

# CANADIAN YOUTH - A SOCIAL VALUES PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY, LIFE ASPIRATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT OF MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z

## FINAL REPORT

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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

The two youngest generations of Canadians – most often referred to as Generation Z (ages 9 to 24) and Millennials (25 to 40) – are the largest in the country's history, and together make up a substantial proportion of the population (over 40%). These generations play a dominant role in today's economy, both in the workforce and as the principal consumer market in many industries. At the same time, their influence is much less significant when it comes to how the country is governed, in terms of politics and policy. Most of the positions of power in Canada are filled with people in older generations, who often appear to not appreciate or give credence to the priorities of younger people. Because younger Canadians are less likely to vote in elections, they lack political clout to demand greater attention.

But today's youth are already assuming leadership roles that will expand rapidly over the next few years. It is in everyone's interest that their voices be heard and fully incorporated into society's collective decision-making. Their world context and life experiences are distinct from those of their parents and grandparents, and they assume leadership roles tasked with addressing the difficult challenges facing society. This makes it important to understand who they are today, in terms of their values, priorities and life experiences.

A major impediment to understanding Canadian youth is the prevailing tendency of lumping an entire generation into a single group, the implicit assumption being that age alone is the defining characteristic.

Most of what passes for analysis of these generations of Canadian adults amounts to little more than anecdote

and stereotype. Aside from data on youth unemployment, student debt and the embrace of everything digital, the Canadian conversation is remarkably devoid of solid evidence about how Generation Zers and Millennials live, what they think, what they value, what they want, or what they hope to achieve. Are they motivated strivers facing a tough job market, or entitled brats who are too picky to accept an unfulfilling job? Are they talented digital innovators or just screen addicts? Have they been nurtured by their Gen X and Boomer parents' loving encouragement, or are they entitled narcissists poisoned by a lifetime of unearned praise? Newspapers, newsfeeds and dinner tables teem with opinions.

This type of shorthand misses the important insights revealed by Michael Adams two decades ago in his landmark book *Sex in the Snow*. In that bestselling analysis of Canadian society, Adams showed that demography is no longer destiny, and that every generation is composed of distinct subgroups, each defined by a unique constellation of social values by which individuals orient themselves to the world and their lives.

In 2016, The Environics Institute for Survey Research partnered with Apathy is Boring and other leading organizations to conduct a groundbreaking survey of Canadian Millennials to reveal for the first time a portrait of this generation through the lens of their social values.<sup>1</sup>

## 2020 RESEARCH

In 2020, the Environics Institute once again partnered with Apathy is Boring to conduct a new study on the social values of Canada's youth, to update the portrait

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadian-millennial-social-values-study>

of Millennials and introduce the leading-edge of the next emerging generation, Generation Z. The purpose of this research is to gain new understanding and insight into these generations through their social values as they pertain to:

- Personal identity
- Current life circumstances
- Life goals and aspirations
- Confidence in the country's democracy and institutions
- Perspectives on global and Canadian issues
- Personal engagement with issues, politics and local community

The research consisted of an in-depth survey conducted online with a representative sample of 5,264 Canadians ages 18 to 40 across the country, encompassing leading-edge Gen Zers (ages 18 to 24) and Millennials (25 to 40).<sup>2</sup> The survey was administered by Environics Research between September 8 and November 9, 2020, and the sample was stratified to ensure representation by province, age and gender, according to the most current population statistics (2016 Census). In addition, oversamples were collected with individuals who self-identify as Black or Indigenous, in order to provide for sufficient representation of each group for analysis. The survey was conducted in English and French (as per respondent preference).

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

The report begins with an introduction of the social values research model pioneered by Environics Research and a detailed profile of the social values segments that define Gen Z and Millennial Canadians. This is followed by an Executive Summary highlighting the key findings of the research, and a detailed presentation of the survey results

covering the main themes described above, with a focus on how youth experiences and perspectives are shaped by identities, background and social values.

Detailed data tables are available under separate cover, which present the results for each survey question by population demographics and other relevant characteristics (see study project page at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org)). All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

Two previous reports drawing from this research have been published by the Environics Institute and Apathy is Boring, and are now available on the Institute website:

- [Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Millennial and Gen Z Canadians \(March 2021\)](#)
- [Canadian Youth Perspectives on Democracy, Global Issues and Civic Engagement \(May 2021\)](#)

Note about terminology. Throughout the report reference will be made to Millennials (defined as Canadians ages 25 to 40) and Gen Zers (18 to 24, comprising the oldest cohort of this generation). The population under study will at times be defined as “youth”, although this term is not typically used in describing people over 30 years of age.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<sup>2</sup> The research set a minimum age threshold of 18, per the standard applied to most national surveys of this type.



# SOCIAL VALUES AND CANADA'S YOUTH

## DEFINING SOCIAL VALUES

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

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

**Environics' social values research—** This concept of social values has been explored systematically through research starting in the 1960s in France, and later across Europe, to better understand socio-cultural trends in society. In the early 1980s, two research firms (Environics Research Group and Montreal-based CROP) adapted this social values research model for North America. For more than three decades, Environics Research has been conducting regular social values surveys of Canadians and Americans on behalf of its clients. This work also provides for broader analysis of social values trends, and

has served as the foundation for several books published by Michael Adams, including *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium* (1997); *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* (2003), and *Stayin' Alive: How Canadian Baby Boomers will Work, Play and Find Meaning in the Second Half of their Adult Lives* (2010).

The Environics Research social values methodology incorporates a set of 80 or so social value trends or “constructs,” based on the research and in-depth multivariate analysis.<sup>3</sup> Examples of social values include:

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

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

<sup>3</sup> For more details about Environics Research and its social values research, see <https://environics.ca/social-values/>

## MEET THE CANADIAN MILLENNIAL SOCIAL VALUES GROUPS

In 2016, Environics Research identified the six distinct social values groups of the Canadian Millennial generation (which were then published for the first time through the Institute's previous survey).<sup>4</sup> They are profiled as follows (as they were in their 2016 lives):

### **BROS & BRITTANYS (32% OF CANADIAN MILLENNIALS)**

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

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

### **DIVERSE STRIVERS (20%)**

To Diverse Strivers, "making it" in life, and doing things that bring new and intense experiences are top priorities. These Millennials crave material success and they push themselves to achieve it in a number of ways. They work hard in their careers and pursue personal challenges (like running marathons or doing hot yoga sessions) in the off-hours. They strive to inspire respect in those closest to them by doing their duty, and being upstanding members of their families and communities. They take care to look good, and have the latest gadgets and toys to maintain a sharp and successful appearance. Diverse Strivers report high levels of vitality—they love crowds, attention and pursue intensity in all they do—and they need every bit of their energy to keep pushing forward toward their goals; they never stop building their resumes to satisfy their ambitions and impress others.

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

<sup>4</sup> Earlier descriptions used the term social value "tribes", which has now been replaced by the more culturally-normative term "group."

### ENGAGED IDEALISTS (17%)

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

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

### LONE WOLVES (16%)

Deeply skeptical of authority, and lacking strong social and emotional connections, Lone Wolves resemble the stereotypical Gen Xers of the 1990s: cool and standoffish. These Millennials are solitary, and favour keeping life simple and straightforward. They are seldom involved in community events and rarely feel strongly connected to what's going on in society-at-large. But whereas some people feeling disconnected from society are angry or hostile to others, Lone Wolves are low-key (e.g., neither xenophobic nor sexist). If disaffected Gen Xers' motto was "Whatever," perhaps the Lone Wolves' words to live by are "I'm not hurting anyone. Just let me be."

Despite stereotypes, Lone Wolves are equally likely to be male or female, as well as being somewhat older

than average, and most concentrated in Quebec. They are among the most native-born and ethnically white of groups (along with Engaged Idealists). Their domestic arrangements are comparable to Millennials overall in terms being married and having children; but Lone Wolves not yet settled in this way are the least interested of any group in getting married or having kids. Among the Millennials, they are least likely to be employed full-time or currently in school, and among those most apt to be not looking for work (along with New Traditionalists, but for different reasons). Lone Wolves include the highest proportion of Millennials without post-secondary education and with household incomes under \$30K. They do not stand out in terms of political ideology, and are least likely of all groups to place themselves anywhere on the spectrum.

### NEW TRADITIONALISTS (11%)

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

New Traditionalists are the oldest and most established of the Millennial groups. They are also more likely than average to be female, to be married (but not common-law) and have children (and those who are not yet married or parents are most likely to want these in their future). This group is slightly over-represented in Alberta and Manitoba. Along with Diverse Strivers, New Traditionalists have a high proportion of immigrants, and a broad ethnic mix (especially those identifying as Black). They are somewhat less apt to be employed full-time, with a higher than average number not looking for work (in many cases being stay-at-home mothers). They have a higher than average

levels of education, and the highest household incomes of any group (in part because of being older and married). New Traditionalists tend to occupy the middle of the political spectrum, and are among the least apt to identify ideologically with the left.

### CRITICAL COUNTERCULTURISTS (4%)

Millennials in the Critical Counterculture segment are the engaged, critical young people sometimes featured in stories about 20-somethings building businesses, pursuing groundbreaking online activism, and otherwise shaking up the world. They share many of the same progressive values as Engaged Idealists: They believe in gender equality, are at ease with diversity of all kinds, and reject discrimination and injustice. But while Engaged Idealists see the world through a social and emotional lens – pursuing authentic relationships and experiences, and striving to express their true selves – the gold standard for Critical Counterculturists is clear-eyed rationality. They reject status and authority

they see as illegitimate or superficial; they don't mind leading when they can add value to a project, but would hate for someone to judge them by their jeans or smartphone.

This is by far the smallest of the Millennial groups. Critical Counterculturists are equally likely to be male or female, they are most likely to fit into the middle age range (27 to 31), and live in British Columbia. They stand out most as being the least family-oriented of groups: They are most likely to be single and have no children, and are most keen to keep it that way. Critical Counterculturists are also by far the most educated group (one in five has a graduate degree), although their household incomes are a bit below average. This group has a notable proportion of first generation Canadians, but most also identify ethnically as white (e.g., anglophones arriving from the USA and Europe). Critical Counterculturists are the quintessential progressives, with two-thirds identifying with the left, compared with only three percent on the right.



## MEET THE CANADIAN LEADING-EDGE GENERATION Z SOCIAL VALUES GROUPS

Environics Research has recently identified seven distinct groups of social values groups for Canada's Generation Z, based on the leading-edge (oldest) portion of this generation (ages 18 to 24). These groups are not younger clones of Millennial groups that precede them, but some similarities emerge.

### EGALITARIAN IDEALISTS (26% of leading-edge Gen Z Canadians)

Egalitarian Idealists are the Gen Z equivalent of Millennials' Engaged Idealists (and notably the largest of the Gen Z segments). They have optimistic views of the world and they strive to lead change. Egalitarian Idealists are least likely to blindly follow what they consider outdated norms, and are strong advocates for the betterment of the world. Focused on helping others and the environment, they want to be involved and actively try to express their values in daily life. They score high on social responsibility, ecological concern and ethical consumerism. Having a job that provides social value is critical to their sense of a progressive and socially responsible identity. These are empathic "global citizens." They're guided by a strong moral compass and feel called to do the right thing for its own sake, not for recognition. These young people are more spiritual than religious. They want to have a purpose and leave a legacy, doing both in a way that is authentic to them and lets their creativity and personality shine through.

Egalitarian Idealists are one of the groups most likely to be third plus generation Canadian (e.g., both parents having been born in the country) and identify ethnically as white. They are by far the most female of the groups (at 73%), are most apt to identify as LGBTQ (31%), and are most present in Quebec. Members of this segment are more likely than others to have completed a post-secondary degree and place themselves on the left of the political spectrum.

### DUTIFUL ACCOMPLISHERS (17%)

Dutiful Accomplishers in comparison with other Gen Z groups as more conforming and feeling a strong sense of duty. They are optimistic and hopeful individuals, living by a general belief that things will work out. Their key priority is making their families proud. Less focused on deriving purpose from their work, Dutiful Accomplishers are concerned about taking large strides in their careers and school; one reason for this focus on achievement is that they care very much how they are perceived by others. With more conservative political views than most other Gen Z groups, they are likely to be religious, be involved in their communities, and express a feeling of belonging in those communities. They also feel a sense of belonging to their country, expressing more national pride than many of their age peers. Dutiful Accomplishers respect authority and believe that rules in society are meant to be followed.

Dutiful Accomplishers are one of three segments encompassing a large proportion of Gen Zers who are first generation Canadians (only half in this group have two Canadian-born parents). They are one of two groups least apt to identify as white, and have strong representation among those who are South Asian and Black. Dutiful Accomplishers are the Gen Z group most apt to be working full time, and they have average levels of education and income. They are predominantly male (65%) and identify as heterosexual (77%). On the political spectrum these Gen Zers are one of three groups who tilt to the right.

### HUSTLING HEDONISTS (16%)

Hustling Hedonists work hard and play hard, while seeking ways to express themselves and earn others' admiration; They share many of the social values expressed by Millennial Diverse Strivers. Hustling Hedonists crave external validation of their achievements, partly because their own



personal value system and worldview remains a work in progress. They are more reactive than proactive in their engagement with the world: they are more likely to be foot soldiers in a social movement than to notice an issue and lead others to address it. Scrambling to meet the many demands of work, society, family and friends, Hustling Hedonists try to put their best foot forward in every area of life. They also seek intense experiences, perhaps as a break from their day-to-day struggles to look good and measure up. Their values suggest a deep streak of impulsivity and a quest for immediate gratification, hedonistic pleasure and intense emotion. “YOLO” is an everyday rallying cry for this group.

