the relative appeal of national and other identities: Canadians are asked, for instance, if they consider themselves to be a Canadian first, a person from their province first, or both of these equally. This question was adapted in the Confederation of Tomorrow survey by asking Indigenous Peoples if they consider themselves to be:

- a Canadian only;
- a Canadian first, but also an Indigenous person;
- equally a Canadian and an Indigenous person;
- an Indigenous person first, but also a Canadian;
- or an Indigenous person only.

The results show that, as in the case with other residents of Canada, most Indigenous Peoples have overlapping identities, with a total of 80 percent saying they consider themselves to be both Canadian and Indigenous, compared to nine percent who say they are a Canadian only, and nine percent who say they are Indigenous only.



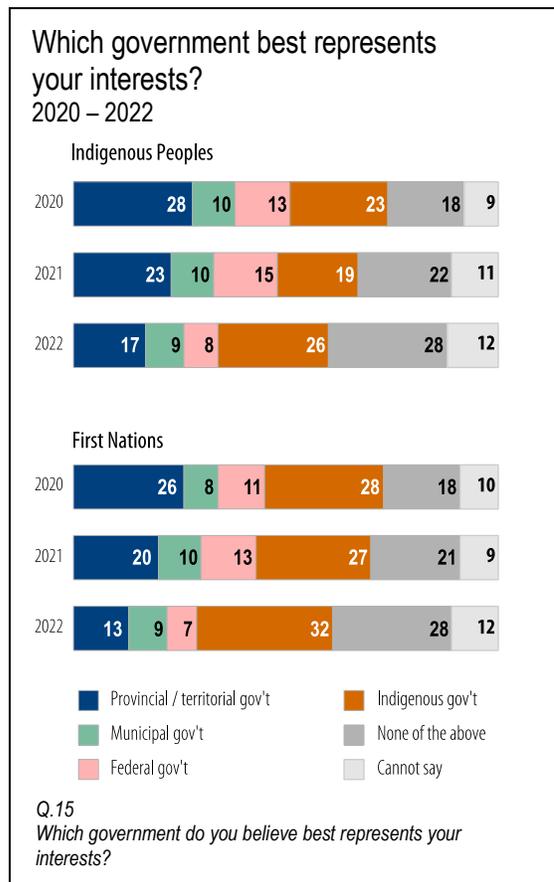
Since 2019, however, the strength of the Indigenous identity has grown somewhat: 40 percent now consider themselves to be Indigenous only or first, compared to 32 percent in 2019. This change is more noticeable for those who identify as Métis. Among those who identify as First Nations, the proportion identifying as Indigenous only or first has increased by seven points

since 2019 (from 43% to 50%), whereas it has increased by 12 points (from 15% to 27%) among those who identify as Métis.<sup>2</sup>

### Representation

The survey asks all Canadians which government best represents their interests. In addition to considering the federal government and their provincial or territorial, and municipal governments, Indigenous Peoples have the option of selecting their Indigenous government.<sup>3</sup> And in 2022, a greater proportion of Indigenous Peoples selected this option – their Indigenous government (26%) – as the one that best represents their interests, than selected their provincial or territorial government (17%), their municipal government (9%) or the federal government (8%). Among those who identify as First Nations, 32 percent say their Indigenous government is the one that best represents them.<sup>4</sup>

Among all Indigenous Peoples, however, the most popular choice is none of these options: 28 percent say that no government best represents their interests. This is an increase of 10 points since 2020 (just prior to the pandemic), when 18 percent said that no government best represents them.



The proportion of Indigenous Peoples who say their Indigenous government best represents them has also increased slightly since 2020 (up 3 points, from 23% to 26%). At the same time, the proportion choosing any non-Indigenous government – that is, either the federal government, their provincial or territorial, or municipal government – has declined sharply, from 51 percent in 2020 to 34 percent in 2022. Among those who identify as First Nations, the decline in the proportion selecting one of these three non-Indigenous governments as their best representative declined from 45 percent to 29 percent.

<sup>2</sup> The sample size for those who identify as Inuk is too small to allow results for this group to be presented separately.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that not all Indigenous Peoples live in a situation where the notion of an Indigenous government would apply.

<sup>4</sup> In Nunavut, where the majority of the population is Inuit, 57 percent say that the territorial government best represents their interests. This figure is higher than for any other province or territory, with the exception of P.E.I., where 57 percent also say that their provincial government is their best representative.

# Conclusion

The Canadian public in general continues to remain, on balance, supportive of efforts to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Non-Indigenous Canadians are more than twice as likely to say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation as they are to say that governments have gone too far. And a majority continues to feel that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation.

A majority of Canadians also express some familiarity with the history of Indian residential schools in Canada. But a significant minority (one in three) are not familiar with this history – a proportion that remained virtually unchanged between early 2021 and early 2022. This finding points to the importance of continuing to support ongoing public discussion and education about the history and current situations of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada.