

MEDIA RELEASE

New survey reveals shifting attitudes towards immigration in Canada

TORONTO, October 30, 2023 – Today the **Environics Institute for Survey Research** and **Century Initiative** released a new national survey on Canadian public opinion about immigration and refugees, as part of the Environics Institute’s ongoing Focus Canada research program.

The results reveal that Canadians are still more likely to disagree than agree that there is too much immigration, but the gap between these two opposing views has shrunk from 42 percentage points to just 7. This marks a dramatic reversal from a year ago when public support for immigration numbers was at an all time high, reflecting a rising trend stretching back three decades. This recent shift is largely driven by rising concerns about how newcomers may be contributing to the current housing crisis. Also contributing to this change is the fact that over the past year Canadians have become more negative about the direction of the country, the economy, and in governments’ ability to plan for future challenges.

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

Today’s research shows that Canadians have concerns about Canada’s ability to welcome the number of newcomers we have, but we are not seeing a rise in xenophobia or hostility to immigrants themselves, said Lisa Lalande, CEO of Century Initiative. As an organization that advocates for responsible population growth, we see this data as a clarion call for proactive economic planning, astute integration policies, and investments in areas of concern, such as housing, in order to preserve the confidence of Canadians. Immigration makes us a more prosperous, diverse, resilient, and influential country – but only if we do the work to grow well.

The true significance of this latest shift in public opinion lies in the fact that it is the first time in many decades (if ever) that a growing number of Canadians are questioning how many immigrants are arriving in the country, as opposed to who they are and where they are coming from, comments Keith Neuman, Senior Associate with the Environics Institute, who has been tracking Canadian opinions on this issue for over 20 years.

This survey is part of the Environics Institute’s ongoing Focus Canada public opinion research program (launched in 1976), and was conducted in partnership with the Century Initiative. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted (via landline and cellphones) with 2,002 Canadians between September 4 and 17, 2023. A sample of this size drawn from the population produces results accurate to within plus or minus 2.2 percentage points in 19 out of 20 samples. All results are presented as percentages, unless otherwise noted. The full report is available [here](#).

Research Highlights

- **Over the past year Canadians have become more negative about the direction of the country and the economy.** Only one in three (34%) of Canadians are now satisfied with the way things are going in the country today (down 13 percentage points from 2022) and the level of pessimism about the economy is comparable to recessions over the past four decades. As in 2022, Canadians continue to identify Inflation and the cost of living (24%) as the most important issue facing the country, along with the economy and interest rates (13%), with housing affordability now near the top of the list in 2023 (14%).
- **Canadians are significantly more likely than a year ago to say there is too much immigration,** reversing a trend dating back decades. More than four in ten Canadians now strongly (23%) or somewhat (21%) agreeing with the statement, “there is too much immigration to Canada,” up 17 percentage points from one year ago and the largest one-year change ever recorded on this question. Those who agree with this statement are most likely to cite concerns that newcomers may be contributing to the current housing crisis (38% of this group give this reason) compared to only 15% in 2022.

- **A strong majority of Canadians continue to strongly (36%) or somewhat (38%) agree that “immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada”,** but this proportion has declined by 11 points over the past year and is now at its lowest level since 1998.
- **Apart from rising concerns about the extent of immigration, there has been no corresponding change in how Canadians feel about immigrants themselves, how they integrate, and what they contribute to society.** For example, more than four in ten (42%) Canadians say that immigrants make their own community a better place, compared with fewer than one in ten (9%) who believe they make it worse. Most of the remainder maintain that immigrants make no difference either way (41%). Those who are positive about the impact of immigrants are most likely to say this is because they add to the local diversity and multiculturalism, with others emphasizing economic and population growth benefits.
- In Quebec, fewer than four in ten (38%) somewhat or strongly agreed that “immigration tends to threaten Quebec culture,” compared with almost six in ten (58%) who disagree. This reflects a dramatic change from three decades ago, when in 1993 it was a majority (57%) of Quebecers who expressed agreement with this statement.
- This year’s survey asked Canadians what priority they feel the government should place on each of six streams of newcomers. Canadians are most likely to want government to prioritize immigrants who contribute to the economy (those with specialized skills and good education), followed by refugees fleeing persecution and family members of current residents. Lower priority is given to temporary workers and foreign students.

- 30 -

Media contacts:

Keith Neuman, Ph.D.

Environics Institute

416-272-6628

keith.neuman@environics.ca

en français

Andrew Parkin

Environics Institute

905-464-3853

andrew.parkin@environics.ca

Lisa LaLande

Century Initiative

416-843-8655

lisa@centuryinitiative.ca

The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established in 2006 as an independent non-profit organization to promote relevant and original public opinion and social research on important issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it has been changing, and where it may be heading. www.EnvironicsInstitute.org

Century Initiative is a national, non-partisan charity with a mission to enhance Canada’s long-term prosperity, resiliency and global influence by responsibly growing the population of Canada to 100 million by 2100. Century Initiative delivers its mission by leading, enabling and partnering on initiatives that support long-term thinking and planning in immigration; infrastructure and environment; economy, entrepreneurship and innovation; support for children and families; and education, skills and employment. Century Initiative takes a network approach, prioritizing inclusion of diverse perspectives to inform and advance its work. www.centuryinitiative.ca