Hustling Hedonists stand out among Gen Z groups as the most diverse in its ethnic identity and background (only 48% identify as white). It is one of three Gen Z groups that are predominantly first or second generation Canadians, and they live predominantly in Ontario (especially in the GTA). They are similar to others in their generation in terms of education level, income and working status. Along with Dutiful Accomplishers and Guarded Independents, Like older Diverse Strivers, Hustling Hedonists tend to identify with the right side of the political spectrum.

### **EARNEST STRIVERS (15%)**

The Earnest Strivers work hard to satisfy their desire for success and stability. Part of their recipe for success is keeping an even keel: this group has a strong ability to keep their emotions under control. This group of young people show signs of a slightly internal struggle – they are low on personal optimism and despite their achievements, they tend to feel self-doubt and even symptoms of “imposter syndrome.” It may be this lack of confidence that leads them to feel a little disconnected from society: they score high on anomie/aimlessness, and their efforts are predicated on an internal, as opposed to external, pressure to succeed. They require stability in traditional modes such as their ability to save for a home and are likely to save on principle; still, they are more likely than their age peers to worry about their financial future. Earnest Strivers are likely to stick to simple ways of doing things: they are averse to complexity and tend to be more close-minded to new ideas unless those ideas are supported by concrete evidence they find persuasive.

Earnest Strivers’ have the highest representation among second generation Canadians (one-third), although their ethnic make-up largely matches that of their Gen Z peers. They do not stand out among segments in terms of income or work status, although they are somewhat less apt to have a post-secondary degree. Earnest Strivers are predominantly male (69%). This group is slightly left of centre on the political spectrum.

### **GUARDED INDEPENDENTS (12%)**

Guarded Independents like to challenge themselves and hold high levels of personal optimism – they are confident, hardworking and enjoy the pursuit of a personal challenge. They are the Gen Z group closest in social values profile to the Millennial Bros and Brittanys (but make up a much smaller part of their generation). Guarded Independents are more likely to stick to a core group of trusted friends than to flexibly explore new social contacts, and their more solitary nature makes them likely to need a solo recharge, such as hiking in nature. These young people pursue intensity in all areas of life – work and personal. They prefer to stick to their own ways of thinking and are less likely to demonstrate open-mindedness. They aim to keep their lives simple and prefer familiar routines to change and variation. The guarded element of their characters means they are often less accepting of differences in identity and perspective when it comes to race and gender. They also express greater indifference to violence than many of their age peers, seeing it as part of life.

Guarded Independents are most likely to live in Quebec and identify ethnically as white. They do not stand out in terms of educational attainment, but are somewhat more likely than other Gen Zers to be working (full or part time) and have higher incomes. They tend to be male (58%) and identify as heterosexual (76%). Politically, this group leans to the right side of the political spectrum.

**REFLECTIVE REALISTS (8%)**

Reflective Realists are a worldly group, bringing a critical lens to many aspects of life. While bearing some resemblance to the Millennial Lone Wolves, they are not necessarily pessimistic in their critical nature – and are likely to be open-minded. These are individualists who are carefully looking out for themselves in ways large and small. Many are on a spiritual quest and feel that they re-charge while they are in nature. It is not surprising, then, that these young people believe strongly in environmental protection. This group is often anxious about income, and feel some alienation from society, scoring higher than others on anomie/aimlessness. Reflective Realists tend to reject authority. Perhaps because of their skepticism about what they are told, these are discriminating consumers – researching purchases and not taking product descriptions at face value. They have a harder time than some of their age peers envisioning their futures, in part due to their financial anxiety.

Reflective Realists stand out as the group with the lowest levels of income and education, and also least likely to be employed or currently studying. These Gen Zers are also more likely to be women, and of all groups most apt to identify as LGBTQ (close to four in ten) and a nonconforming gender (11%). Reflective Realists have the highest representation of Indigenous Peoples, and concentration in Atlantic Canada and B.C. Like Egalitarian Idealists, this group tends to identify with the political left.

**OPTIMISTIC OBSERVERS (6%)**

Optimistic Observers are the smallest of the Gen Z groups, and share many values with Reflective Realists.

At the same time, they can be characterized as happy homebodies; they are comfortable in their own spaces and don't have a strong sense of social or worldly obligations. They are not inclined to explore the world in search of new experiences. They are comfortable working their day job and confident they are on the right track. They are not concerned with social perceptions of themselves and are happy where they are. Optimistic Observers believe in working hard to get ahead; since this group scores high on individualistic values, "getting ahead" partly means achieving greater freedom and autonomy. They hold a personally optimistic outlook as well as a post-materialist mindset, taking a live-and-let-live approach to the world around them. The Optimistic Observer is the "low-key" or "chill" friend in the group.

In contrast with Reflective Realists, Optimistic Observers stand out as having high levels of education and income. They also resemble Egalitarian Idealists in being primarily white and third generation Canadians. This group is most highly represented in Quebec, and also among Gen Zers who identify as heterosexual (82%). Compared with most other Gen Z groups, they do not exhibit a high level of social consciousness and tend to identify with the middle of the political spectrum.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canadian youth – Millennials (ages 25 to 40) and the leading-edge of the Generation Z (18 to 24) – are now making their way in a world very different from the ones their parents and grandparents navigated in their own time. Today these younger generations enjoy unprecedented opportunities and freedoms while at the same time face unprecedented challenges in areas of employment and housing, as well as confronting such domestic and global threats as climate crisis, widening inequality, systemic racism, and most recently a major pandemic that has put much of their lives on hold.

It is in this context that the research portrays the lives and perspectives of Millennials and Gen Z Canadians in terms of their personal identities, circumstances, life aspirations, and perspectives on democracy, global issues and civic engagement. As a whole, youth are doing well, especially in light of the global pandemic which was already six months old when the research was conducted. But circumstances and outlook are by no means uniform within these generations, and there are significant differences across a number of dimensions.

As has been documented in previous Institute research, education emerges as one of the strongest differentiators among youth in Canada; those with a post-secondary degree are doing noticeably better and expressing more a positive future outlook in comparison with those with no more than a high school diploma. By comparison, household income does not make as much of a difference. Positive circumstances and outlook is also closely linked to feeling connected to one's local community, suggesting that many youth in this country are struggling with social isolation.

Canada's youth are the most ethnically and racially diverse generations in the country's history, and this factors into most of the topics covered in this study. South Asian youth stand out as among the most successful and optimistic, a function in part of having the highest level of educational attainment. Black youth also express notable motivation and confidence, when it comes to pursuing

post-secondary education, and looking ahead to their future careers and income. By comparison, Indigenous youth are not faring as well as in some areas.

The study reveals that social values play a significant role in the circumstances, experiences and outlook of Canadian youth, above and beyond demographics like education and ethnic-racial background. Social values – organized into six Millennial and seven Gen Z groups – provide important insight into these generations' orientation to life, career, politics and civic engagement. Among Millennials, it is **Diverse Strivers** – the most ethnically diverse group of this generation – who are the most successful, engaged and optimistic. **Engaged Idealists** and **Critical Counterculturists** are also doing well in terms of education and employment, and are among the most actively engaged in local and global issues. **Bros & Brittanys** make up the largest group in this generation and as such tend to define the average in most areas. **Lone Wolves** (comprising one-sixth of Millennials) make up the group who most likely to be struggling in their lives and who exhibit the most negative outlook for the future.

A similar pattern can be seen among leading-edge Gen Z youth. The most successful groups in this younger generation are also the most ethnically-diverse – **Hustling Hedonists** in particular, but also **Dutiful Accomplishers**. **Egalitarian Idealists** are in many ways similar to the older Engaged Idealists, and share much of the same outlook and aspirations. In this generation, the least success and optimism is found among **Reflective Realists** (the group with the least education and income, as well as a critical lens to many aspects of life), and **Optimistic Observers** who share many of the same values but a different socio-economic profile. Two other Gen Z segments – **Earnest Strivers** and **Guarded Independents** – occupy a space somewhere in between.

This social values typology offers a valuable framework for understanding Millennial and Gen Z Canadians, and determining how best to consider their priorities and

interests with respect to marketing, public policy and citizen engagement. As revealed through this research and other studies like Apathy is Boring's [Together We Rise](#), youth are not a monolithic group. This makes it essential to appreciate the diversity of youth perspectives and experience, and in doing so provide more than just space to encourage their activation in their communities and in the democratic process more broadly. Creating new types of opportunities for youth will enable them to more easily connect to their communities and emerge as decision-makers and leaders in their own right.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

**Personal identities—** For Canadian youth as a whole, personal identity is most strongly linked to their country, gender and language, and to a lesser extent their generation, region or province, and religion. For Indigenous youth, their nation or community is the strongest identifier (especially among Gen Z), while ethnicity or race is most widely embraced among those who are Black and South Asian, as well as by members of the most ethnically-diverse social values groups (Hustling Hedonists, Diverse Strivers); youth in these two groups stand out prioritizing all aspects of their identity.

Almost all youth identify their gender as either male or female, and three-quarters identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual, with one in ten reporting as bisexual and a similar proportion naming another sexual identity. Non-heterosexual orientations are most common among Gen Z Indigenous youth, as well as among women, youth ages 18 to 21, Reflective Realists and Critical Counterculturists.

Non-Indigenous youth identify more strongly with Canada than with their province, especially in Ontario and least so in Quebec (although only one in six identify exclusively as Quebecers). Similarly, Indigenous youth are more apt to see themselves as Canadian than as an Indigenous person (most notably among Métis), with the large majority identifying in some measure as both.

**Life satisfaction—** In the midst of the pandemic in late 2020, one-quarter of Canadian youth report a high level of overall life satisfaction, compared with one in five who describes it to be low or poor. Life satisfaction is most closely tied to household income and educational attainment, but is also linked strongly to how closely youth feel connected to their local community. Millennials have somewhat higher satisfaction levels than Gen Z youth, but they are now somewhat less positive than they were in 2016 (possibly due to their pandemic circumstances). Among Gen Zers, it is Dutiful Accomplishers and Hustling Hedonists who are most satisfied with their lives overall (in contrast with Reflective Realists), while among Millennials it is Diverse Strivers who are the most positive (and the only group in this generation to show improvement over the past few years).

**Employment and income—** Seven in ten youth are employed full or part time, with another one in five in school and one in four are out of the workforce. Employment is most strongly linked to educational attainment, and least likely to be reported by Indigenous youth. Little more than one in three believe they earn enough money to live the way they would like, and this barely tops 50 percent among those in the top income bracket (\$100K and more). Income adequacy among Millennials as a generation has held steady since 2016, but risen noticeably among Diverse Strivers, while declining among Engaged Idealists and New Traditionalists.

While a majority are not satisfied with their current incomes, most are optimistic about their future prospects for achieving a desired income. This positive outlook is most evident among youth with at least some post-secondary education, those who are Black, and the youngest cohort (ages 18 to 21). Optimism about future financial success has declined among Millennials since 2016, most noticeably among women, those with incomes under \$60K, and Bros & Brittany's and Lone Wolves. In contrast Indigenous Millennials are now more optimistic than before about eventually having the money to live life as they want.

**Community belonging—** Only one in six youth feel a strong sense of belonging to what they define as their local community (typically one's neighbourhood), with more than twice as many describing this connection as somewhat or very weak. Strong community belonging is most widely reported among South Asian and Black youth, as well as among the most ethnically-diverse social values groups in both generations (e.g., Hustling Hedonists and Diverse Strivers), in contrast to those which are predominantly white (Reflective Realists and Lone Wolves). Reasons for weak community ties fall mostly into one of two themes: describing their neighbourhood as unfriendly or unwelcoming, and personal reasons such as a preference to keep to oneself or being new to an area.

**Top life goals and aspirations—** What Canadian youth say they most want out of life is positive family or partner relationships and successful careers, followed by financial security, personal growth, and home ownership. Career development and education are given added priority over the next two years, compared with a lifetime focus. But some are not looking ahead, with one in five not identifying any short term or lifetime goals; this group is most apt to include men with limited education and employment, and a significant proportion of Millennial Lone Wolves and Gen Z Earnest Strivers.

In terms of what youth want most from their work and careers, the highest priority in both generations is placed on achieving a work-life balance and financial security, with seven in ten saying these are of critical importance. Less emphasis is given to creating wealth for themselves and their families and having flexibility in how and when they work. By comparison, few place critical importance on work and careers that make an important contribution to society, a priority that diminishes with each successive age cohort across the generations. More than other work and career goals, contributing to society is a function of one's social values: it is most apt to be important to Gen Z Hustling Hedonists and Egalitarian Idealists, as well as their Millennial counterparts, Diverse Strivers and Engaged Idealists. In contrast, very few Optimistic Observers, Bros & Brittany's or Lone Wolves share this ambition.

Finally, youth are more likely than not to express confidence in achieving their work and career goals, but this is more likely to be the case for men and those with

higher levels of education and income. Among ethnic/racial groups, Black youth stand out as having the most confidence in their future careers, along with South Asian Millennials. Indigenous youth are least apt to express the same optimism about achieving their work and career goals.

**Value of post-secondary education—** Most youth in Canada see value in post-secondary education, but not everyone is convinced. Only three in ten believe it is essential to having a fulfilling life, with a majority saying it is important but not essential, and another one in six who considers it to be not important. Among those with a post-secondary degree, fewer than half say it has been very helpful in their careers to date, and they are evenly divided on whether they would get the same degree if given a second chance; many would pursue a different field of study, while a smaller group say they would have done something outside of formal education (e.g., start a business). For those without a post-secondary degree, roughly half plan to pursue one (or are already enrolled), while the other half indicate they have no plans or remain uncertain. Youth intending to obtain further education tend to be first generation Canadians, and those who are Black and South Asian.

As with work and career goals, perspectives on the value of post-secondary education are strongly linked to social values, apart from one's current education. Among Millennials, positive opinions are most widely expressed by Diverse Strivers and Engaged Idealists, and least so by Lone Wolves and Critical Counterculturalists; these latter two groups have the lowest and highest levels of educational attainment, respectively, suggesting their skepticism about post-secondary education stems from different reasons.

The same pattern is evident among Gen Z youth: views about post-secondary education are the most positive among Hustling Hedonists and Egalitarian Idealists, and least so among Reflective Realists and Egalitarian Idealists (again, groups with the least and most education, respectively).

**Perspectives on democracy and institutions—** Canadian youth give a qualified endorsement to their country's democracy and governments. They are more likely than



not to express satisfaction with the way democracy is working (leading-edge Gen Zers in particular) and most believe their governments are working, albeit with major problems. Among major Canadian institutions and sectors, youth have the strongest confidence in the country's health care system, major non-profit organizations (e.g., YMCA, United Way) and universities and colleges, followed by banks, the school system, and the justice system and courts. By comparison, such confidence is least evident when it comes to the federal Parliament, Canadian media and major corporations.

Confidence in the country's democracy, governments and institutions is strongest among the most ethnically-diverse social values groups: Millennial Diverse Strivers and New Traditionalists, and Gen Z Hustling Hedonists and Dutiful Accomplishers. These are the same groups with the strongest sense of belonging to a local community. Not surprisingly, such confidence in democracy and institutions is weakest among youth with the least education and the most skepticism about authority (Lone Wolves and Reflective Realists).

**Perspectives on global and Canadian issues—** Given the current state of the world, it is no surprise that Canadian youth are more pessimistic than optimistic about the direction the world is heading over the next decade. In terms of making real progress on major global issues, they express the most optimism about progress on gender inequality, pandemics like Covid-19, and racism, and less so when it comes to climate change and poverty/economic inequality. Once again it is Hustling Hedonists and Diverse Strivers who express the most positive outlook, in comparison with Reflective Realists and Lone Wolves. Millennial Critical Counterculturists are especially pessimistic about the global future.

When it comes to how progress can be achieved on the pressing issues here at home, youth express tempered confidence in the effectiveness of such strategies for social change as developing community grass roots projects, holding governments accountable through elections and voting, launching social movements to create public debate, and advocating for policy reform. On the potential for meaningful change, it is Millennial Engaged Idealists and Gen Z Egalitarian Idealists who are the most confident in making a difference, in contrast to

Lone Wolves, Earnest Strivers and Optimistic Observers.

**Civic and political engagement—** Most Canadian youth follow news and current events, with half doing so on at least a daily basis, compared with just one in six who do so rarely or never. A majority express some if not strong interest in politics, with this most prevalent among Gen Z Dutiful Accomplishers and Egalitarian Idealists, and Millennial Critical Counterculturists and Diverse Strivers.

Youth span the spectrum of political orientation, with roughly one-quarter identifying on the political right, one in five on the political left, and four in ten placing themselves somewhere in the middle. Most of the youth social values groups tend to cluster in the middle of the political spectrum. Those who fit clearly on the political left include Gen Z Egalitarian Idealists and Reflective Realists, as well as Millennial Critical Counterculturists. The political right is most likely to be represented by Gen Z Dutiful Accomplishers, Hustling Hedonists and Guarded Independents, as well as Millennial New Traditionalists.

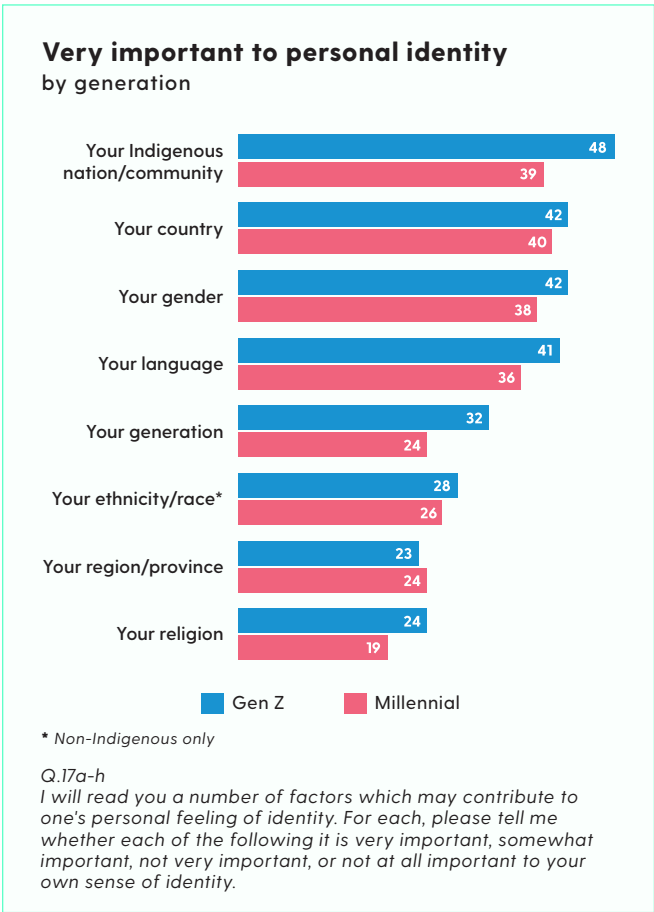
Regardless of political orientation, most youth do not limit their social circles to those of the same persuasion. Fewer than four in ten say all or most of their friends share their own political views, and about half connect with others (online and in-person) whose political orientation is very different from their own. This practice is similar across social values groups, but Diverse Strivers stand out as being most likely to have all or most friends sharing their own views but also engage with those whose perspective is very different.

One third of Canadian youth reports having done unpaid volunteer work over the past year, an activity closely linked to educational attainment (especially among those with a post-graduate degree), and most prevalent among Diverse Strivers. Close to half belong to or participate with local organizations and groups, such as unions, professional associations and those associated with such activities as sports, religion, and culture and the arts. Such activity is most common among Millennial Diverse Strivers and Critical Counterculturists, as well as Gen Z Hustling Hedonists, Dutiful Accomplishers and Earnest Strivers.

# PERSONAL IDENTITY

## IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF IDENTITY

For Canadian youth, personal identity is most strongly linked to their country, gender and language, followed by generation, ethnicity or race, region or province, and religion. All aspects of identity are stronger among Gen Z youth and those who are Black and South Asian.



What matters most in how people define their personal identity? The survey examined the degree to which Canadian youth consider each of eight aspects of identity to be important. Overall, youth are most likely to give strong importance to their country (with Indigenous participants placing strong importance on their Indigenous nation or community), followed by their gender and language. In comparative terms, youth are less apt to define themselves in terms of their generation, ethnicity or race (among non-Indigenous participants), religion, and region or province. The overall rank order of these identities is largely the same for the two generations, but Gen Zers are somewhat more likely than Millennials to rate each as very important.

**Country**— Four in ten Gen Z (42%) and Millennial (40%) Canadians consider their country to be very important to their own sense of personal identity, compared with fewer than one in five who say it is not very or not at all important (18% and 17%, respectively). Across the two generations, emphasis on country as a source of identity is most evident among first generation Canadians (46%), and youth who identify as South Asian (56%) and Black (50%), in comparison with those who are Chinese (35%), white (39%) and Indigenous (42%). Identification with their country is strongest in Atlantic Canada (49% say it is very important) and Ontario (46%), and weakest in Quebec (28%).

Country identity also varies significantly across social values segments. Among Gen Z youth, strong identification with country is most common among Dutiful Accomplishers (51%) and Hustling Hedonists (62%), and least so among Optimistic Observers (28%). Among Millennials, country identification is strongest among Diverse Strivers (56%), in contrast with Lone Wolves (24%) and Critical Counterculturists (20%).

**Indigenous nation or community**— Among the 444 survey participants who identify as Indigenous, close to half (48%) of Gen Zers and four in ten (39%) Millennials

say that their Indigenous nation or community is very important to their personal identity, with fewer than half as many indicating it is not important (16%, and 22%, respectively). This sample size is not large enough to support a full analysis by group, but this aspect of identity is more strongly prioritized among First Nations youth (50%) than among those who are Métis (31%) (there are too few Inuk participants to report on results).

**Gender—** Four in ten (42%) Gen Zers and a similar proportion (38%) of Millennials say their gender is a very important part of their personal identity, compared with one in four who indicate it is not very or not at all important (23% and 25% respectively). Women are only somewhat more apt to place strong importance on gender identity (42%, versus 36% among men) and this applies equally to both generations. What appears to make more of a difference is ethnic or racial identity, with Black (61%) and South Asian (55%) youth most likely to say gender is very important to their identity. Across ethnic and racial groups, women place greater emphasis on gender identity than men by a seven to nine percentage point margin, except in the case of Chinese youth where there is no difference.

The proportionately greater emphasis placed on gender identity among some racialized youth is also reflected in the social values segments that are the most ethnically diverse: Hustling Hedonists (55%) among Gen Zers, and Diverse Strivers (53%) and New Traditionalists (52%) among Millennials.

**Language—** Four in ten (41%) Gen Zers and 36 percent of Millennials place strong importance on their language as a source of personal identity, versus those for whom it is of little or not importance (21% and 24%, respectively). As might be expected, language is given greater importance by francophones (45%) than anglophones (37%), and even more so among youth who identify as Black (46%, especially among Millennials), Indigenous (45%), and South Asian (45%, most notably among Gen Zers). Language is

given the most emphasis among the two most ethnically diverse segments – Hustling Hedonists among Gen Zers and Diverse Strivers among Millennials (two groups with similar social values profiles).

**Generation—** One-third (32%) of Gen Z youth and one-quarter (24%) of Millennials say their generation forms a very important part of their personal identity (compared with 25% and 31%, respectively, who say this is not important). In both cohorts, generation is most widely seen as important among racialized youth, especially among those who are South Asian (49%) and Black (44%), as well as among Indigenous Gen Zers (42%). By comparison, fewer than one in four white (23%) and Chinese (23%) places this priority on generation as part of his or her personal identity. As with language, generation is most apt to be a strong component of identity among Hustling Hedonists (Gen Zers) and Diverse Strivers (Millennials).

**Ethnicity/Race—** Among non-Indigenous Canadian youth, just under three in ten consider their ethnic or racial background to be very important to their personal identity (essentially the same among Gen Zers (28%) and Millennials (26%)). As would be expected, this is much more relevant to racialized youth and especially for those who identify as Black (66%; 69% among Gen Zers, 61% among Millennials), followed by those who are South Asian (47%) and Chinese (44%). By comparison, fewer than one in five (19%) white youth places strong importance on his or her ethnic or racial identity, with almost half (47%) saying it is of little or no importance. Emphasis on ethnic/racial identity is reflected in the two most ethnically diverse social values segments (Hustling Hedonists, Diverse Strivers).

**Region or province—** Only one in four (24%) Canadian youth places strong importance on his or her region or province as a source of personal identity. This varies somewhat across the country, with strong importance ranging from a high in Atlantic Canada (37%) to a low in

Ontario (21%), with Quebec close to the low end (24%). As with other aspects of identity, the region or province were most widely seen as very important among youth who are Black (31%), Indigenous (31%), and South Asian (36%), in comparison with those who are white (22%) and Chinese (21%). Emphasis on ethnic/racial identity is reflected in the two most ethnically diverse social values segments (Hustling Hedonists, Diverse Strivers).

**Religion**— Compared to other dimensions of identity, Canadians are least apt to place strong importance on religion as a source of personal identity (24% of Gen Zers and 18% of Millennials). As with other dimensions, however, this source of identity is strongly influenced by ethnic or racial background: Religion is of greatest importance to youth who identify as Black (46% say it is very important) and South Asian (46%), in contrast with those who are white (16%) and Chinese (13%). Across social values segments, religion is most prominent as a basis of personal identity among Gen Zers who are Hustling Hedonists (39%) and Dutiful Accomplishers (37%), and among Millennials who are New Traditionalists (51%) and Diverse Strivers (38%).

## POPULATION BENCHMARK

Environics Institute research with the full Canadian population (ages 18 plus) in 2019 reveals that youth are less likely than older generations to place strong importance on each of these aspects of identity, especially in comparison with Canadians ages 55 plus.\* This difference is most pronounced in terms of Indigenous nation/community, country, region/province, and language.

\* Confederation of Tomorrow: 2019 Survey of Canadians.  
Environics Institute

## GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

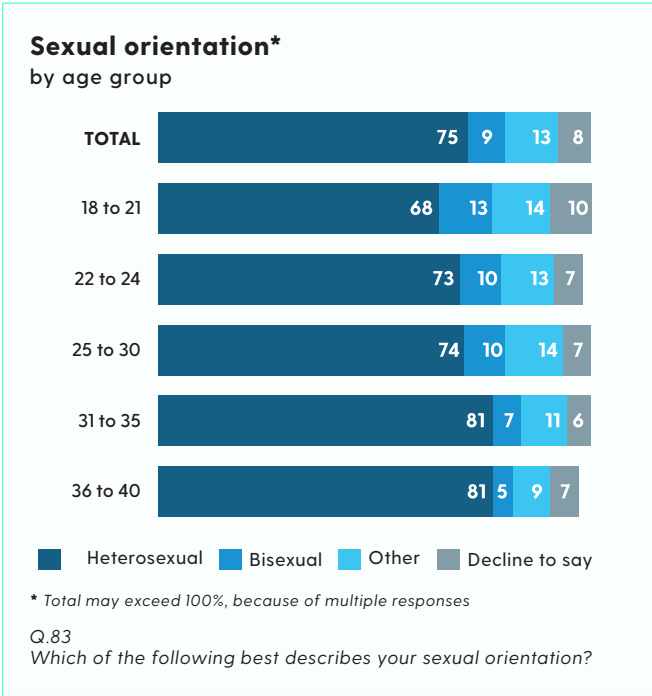
**Almost all Canadian youth identify their gender as either female or male. Three-quarters identify as heterosexual, with some (especially women and youth 18 to 21) also presenting as bisexual or another orientation. Indigenous youth express the widest range of sexual orientation.**

Survey participants were also asked about their gender identity and sexual orientation, based on list of conforming and non-conforming categories, with the opportunity to volunteer other categories not listed.

**Gender identity**— Almost all Canadian youth identify their gender as either female (50%) or male (48%), with others identifying as nonbinary (1%) or transgender (1%), and less than one percent affirming such categories as two-spirit and gender queer. Another one percent opted not to provide any response. Responses do not differ noticeably across the two generations. Non-conforming gender identification (i.e., neither female nor male) is most apt to be expressed by Indigenous youth (5%), Gen Z Reflective Realists (10%), and Millennial who Critical Counterculturists (6%).

**Sexual orientation**— Three-quarters (75%) of Canadian youth identify as heterosexual, with one in ten (9%) identifying as bisexual. Smaller proportions indicate other orientations, including gay (3%), pansexual (2%), lesbian (2%), Asexual (2%), questioning (2%), queer (1%), two-spirit (1%), and something else (<1%). Eight percent declined to answer the question.

Participants could give more than one option, and this was most common among those who identified as other than heterosexual. A majority in almost all socio-demographic and social values groups identify as heterosexual, but this orientation also appears to be partly a function of age within generational cohorts: identifying as heterosexual is least predominant among youth ages 18 to 21 (68%), rising to eight in ten (81%) among those 31 to 40.



Men and women are equally likely to identify as heterosexual, but women are much more likely to also identify as bisexual (13%, versus 5% of men), as well as most other non-heterosexual categories (excluding gay). Among ethnic/racial groups, Indigenous youth stand out as reporting the most diverse range of sexual orientations, including bisexual, gay, and pansexual.

Among Gen Z Indigenous youth, fewer than half (47%) identify as heterosexual, with almost half as many (22%) indicating they are bisexual. Among Millennials, Critical Counterculturalists express the broadest range of orientations (especially bisexuality and Asexuality), followed by Engaged Idealists. Among Gen Zers, it is Reflective Realists who show the most diverse range of sexual orientation, followed by Egalitarian Idealists.

CANADIAN VERSUS PROVINCIAL IDENTITY

Non-Indigenous youth are more likely to consider themselves Canadian than someone from their province, most noticeably in Ontario and least so in Quebec. For most Indigenous youth, identity is a mixture of being Canadian and being Indigenous, with one-third identifying equally with both.

Canadian versus provincial identity— In addition to measuring the importance of country as a source of identity, the survey also explored how youth identify personally as a Canadian in comparison with how they consider themselves as part of their province. The survey asked Indigenous participants the extent to which they consider themselves to be Canadian or an Indigenous person, or both.<sup>5</sup>

Results from the survey reveal a range of perspectives, but non-Indigenous youth are twice as likely to consider themselves Canadian only (24%) or as a Canadian first but also someone from their province or region (23%), in comparison with those who identify exclusively with their province (8%) or with their province first but also as a Canadian (15%). The remainder (30%) say they identify equally with the country and their province.

The balance of these identities varies somewhat across the country in a predictable pattern, although the differences are not as significant as might be expected. Identification with province is most pronounced in Quebec (50% exclusive or first), while the reverse is the case in Ontario (58% identify as Canadian exclusively or first). But other parts of the country fall much closer to the national average, and notably it is in the Prairies and B.C. where youth are most apt to identify equally with country and province.

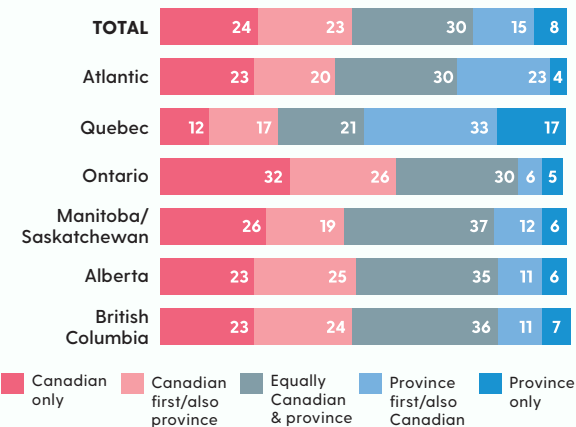
Social values appear to play only a minor role in shaping jurisdictional identity. Among Millennials, Bros and Brittany's and Lone Wolves tend to identify as Canadian,

<sup>5</sup> This question was drawn from a series of Environics Institute surveys of the Canadian population, and was last asked in 2020 (add study



Identity as Canadian or someone from your province

Non-Indigenous, by region

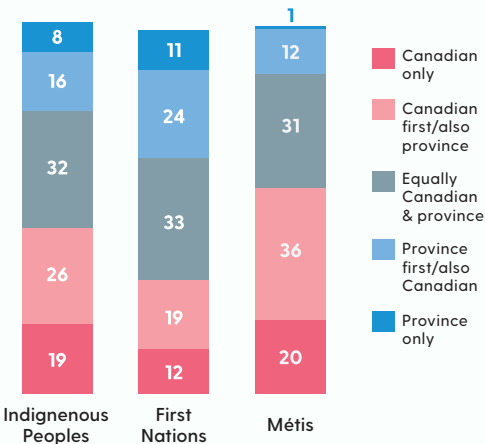


Q.16a  
[IF NON-INDIGENOUS] People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself to be

while Critical Counterculturists are the segment most apt to align themselves with their province. Among Gen Zers, it is the Reflective Realists who most strongly see themselves as Canadian (56% overall, 31% exclusively), while Earnest Strivers and Guarded Independents are the ones most apt to identify with their province.

**Canadian versus Indigenous identity—** Indigenous participants were asked a different version of the question: the extent to which they consider themselves to be Canadian versus an Indigenous person. The results are strikingly similar to those from the Canada versus province question: Close to half of Indigenous participants say they consider themselves Canadian exclusively (19%) or first but also as an Indigenous person (26%), compared with one in four who identifies exclusively as Indigenous (8%) or Indigenous first but also as a Canadian (16%). One in three Indigenous youth (32%) indicates he or she identifies equally as Canadian and Indigenous.

Identity as Canadian or Indigenous by First Nations/Métis



Q.16b  
[IF [INDIGENOUS] People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself to be

Identification with Canada is considerably stronger among Métis youth (56% exclusively or first), as well as among those whose ethnic identity includes white as well as Indigenous (73%).<sup>6</sup> By comparison, First Nations youth are more evenly distributed across the spectrum of options. In contrast with non-Indigenous youth, Indigenous women are somewhat more likely to identify as Canadian, while men tend to emphasize other options.

<sup>6</sup> There is some overlap between those identifying as Métis and those identifying as white (56%), but an appreciable percentage of First Nations (40%) participants also include white as part of their ethnic identity.

## DEFINING ONE'S GENERATION

**Gen Z and Millennial Canadians share a similar view of what makes their respective generations distinctive or unique. In both cases digital literacy is the most common attribute, but overall there is little agreement on what stands out about who they are as a generation.**

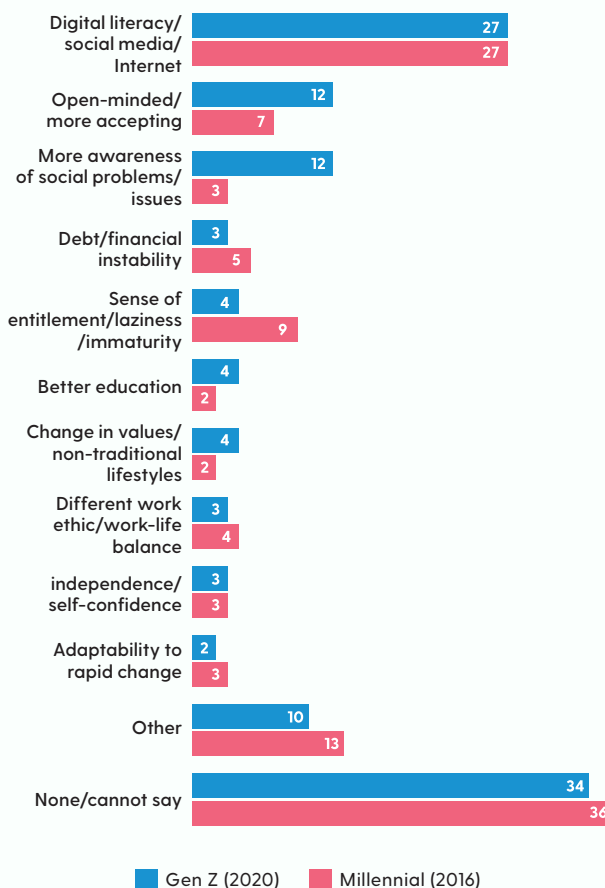
Every generation gets a label (or two) that ostensibly captures the essence of what it represents, invariably becoming stereotypes that capture the public imagination and media spotlight. Generation Z is still new enough to avoid being tagged with indelible labels but current narratives describe these youth as especially connected digitally and socially (the first generation to be truly “digital natives”), pragmatic, and politically progressive.

The 2016 survey asked Millennials what they consider to be the most distinctive or unique about their generation compared with older generations in Canada (asked unprompted, so that participants were not offered options to choose from). In 2020, the same question was posed to leading-edge Gen Zers. Results from the survey reveal that leading-edge Gen Z and Millennial Canadians have strikingly similar perspectives about what defines their respective generations. In both cases, digital literacy is the most common theme, but overall there is no defining view about what makes their generation distinctive or unique.

Two-thirds of Canadian Gen Zers could identify at least one characteristic that defines their generation, about the same proportion of Millennials who were able to define their own generation in 2016. Like Millennials, this generation is most likely to say they stand out as having digital literacy (e.g., social media, Internet) (27%), followed by such characteristics as being open-minded or accepting, having a sense of entitlement, dealing with debt and financial instability, and having a distinct approach to work-life balance and non-traditional lifestyles. Gen Zers are more apt to define their generations as being more aware of social problems (12%, versus 4% of Millennials). In both generations, about one in three cannot (or will not) identify anything about their generation as being distinct from other generations.

As was the case with Millennials, Canadian Gen Z perspectives on what makes their generation unique are largely similar across the cohort. Women are somewhat more likely than men to emphasize digital literacy and open-mindedness. Those who are Egalitarian Idealists and Reflective Realists are more likely than other social values segments to define their generation in terms of digital literacy, open-mindedness, and awareness of social problems. By comparison, the inability or unwillingness to name any distinctive characteristics is most prevalent among Indigenous Gen Zers (46%), as well as among Earnest Strivers (59%, compared to only 15% of Egalitarian Idealists).

### What makes your generation unique? by generation - unprompted mentions



Q.43  
[IF GENZ] What do you believe is most distinctive or unique about your generation, compared with older generations in Canada?

# CURRENT LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

The following section addresses relevant aspects of how youth are currently faring in their lives, covering such areas as overall life satisfaction, employment status, income security, educational attainment, and social connection.

## OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION

**Overall life satisfaction among Canadian youth is most closely tied to household income and sense of belonging to one’s community. Among Millennials, life satisfaction has declined since 2016, except among first generation Canadians and Diverse Strivers.**

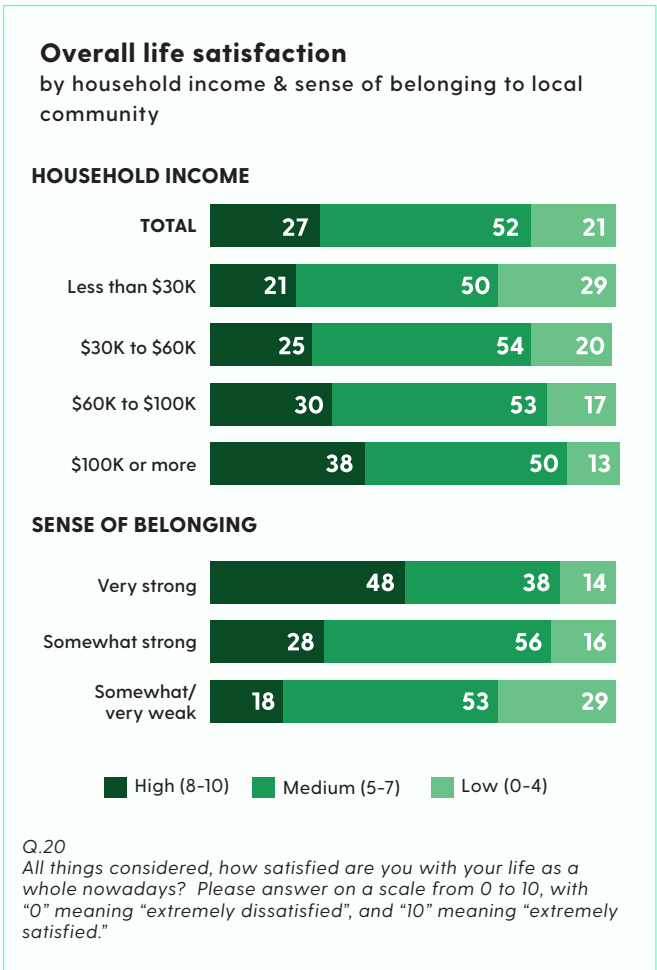
All things considered, how satisfied are Canada’s youth with their current lives? This question is often posed on surveys as a global measure of happiness, fulfilment or success. This survey used a standard question that employs an 11-point scale, ranging from “0” (extremely dissatisfied) to “10” (extremely satisfied). As with any population, there is considerable variation in the overall life satisfaction among youth, with most (52%) placing themselves somewhere in the middle (with scores of 5 to 7 on the 11 point scale). Just over one-quarter (27%) say they have a high level of satisfaction (8 to 10), compared with somewhat fewer (21%) who express low overall life satisfaction (0 to 4). The mean score is 6.1 out of possible 10.

Overall life satisfaction is largely similar between the two youth generations. Millennials are a bit more likely to say they have a high degree of life satisfaction (28%, versus 25% among Gen Zers), but this also represents a notable decline among those in this generation compared with their satisfaction levels in 2016 (when 36% expressed a high level of overall life satisfaction).

Among youth (both generations combined), life satisfaction is closely tied to household income (with high satisfaction rising from 21% among those earning less than \$30K, to 38% among those earning \$100K plus). This impact of income is also reflected in higher satisfaction levels among those with a post-secondary degree (34%; especially if it’s a graduate

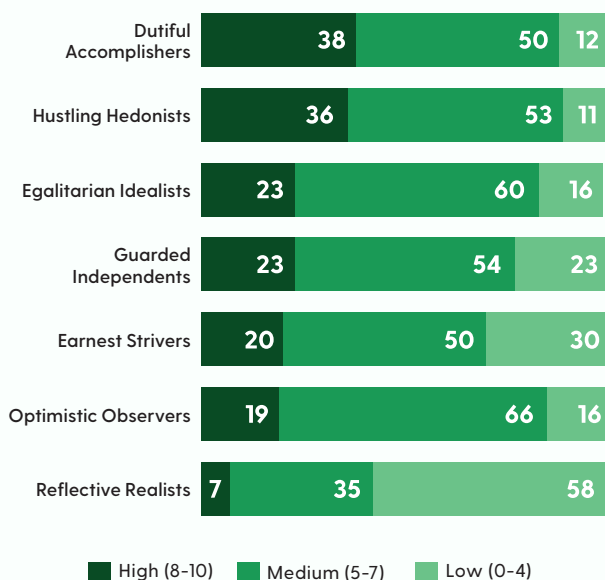
degree, 50%) and among South Asian youth (37%, in contrast with those who are Indigenous (21%)).

But even more than income, overall life satisfaction is tied to how closely youth feel connected to their local community (broadly defined), which itself has no correlation with household income. High life satisfaction is reported by almost half (48%) of those who feel a very strong connection to their local community, dropping to only 18 percent among those with weak connection (see more on sense of belonging below).



### Overall life satisfaction (by GenZ social values groups)

Gen Z social values groups



Q.20

All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10, with "0" meaning "extremely dissatisfied", and "10" meaning "extremely satisfied."

Overall life satisfaction is also somewhat higher among first generation Canadians (33%) and Quebecers (32%, versus 24% in Ontario and 23% in Alberta). Low levels of life satisfaction are most prevalent among youth who have not completed high school (33%), those looking for work (35%), and those whose sexual orientation is other than heterosexual (31%) (this group also reports lower than average incomes).

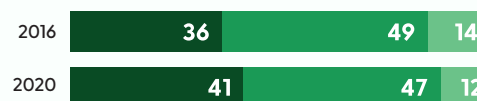
Among Millennials, the decline in overall life satisfaction since 2016 is evident across most of this generation, but most noticeably those in the older cohort (ages 36 to 40), high income earners and residents in Ontario and Alberta. In contrast, life satisfaction levels have improved over the past four years among first generation immigrant Millennials.

Finally, life satisfaction is also linked to social values in a significant way. Among Gen Zers, two segments stand out: high life satisfaction is most widespread among Dutiful

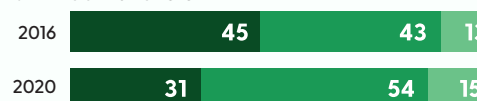
### Overall life satisfaction

2016-2020, Millennial social values groups

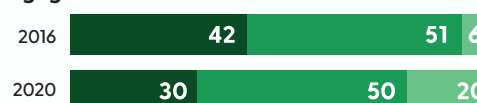
#### Diverse Strivers



#### New Traditionalists



#### Engaged Idealists



#### Critical Counterculturalists



#### Bros and Brittany's



#### Lone Wolves



Q.20

All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10, with "0" meaning "extremely dissatisfied", and "10" meaning "extremely satisfied."

Accomplishers (38%) and Hustling Hedonists (36%) (two groups with the most significant presence of first generation Canadians and ethnic diversity).

By comparison, very few (7%) Reflective Realists share this level of life satisfaction, with more than half (58%)

rating their overall life satisfaction to be low (reflecting the high representation in this group of youth who have less education, are not working, Indigenous and a weak sense of community belonging).

Among Millennials in 2020, high life satisfaction is most prevalent among Diverse Strivers (41%), and least so among Bros & Brittanys (23%) and Lone Wolves (20%). Since 2016, satisfaction levels have declined across social value segments, with one notable exception: rising satisfaction among Diverse Strivers (high satisfaction up 5 percentage points). Low satisfaction ratings have increased most noticeably over the past four years among Engaged Idealists (up 14 points) and Critical Counterculturists (up 10 points).

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

**A majority of youth are employed full or part time, with another one in five in school, and one in four not currently in the workforce. Employment is least common among Indigenous youth, with four in ten neither working or in school.**

Seven in ten Canadian youth report to be currently employed, mostly full time (42%), as well as part-time (17%) or self-employed (full or part-time) (8%). One in five is a student full (15%) or part (5%) time, while one in four is either seeking employment (12%) or not looking for work (12%) (totals exceed 100% because some fit in more than one category). Employment status depends in large part on age across the two generations in a predictable pattern. The youngest cohort of Gen Zers (18 to 21) are evenly split between those working and those in school. By ages 31 to 35, more than half of youth are working full-time, with roughly one in ten (9%) currently seeking employment.

Employment status  
by age cohort

	18-21	22-24	25-30	31-35	36-40
Employed full-time	18	37	48	56	55
Employed part-time	28	22	16	8	11
Self-employed	5	5	8	9	9
Student (full- or part-time)	50	32	13	8	4
Looking for work	13	13	11	11	9
Not looking for work	6	6	12	14	15

Q.31  
Are you currently?

As would be expected, full-time employment is strongly linked to educational attainment in both generations, but most significantly among Millennials (reported by 68% with an undergraduate degree and 74% with a graduate degree, compared with 24% among those who have not completed high school). Across ethnic/racial groups, full time employment is most commonly reported by youth who are Chinese (49%), and least so among those who are Indigenous (24%, compared with more than four in ten who are neither working nor in school). Men are somewhat more apt to be working full-time, while women are more likely to report part-time work or not looking for work (e.g., focusing on child care).



INCOME ADEQUACY

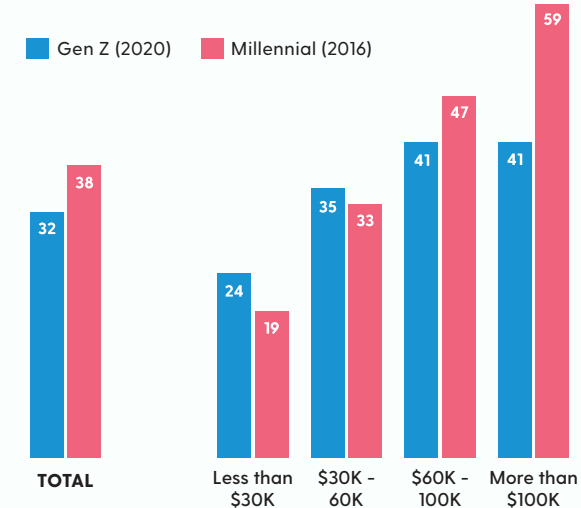
Little more than one-third of Canadian youth believe they currently have enough money to live as they would like, and this proportion barely tops 50 percent among those in the top income bracket. Yet most who describe their income as inadequate are optimistic they will earn a desired income in the future.

**Is your current income enough?**— Do Canadian youth have enough money to lead the kind of life they want? Just over one in three (35%) says this is the case. As would be expected, this view is tied to current household income, and especially so among Millennials. At the same time, even among those in the top income brackets, satisfaction with what one has is by no means the norm. Apart from current household income, reports of adequate levels increase gradually with age (rising from 32% among those 18 to 21, to 40% among those 31 and older). Income adequacy is least apt to be reported among youth unemployed and looking for work (16%) and those with incomes under \$30K (22%).

Among Millennials, reported income adequacy has held steady over the past four years. Within this generation, however, income security has improved modestly among the younger cohort, those with lower household incomes and residents of eastern Canada, while declining among older Millennials, higher income earners and westerners. Among social values groups, income adequacy has risen sharply among Diverse Strivers (to 53%, up 17 points), while dropping among New Traditionalists (31%, down 9) and Engaged Idealists (36%, down 5)

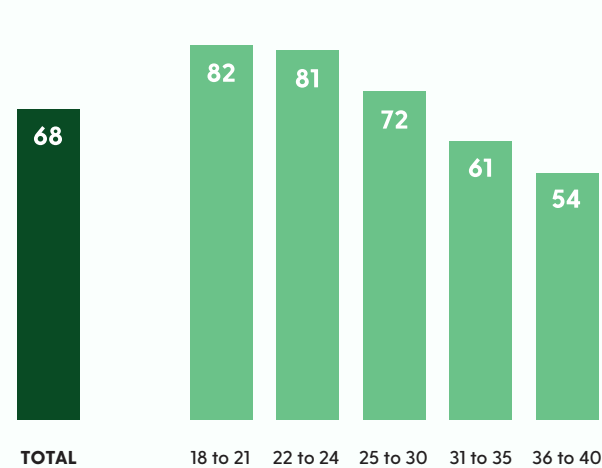
Prospects for the future. While most youth say they do not currently have the income they need or aspire to, there is also considerable optimism about future prospects. Among those who do not currently earn or have enough money today, two-thirds (68%) believe they will be able to do so in the future. And this outlook is only modestly related to current income, relative to other factors. Optimism about future income security is most evident among youth with some post-secondary education (but no degree) (77%), a graduate degree (81%), students (82%), youth who identify as Black (83%), and those with a high level of overall life

Have enough money to live as you like  
by household income, by generation



Q.32  
Do you currently earn or have enough money to lead the kind of life you want, or not?

Will have the desired income in the future  
Those who do not currently have enough, by age



Q.33  
Do you think you will be able to earn or have enough money in the future to lead the kind of life you want, or not?

satisfaction (81%). Unlike current income adequacy, optimism about attaining this goal declines with age across the generations (it is highest among youth 18 to 21 (82%) and declines to only 54 percent among those 36 to 40).

Among Millennials, optimism about achieving future financial security has declined since 2016 (from 72% to 63%), with this shift most pronounced among youth with incomes under \$60K, women, Atlantic Canadians, and those who are Bros & Brittanys and Lone Wolves. Notably, Indigenous Millennials are now more likely than four years ago to believe they will eventually have the money to live the kind of life they want (69%, up 9 points since 2016).

Among leading-edge Gen Z Canadians who are not earning their desired income, expectations about future earnings vary noticeably across social values groups. Optimism about future prospects is almost universal among Dutiful Accomplishers (92%), Egalitarian Idealists (91%), Hustling Hedonists (90%) and Optimistic Observers (89%), but much less evident among Earnest Strivers (64%) and Reflective Realists (51%).

## BELONGING TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

**Few youth feel a strong sense of belonging to their local community. Such connections are most widely reported by those who are South Asian and Black, and the most ethnically-diverse social values groups. Weak community ties is a function of both local community characteristics and personal preferences.**

One of the primary challenges of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is building and maintaining meaningful social connections with family and friends, with neighbors on an individual level, and with “society at large” on a broader level. Social isolation may be most widely experienced by today’s youth, who are establishing their adult lives and heavily focused on remote online connections.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has only brought the challenges of social isolation into greater relief across all generations.

The survey addressed the extent to which youth in Canada feel social connection to others through a general question about feeling “a sense of belonging to one’s local community” (a standard benchmark question from Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey).<sup>8</sup> Among youth as a whole, one in six (15%) reports feeling a very strong sense of belonging to his or her local community, with close to half (46%) describing this connection as somewhat strong, and the remainder saying it is somewhat (30%) or very (9%) weak.

The importance of community connection is underscored by how closely it is linked to overall life satisfaction. Canadian youth with a very strong sense of belonging are almost three times as likely to report a high level of overall life satisfaction (48%), compared with those reporting a somewhat or very weak connection (18%) (see chart on page 22).

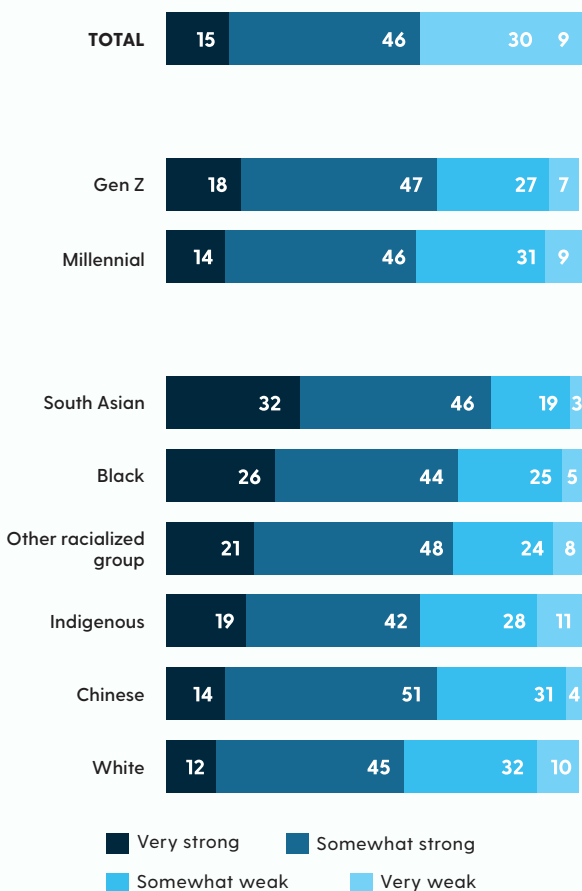
Sense of belonging to community is marginally more prevalent among leading-edge Gen Zers (18% very strong) than Millennials (14%), and is also somewhat more apt to be reported by men (17%) than women (13%). More noticeable are differences across ethnic/racial groups. A very strong sense of community connection is most widely reported by South Asian youth (32%), followed by Black youth (26%), and much less so among those who identify as white (12%) and

<sup>7</sup> Evidence of the challenges facing youth can be found in the Institute’s Toronto Social Capital Study 2018

<sup>8</sup> “Local community” is not defined in the question, leaving it to survey participants to use their own frame of reference. For a detailed review of the “sense of belonging” literature and Canadian data see <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/research/sense-belonging-literature-review.html#sec01.2>

### Sense of belonging to local community

by generation and ethnic/racial group



Q.18

How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community? Would you say it is?

### Chinese (14%)

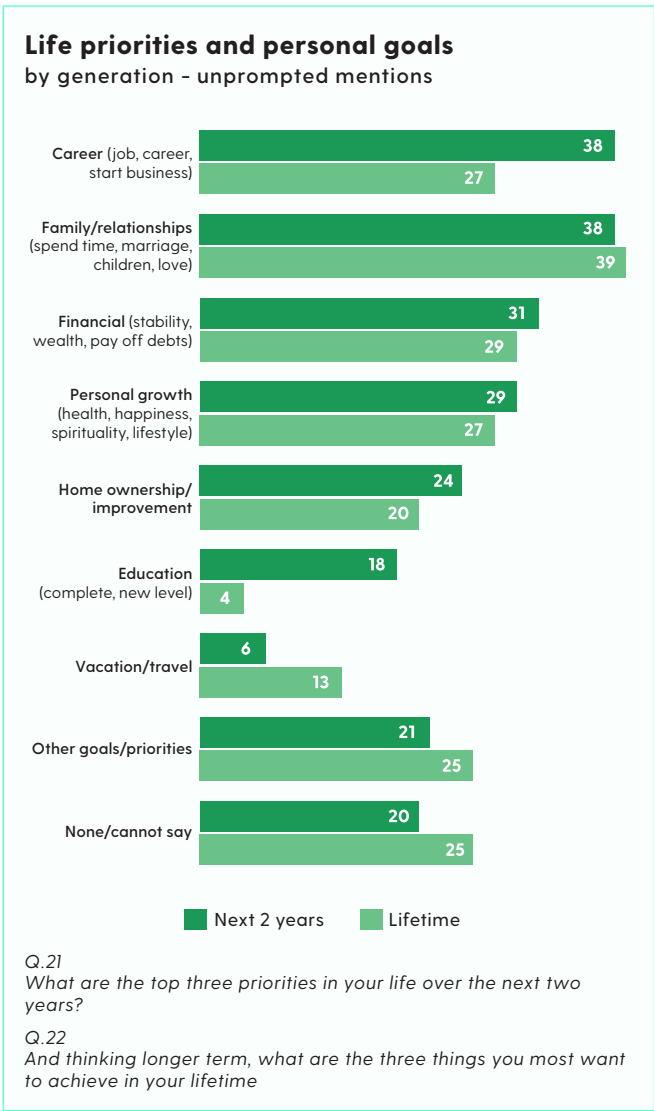
Social values also appear as an important differentiator on a sense of community belonging. Among leading-edge Gen Zers, it is Hustling Hedonists who stand out as having a very strong connection (32%, versus only 13% with weak ties). In contrast, a strong sense of belonging is reported by very few Reflective Realists (4%, versus 71% with a weak connection) and Optimistic Observers (7%, versus 56%). Among Millennials, it is the Diverse Strivers (the older version of Hustling Hedonists) who feel the strongest community connection (37%), with this least evident among Lone Wolves (4%), Bros & Brittany's (6%) and Critical Counterculturists (9%); half or more of each of these groups describe their connection to local community as somewhat or very weak.

**Reasons for weak sense of community belonging**— Those who described their sense of belonging as somewhat or very weak were asked the main reason or reasons they did not have a stronger sense of connection to their local community (asked unprompted). Most responses fall into one of two broad themes: issues with their community or neighborhood, and personal reasons.

Close to half of youth with a weak sense of community belonging attribute this to the community itself, in terms of being an unfriendly or unwelcoming neighbourhood (22%) and the lack of interesting community programs or events (14%), as well as a lack of shared values and politics (8%), the cultural or demographic make-up (6%), and concerns about crime (3%). Four in ten cite personal reasons, in terms of preferring to keep to oneself (22%), being new to the area (10%), not having the time to become more involved (6%), and lack of interest in being more connected (4%). Few (3%) specifically mention the Covid-19 pandemic as a reason for not feeling more connected.

Reasons for lack of community connection are notably similar across the youth population. Leading-edge Gen Zers are somewhat more likely to emphasize neighbourhood issues over personal ones, but the reasons for weak community connection do not change as age increases.

# LIFE GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS



## TOP LIFE GOALS

As short term and lifetime aspirations, youth place the highest priority on family/personal relationships and their careers, followed by financial security, personal growth and home ownership. One in five do not identify any life goals, with this group predominantly men without post-secondary education.

What do Canadian youth want most out of life? The survey posed two questions about life aspirations, first to name up to three personal priorities over the next two years, and then what three things they most want to achieve in their lifetime. Both questions were asked unprompted, so that participants could describe goals in their own words; these were then analyzed and coded into conceptually meaningful themes and categories.

The results reveal a handful of broad themes covering the main aspects of life and livelihood. In terms of two year goals, the most common themes involve **career** (38%) (e.g., finding a job, advancing one’s career, starting a business) and **family or personal relationships** (38%) (getting married, spending time with family, raising children, finding love), followed by **financial goals** (31%) (achieving stability, accumulating wealth, paying off debts), **personal growth** (29%) (being healthy, happy, becoming a better person), **home ownership** (24%) (buying a home, moving to a better place), and **education** (18%).

Other less widely mentioned short term objectives include vacation or travel, buying a car, volunteering, and pet ownership. One in five (20%) did not identify any personal priorities for the next two years.

When it comes to lifetime goals, the themes and their relative importance remain largely the same as for two-year priorities, except with a somewhat smaller emphasis given to career goals and education, and a bit more focus placed on vacation and travel.

The relative importance placed on each of the main themes varies across the population:

**Career goals—** The emphasis placed on career goals declines somewhat as youth age across the two generations, both for two-year priorities and lifetime achievements. For instance, career goals as a two-year priority is identified by 43 percent of youth aged 18 to 21, and then shrinks in each successive cohort, down to 30 percent among those aged 36 to 40. This same trend is also reflected in the fact that each cohort of Millennials is less apt to place importance on career priorities in 2020 than in 2016.

The emphasis on career goals over the next two years is similar across household income, race/ethnicity, gender and generation in Canada. But when it comes to lifetime goals, career is given comparatively greater importance by women, Black youth and Quebecers, and least so among those who are Chinese.

Social values also play a role in the emphasis given to career goals over two years and lifetime. Among Gen Z youth, career goals over the short term are of most importance to Optimistic Observers and Hustling Hedonists, while as a lifetime goal it is of most importance to Egalitarian Idealists and Hustling Hedonists. For both time horizons, Gen Z Earnest Strivers are least apt to share this priority. Among Millennials, the emphasis given to career goals is similar across social values groups, with the notable exception of Lone Wolves who give this much less priority than other groups (as was the case in 2016).

**Family and relationship goals—** The importance given to family and relationship goals rises as youth age to a certain point, and then declines. For instance, the proportion of youth identifying this goal as a two year priority goes from 29 percent (among youth aged 18 to 21) up to 43 percent (ages 31 to 35), then drops to 36 percent (ages 36 to 40). A similar pattern shows in the emphasis given to family and relationships as a lifetime goal, but the

downward shift starts after age 25. Among Millennials, the priority placed on family and relationships as both a two year priority and lifetime goal is notably lower in 2020 than in 2016.

Among youth as a whole, family and relationship goals are given the most prominence among women, Quebecers, youth with a post-secondary degree, and third plus generation Canadians. Among Gen Zers, family and relationship priorities over the next two years is more prevalent among white and Black youth compared with those who are Chinese and South Asian; but these differences are not reflected in their lifetime goals nor among Millennials. Family and relationships figure more prominently among youth who identify as heterosexual (for both time horizons) and as bisexual (as a lifetime goal).

Among Gen Zers, the priority given to family and relationship goals over the next two years does not vary much by social values groups, but with a lifetime horizon this becomes of much greater importance for Egalitarian Idealists (identified by 54% of this group). By comparison, only half as many (27%) Earnest Strivers share this aspiration. Among Millennials, it is Engaged Idealists, New Traditionalists and Critical Counterculturists who focus the most on this area of life (both over two years and lifetime), while Lone Wolves stand out as expressing the least interest. Priority on family and relationship goals have declined across all Millennial social values groups since 2016, with the exception of Engaged Idealists (no change) and Critical Counterculturists (small increase).

**Financial goals—** The emphasis given to this area of life is largely similar across age cohorts, with modest increases as youth get older. The priority on financial goals given by Millennials is essentially unchanged since 2016. Financial priorities are higher among youth with a post-secondary degree; they do not vary noticeably by household income as a two year priority, but do increase along with income

as a lifetime aspiration among Millennials. Across the country, financial goals are also of most importance to residents of B.C. and Alberta (over the next two years) and among Millennials who are men and those who identify as Black.

Among Gen Zers, the priority placed on financial goals over the next two years does not vary by social values group, but as a lifetime aspiration it is most evident among Guarded Independents, and least so among Earnest Strivers. Among Millennials, it is Critical Counterculturalists who place the strongest emphasis on financial goals over the next two years and also lifetime (in this latter case joined by Engaged Idealists and New Traditionalists); Critical Counterculturalists are the only group for whom this priority has strengthened since 2016. Lone Wolves continue to be least focused on this part of their lives.

**Personal growth goals—** The priority youth place on personal growth increases steadily along with age cohorts as a two year priority, but not in terms of lifetime aspirations. Millennials' emphasis in this area is unchanged over the past four years. As a two year priority, personal growth is most likely to be identified by Millennials who live in Quebec and who identify as Indigenous, as well as by Gen Zers who identify as Black. Personal growth as a lifetime goal is most prevalent among women, youth who identify as South Asian, and first generation Gen Zers.

Among Gen Z youth, personal growth is most likely to be a two year priority among Reflective Realists, while Earnest Strivers are least apt to share this view (especially as a lifetime goal). Among Millennials, it is Critical Counterculturalists and New Traditionalists who emphasize personal growth, in contrast with Lone Wolves.

**Home ownership goals—** Youth focus on home ownership (or in some cases moving to a better home) increases up through age 30 and then diminishes, both as a two year priority and a lifetime aspiration. This priority has declined marginally among Millennials since 2016, both as a two year priority and a lifetime aspiration. The emphasis given to home ownership does not vary significantly across the youth population, but is most noticeable among women and third generation

Canadians. Among Gen Zers, Earnest Strivers are the least apt to prioritize home ownership over the next two years, while Optimistic Observers stand out as giving this attention as a lifetime goal. Among Millennials, Engaged Idealists are somewhat more likely than others to identify this goal, both over the next two years and lifetime.

**Education goals—** Canadian youth priority on education over the next two years is mostly a function of age. This is identified as a two year goal by close to half (44%) of those aged 18 to 21, and declines across older cohorts to only seven percent among those aged 36 to 40. Few in any cohort identify education as a lifetime goal (ranging from 6% among those aged 18 to 24, down to 3% among those aged 25 to 40). Likewise, Millennials as a generation place somewhat lower importance on education goals in 2020 than they did in 2016 (now being four years older).

Education is most apt to be a two year priority among women and youth with some post-secondary education (but not a university degree), as well as Millennials who are Black and Indigenous. Among Gen Zers, education is a significant priority among Hustling Hedonist and Optimistic Observers, and least so among Earnest Strivers. Among Millennials, this emphasis is most evident among Engaged Idealists, Critical Counterculturalists and New Traditionalists, but has declined significantly in the first two groups since 2016.

**Those who do not identify any life goals—** The absence of any two-year or lifetime goals is lowest among youth aged 22 to 24, and highest among those aged 18 to 21 and 31 to 40. This group is most likely to be comprised of men, youth with less education and those who are not employed and not looking for work. Notably, the lack of short term or lifetime goals is now more prevalent among Millennials in 2020 than in 2016, and most significantly among Lone Wolves (40% in the case of lifetime goals, up 9 points) and Diverse Strivers (28%, up 9). Among Gen Z, almost half (47%) of Earnest Strivers do not identify any lifetime goals.

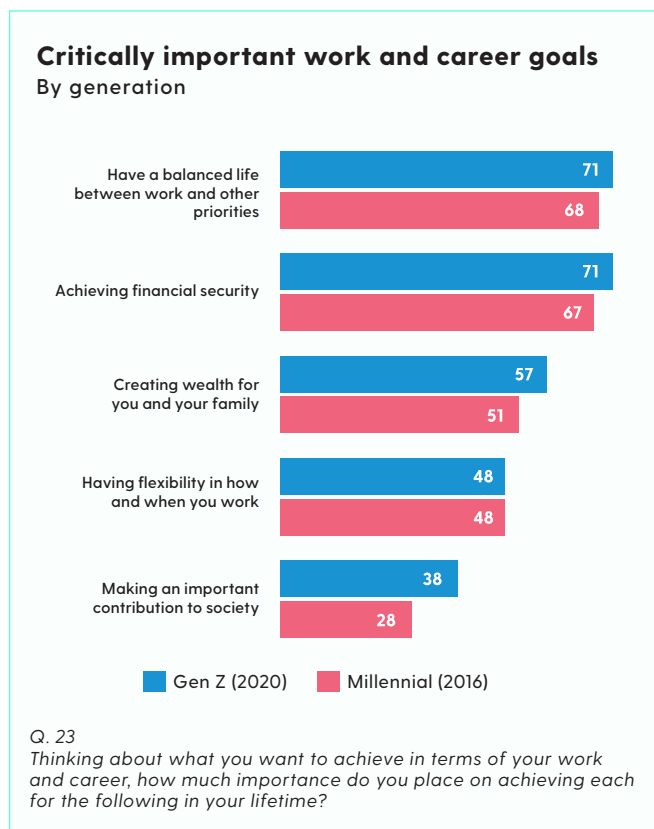


## WORK AND CAREER PRIORITIES

**Youth place the strongest career priority on achieving work-life balance and financial security, ahead of wealth creation and flexibility on how and when they work. Much less emphasis is given to making an important contribution to society, a priority strongly influenced by their social values.**

What do Canadian youth want most from their work and careers? Among the five goals presented on the survey, the highest priority is placed on having a balanced life between work and other life priorities (69% say this is critically important), and achieving financial security (67%), followed by creating wealth for oneself and one's family (53%), and having flexibility in how and when one works (48%), and making an important contribution to society (31%).

The relative importance placed on these work and career goals is similar for the two generations, but varies across other characteristics of the youth population.



Having a balanced life between work and other priorities. This is one of the top two goals for both generations. It is most apt to be seen as critically important among youth aged 22 to 24 (76%), and then declines progressively as youth age through their late 20s and 30s. This pattern is also reflected in the fact that Millennials are less likely than in 2016 to make this a critical priority, and this decline is most pronounced among the oldest cohort (64% among those now aged 36 to 40, down 18 points since 2016).

The importance placed on a balanced life increases with educational attainment, but not household income. Women place greater priority on this goal than men, with this gap especially large among Gen Zers. Among Millennials, Black youth stand out as placing the most importance on this goal (76%), in contrast with those who are Indigenous (61%) and Chinese (60%).

Among Gen Z youth, balancing work and other priorities is most apt to be seen as critically important among Egalitarian Idealists, Reflective Realists, and Optimistic Observers, and much less so among Earnest Strivers. Among Millennials, it is Engaged Idealists and Critical Counterculturists who stand out on this priority, with Lone Wolves least apt to share this perspective. Millennials in all social values groups now place less importance on this goal than they did four years ago, with the notable exception of Critical Counterculturists (where there has been no change).

Achieving financial security. This work and career priority is equally important to both generations, but less so among Millennials than in 2016, especially among those aged 36 to 40 (63% in this cohort say it is of critical importance, down 8 points). This goal is most apt to be prioritized among Gen Z women and Black Millennials. Among Gen Z youth, the importance of achieving financial stability is least evident among Earnest Strivers. Among Millennials, the importance of this goal has declined across all social values groups except Engaged Idealists (where it has risen marginally), and remains lowest among Lone Wolves.

Creating wealth. Creating wealth for oneself and one's family is third in the list of priorities for both generations, but is more likely to be considered critically important by Gen Zers (especially those aged 22 to 24 (59%), and progressively less so through Millennial cohorts (bottoming out at 46% among those aged 36 to 40)). The priority given

to wealth is not clearly linked to educational attainment, household income or gender, but is most pronounced among youth who are Black and South Asian, as well as among first generation Canadians.

Social values figure prominently in youth orientation to this work and career goal, especially among Millennials for whom wealth creation is most apt to be prioritized by Diverse Strivers (66%), in contrast with Critical Counterculturists (21%) and Lone Wolves (34%). Among Gen Zers, wealth creation is most widely considered to be of critical importance among Hustling Hedonists (72%) and Dutiful Accomplishers (68%), in contrast to Egalitarian Idealists (48%), Earnest Strivers (51%) and Reflective Realists (52%).

Having flexibility in when and how you work. Canadian Gen Zers (48%) and Millennials (48%) express the same level of priority on this work and career goal, with little difference across cohorts, or change in Millennials' perspective since 2016. As with some of the other priorities, Black youth are most likely to identify this as critically important (especially among Millennials). Gender does not factor into this priority among Gen Zers, but among Millennials women are somewhat more likely than men to emphasize its importance (a small but notable shift from 2016 when there was no difference by gender).

Among Gen Z youth, Hustling Hedonists are most apt to prioritize work flexibility (64%), compared with Earnest Strivers (39%), Optimistic Observers (40%) and Guarded Independents (42%). Among Millennials, it is Diverse Strivers (60%) who stand out on this work and career goal, with Lone Wolves (34%) least apt to share this view.

Making an important contribution to society. Among the work and career goals presented, both Gen Z (38%) and Millennial (28%) youth are least likely to place high priority on making an important contribution to society, with the proportion identifying it as critically important declining with each successive age cohort (decreasing from 39% among those aged 18 to 21, to 24% among those 36 to 40; with this last group lower by 6 percentage points than in 2016).

Youth most likely to place a priority on work that contributes to society include those who are Black and South Asian, as well as Millennials with a post-secondary degree. More than any of the other goals, this one is most strongly determined by social values. Among Gen Zers, a majority of Hustling Hedonists (53%) and Egalitarian Idealists (47%) consider this to be a critically important priority in their work and careers, in sharp contrast with Optimistic Observers (12%). Among Millennials, Diverse Strivers (49%, up 5 points since 2016) and Engaged Idealists (42%, down 2) are most apt to place a priority on this goal, in comparison with Bros and Brittanys (15%, down 3) and Lone Wolves (10%, down 5).

CONFIDENCE IN ATTAINING CAREER GOALS

Youth express qualified optimism in achieving their work and career goals, and such confidence is strongly linked to current educational attainment. Confidence of success is most prevalent among Black youth and least so among those who are Indigenous.

How confident do Canadian youth feel about achieving their current work and career goals over time? Overall, there is qualified optimism about the future, with three in four saying they are very (23%) or somewhat (52%) confident in achieving their goals, compared with one in four who is not very (19%) or not at all (6%) confident. Views are similar across generations and age cohorts, but Gen Z youth are more likely than Millennials to be very confident (27%, versus 21%). As well, Millennials' confidence in future career success has declined noticeably since 2016, and most noticeably among those aged 36 to 40 (with the proportion very or somewhat confident declining by 13 percentage points).

Confidence in attaining work and career goals is most strongly linked to educational attainment: almost all (96%) of youth with a graduate degree are somewhat if not very confident in their future, compared with just over six in ten (63%) who have not completed high school. At the same

time, even among youth with an undergraduate degree or diploma, just one in four feels very confident about his or her future career.

Higher levels of career confidence is also evident among those with higher incomes, men and Quebecers, especially among Millennials. Among ethnic/racial groups, Black youth stand out as having the most confidence in their future careers (84% very or somewhat confident), along with South Asian Millennials (88%), while least evident among those who are Indigenous (69%).

Among Gen Z youth, career confidence is most prevalent among Dutiful Accomplishers (91%) and Hustling Hedonists (92%), in contrast with Reflective Realists (41%). Among Millennials, it is Diverse Strivers (87%) and Engaged Idealists (80%) who are the most positive, compared with Bros & Brittany's (67%) and Lone Wolves (57%), with both groups showing the most decline since 2016.

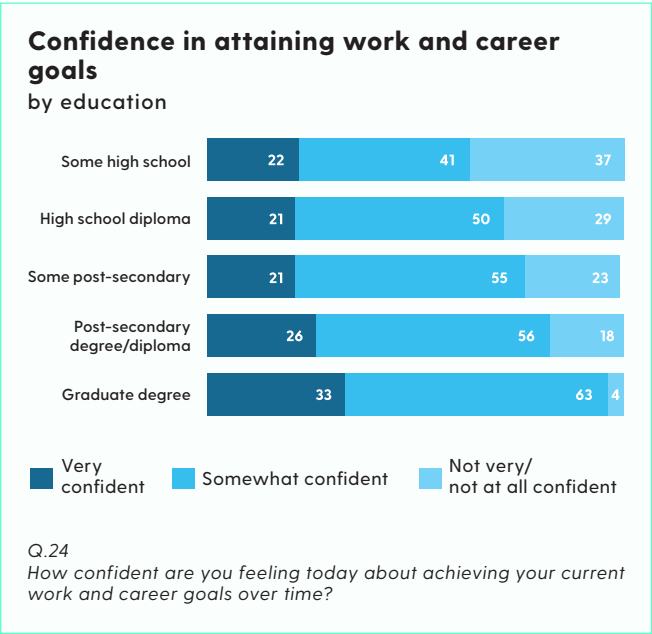
THE VALUE OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Youth have mixed views about the value of post-secondary education, with only three in ten seeing it as essential to a fulfilling life. Among those with a degree, fewer than half say it has been very helpful in their career, and they are divided on whether they would get the same degree if given a second chance.

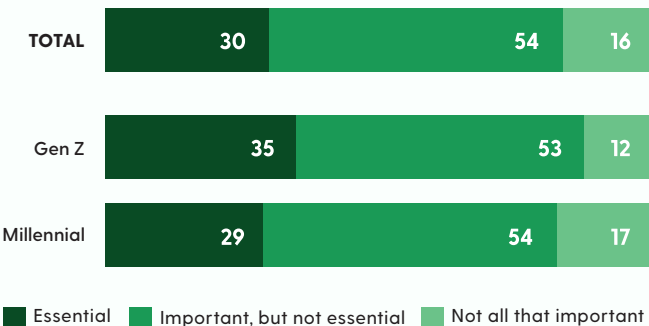
Post-secondary education has been a cornerstone for employment, career and life success for several generations. There has been a substantial public investment in colleges and universities across the country, and Canada boasts one of the highest rates of post-secondary education in the world. But increasingly some are questioning whether having a degree is still a sure ticket to a secure future. How do youth today view the value of post-secondary education?

How essential is having a post-secondary degree?

— Most youth in Canada see value in post-secondary education, but not everyone is convinced of its importance. Three in ten (30%) say it is essential to having a fulfilling life, with a majority (54%) describing it as important but not essential, and another 16 percent indicating it is not all that important.



Importance of post-secondary degree to a fulfilling life by generation



Q.28  
How important do you believe it is to have a post-secondary (college or university) degree to have a fulfilling life?

The importance placed on post-secondary education is most prevalent among youth who are first generation Canadians (42% of whom describe it as essential to a fulfilling life), and those who are Black (45%) and South Asian (47%), in contrast with those who are white (25%). This view is also more evident among leading-edge Gen Zers (35%) than Millennials (29%), with the perspective of this latter generation unchanged from 2016. Current educational attainment makes a difference among Millennials (as it did four years ago), with post-secondary education more strongly valued among those who have it. But this relationship does not appear among leading-edge Gen Z youth. As well, there is no difference between men and women on this question, in either generation.

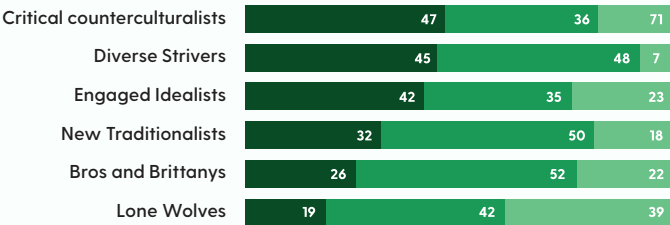
Perspectives on the value of post-secondary education are strongly influenced by social values. Among Millennials, such education is now considered essential by a majority (54%) of Diverse Strivers, and even more so than in 2016. In contrast, this view is shared by few Lone Wolves (16%) and Critical Counterculturalists (13%), and in both cases reflects a decline over time. This is despite the fact that Critical Counterculturalists are the most likely of any group to have a post-secondary degree (40%),

with Lone Wolves least apt to have one (15%); these two groups may have very different reasons for discounting what a degree can offer.

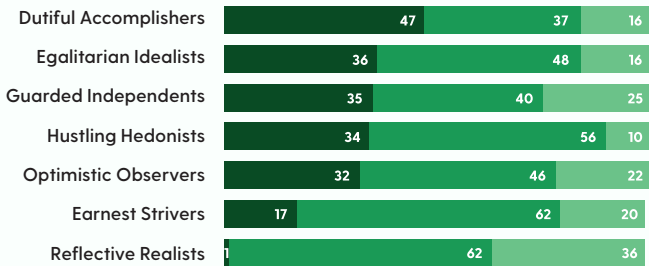
Among leading-edge Gen Zers, it is Hustling Hedonists (53%) who are most apt to say that post-secondary education is essential to a fulfilling life, followed by Dutiful Accomplishers (40%). Least likely to share this view are Egalitarian Idealists (28%) (who have the highest proportion of post-secondary degrees, at 34%) and Reflective Realists (24%) (who have the lowest proportion, at 18%).

Value of post-secondary education to date by social values groups

MILLENNIAL



GEN Z



Very helpful   Somewhat helpful   Not very/not at all helpful

Q.26  
[IF COMPLETED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION] How valuable have you found your post-secondary education to have been so far in your life, in terms of helping you achieve your life goals?

**Value of post-secondary education to date—** This question was also examined by asking youth who have a post-secondary degree how valuable they found it to be so far in helping them achieve their life goals. Opinions are divided among those who say their degree has been very helpful (32%), somewhat helpful (46%), and not very or at all helpful (22%).

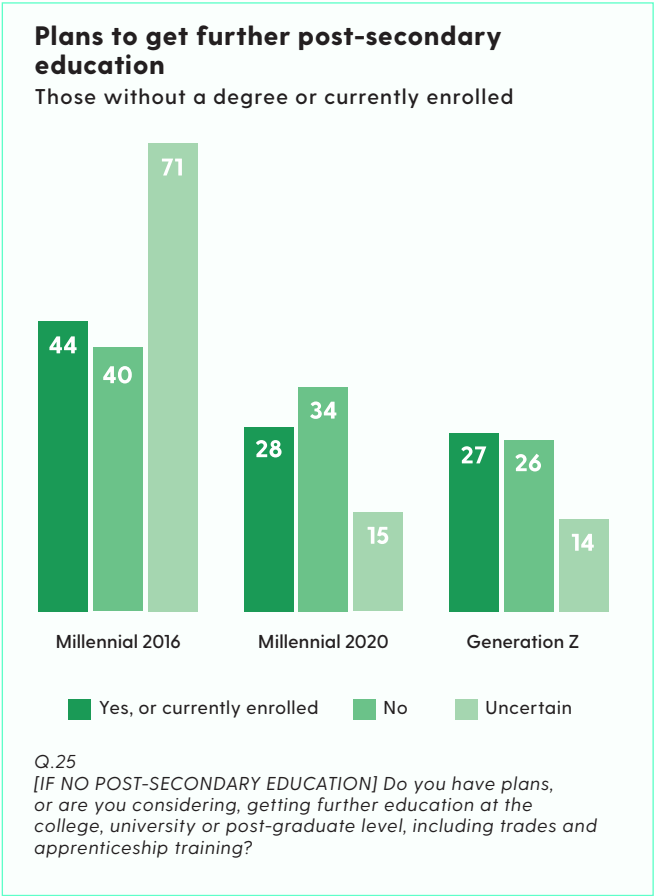
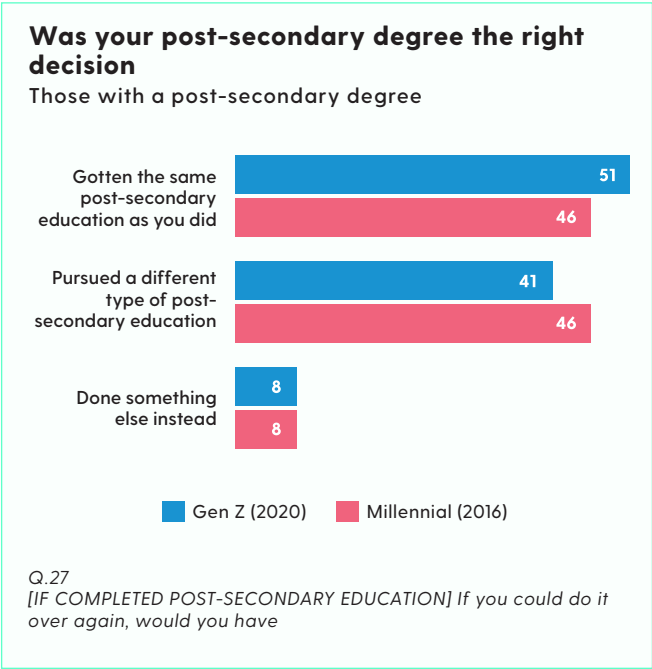
Youth who are the most positive about what their degree has done for them include those who have graduate degree (52%, versus 31% among those with an undergraduate degree), those earning \$100K or more (40%), and Black youth (42%). This view is least evident among youth who are self employed (19%) or looking for work (11%), Chinese youth (19%), and those with a low level of life satisfaction (11%).

Perspectives on this question are the same between two generations as a whole, but there are notable differences within each. Among Millennials, belief in their post-secondary degree being very helpful has declined somewhat over the past four years (from 41% to 36%), with this downward trend most noticeable among women, the oldest cohort (ages 36 to 40), those looking for work, and residents of Atlantic Canada, Ontario and Alberta. Among social values groups, this assessment is most prevalent among Critical Counterculturists (47%), Diverse Strivers (45%) and Engaged Idealists (42%), and least so among Lone

Wolves (19%). This view has declined since 2016 among all groups except Critical Counterculturists (who, counter-intuitively, are also least convinced about the importance of such education in having a fulfilling life).

Among Gen Zers with a post-secondary degree, women (36%) are more positive than men (29%) about what this education has provided to date, while household income does not appear to be a factor. Across social values groups, it is Dutiful Accomplishers (47%) who are most likely to say their degree has been very helpful to date, in stark contrast to Reflective Realists (1%) and Earnest Strivers (17%).

**Would you get the same degree again? —** Youth with a post-secondary degree were also asked, if given a second chance, if they would have still pursued the same degree or followed a different path. Responses to this question are also mixed. Just over four in ten (43%) say they would still have gotten the same post-secondary education they completed. Others believe they would have pursued a different type of



post-secondary education (47%) or done something entirely different (10%).

Across the population, satisfaction with one's chosen post-secondary path is most evident among youth in the top income bracket, Quebecers and Indigenous Peoples. Those most apt to say they would have done something completely different tend to be youth who are struggling, in terms of having low incomes, not looking for work, and low overall life satisfaction.

Millennials' response as a whole to this question have remained remarkably stable since 2016, but there have been some notable changes within this cohort. A drop in satisfaction with the educational path taken is most pronounced among the oldest Millennials (ages 36 to 40) and those with a graduate degree; they are now more likely to say they would either pursue a different degree or do something else entirely. A similar decline in satisfaction with one's current degree is also most evident among New Traditionalists, and to a lesser extent among Bros & Brittanys and Lone Wolves, in contrast to Diverse Strivers who are now more likely than before to say they would get the same degree again. Critical Counterculturists, despite downplaying the essential role of their post-secondary education, continue to be the segment most satisfied with their chosen educational path.

Among Gen Zers who have completed a post-secondary degree (28% of this cohort), satisfaction with their educational path is most prominent among those aged 18 to 21 and those pursuing another degree, as well as those who are Egalitarian Idealists, Optimistic Observers, Dutiful Accomplishers and Guarded Independents. On this question, Earnest Strivers are least apt to share this view, with more than twice as many saying they would have pursued a different post-secondary degree.

**Plans for further post-secondary education—**Youth who do not yet have a post-secondary degree were asked if they have plans for, or are considering getting, further education at the college, university or post-graduate level. Roughly half of this group responded in the affirmative in terms of having such plans (37%) or are already enrolled in such a program (12%). A similar proportion is divided between those who have no such plans (28%) and those who remain uncertain (22%). Plans for or current enrollment in post-secondary education is most widely reported by first generation Canadians (66%) and those who are Black (71%) and South Asian (69%), in comparison with those who are white (43%).

Among Millennials without a post-secondary degree (comprising 47% of this cohort), only four in ten say they have plans for this (32%) or are currently enrolled (8%), with a surprisingly high 26 percent still uncertain about their future (essentially unchanged since 2016). Pursuit of post-secondary education is most prevalent among younger Millennials (ages 25 to 30), as well as among Diverse Strivers (59%) and Engaged Idealists (57%). By comparison, few (21%) Lone Wolves express such plans.

Among Gen Z youth without a degree (49% of this cohort), seven in ten say they plan to get one (48%) or are currently enrolled (23%), with the balance saying they have no such intentions (15%) or remain uncertain (14%). Among social values groups, the pursuit of post-secondary education is most widespread among Egalitarian Idealists (80%) and Hustling Hedonists (77%), and least so among Earnest Strivers (63%) and Guarded Independents (65%).



## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR CANADIAN YOUTH

**Canadas' youth are divided on how well the country's major institutions are supporting the needs and aspirations of their generation. Gen Zers are more positive than Millennials, but the latter now sees more evidence of institutional support than it did in 2016.**

Canada's younger generations are confronted with unprecedented challenges in making successful transition to adulthood and its associated milestones of employment and career, financial security, affordable housing and child care. These are in large measure collective problems stemming from broad economic, structural and political trends that require attention by the country's major institutions, including governments, post-secondary institutions and the private sector.

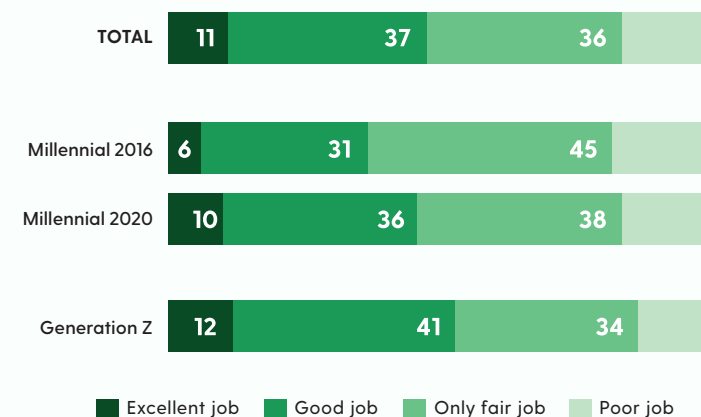
How well do youth believe major institutions are doing to support the needs and aspirations of their generation? The assessment is mixed. Close to half say they are doing an excellent (11%) or good (37%) job, while an equal proportion

believe they are doing only a fair (36%) or poor (15%) job. A positive rating (excellent or good) is more likely to be given by Gen Zers (53%) than Millennials (46%), but the opinions of the latter generation have improved significantly since 2016 (when only 37% shared this view).

Across the youth population, a positive assessment of the support provided by the country's institutions is most evident among those with a graduate degree, first generation Canadians, Black and South Asian youth, and men.

Among Millennials, ratings have improved across most of the generation, but most significantly among those with a graduate degree, first generation Canadians, and Diverse Strivers (77% say excellent or good job, up 22 points since 2016). By comparison, only 20 percent of Critical Counterculturalists now share this view (down 4 points). Among leading-edge Gen Zers, confidence in major institutions is expressed by strong majorities of Hustling Hedonists (71%), Earnest Strivers (70%) and Dutiful Accomplishers (63%), compared with no more than a third of Egalitarian Idealists (35%) and Reflective Realists (27%).

### How well major institutions are supporting needs/ aspirations of your generation by generation



Q.44

*In your view, how well do you think the country's major institutions (such as governments, post-secondary institutions and the private sector) have been doing to support the needs and aspirations of people in your generation? Have they done:*

# PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY AND INSTITUTIONS

The survey also examined youth perspectives on a range of other issues, with the results covered in depth in a previously published report. This report focuses on these issues through the lens of Gen Z and Millennial social values.

## CONFIDENCE IN DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNMENT

**Confidence in the country's democracy and its major institutions is strongest among the most ethnically-diverse social values groups (e.g., Hustling Hedonists and Diverse Strivers), and least evident among those with the least education and greatest rejection of authority (Reflective Realists and Lone Wolves).**

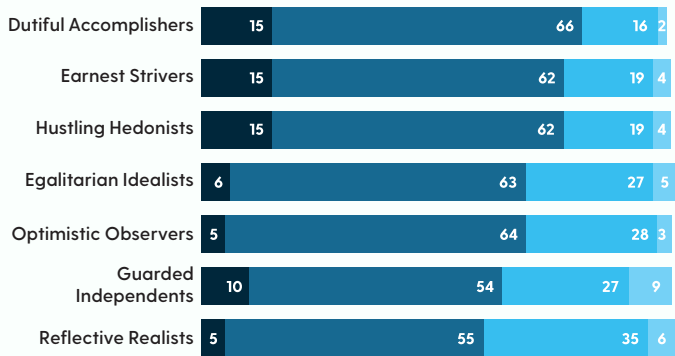
**Satisfaction with democracy in Canada**— How do Canada's youth feel about the way democracy works in the country today? On balance, opinions are more positive than negative but by no means reflect a ringing endorsement. Just one in ten (10%) is very satisfied, with the majority (57%) saying they are satisfied. The remaining third are somewhat (26%) or very (7%) dissatisfied. Satisfaction with the country's democracy is strongest among youth with higher levels of educational attainment, as well as South Asians, first generation Canadians, and those with a strong sense of community belonging. This view is least apt to be shared among those who are white and Indigenous, and those with a low level of overall life satisfaction.

Views about democracy in Canada are also a function of one's social values, with positive views most prevalent among the most ethnically-diverse groups. Among Gen Z youth, it is Dutiful Accomplishers (81% very satisfied or satisfied), Earnest Strivers (77%) and Hustling Hedonists (77%) who are most likely to express satisfaction with how democracy is working today, with this view least apt to be shared by Reflective Realists (60%) and Guarded Independents (64%).

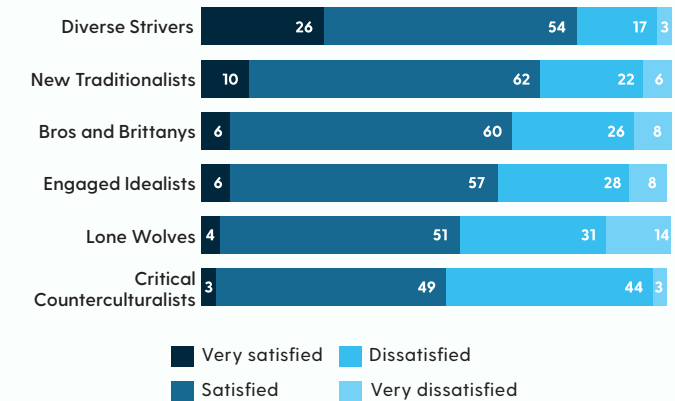
### Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada

By social values group

#### GEN Z



#### MILLENNIAL



Q.56  
In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Canada?

Millennials as a whole are somewhat less satisfied with democracy than Gen Z Canadians, but within this generation the most positive opinions are expressed by the two most ethnically-diverse social values groups – Diverse Strivers (80%) and New Traditionalists (72%). By comparison, satisfaction levels are notably lower among Critical Counterculturalists (52%) and Lone Wolves (55%); these two groups have very little in common demographically, but share a skepticism about many issues.

**Is government working or broken?** — Similar to opinions about the state of Canadian democracy today, Canadian youth are more positive than negative about the functioning of their governments (as combined across the three levels).<sup>9</sup> Two-thirds say governments in Canada today are generally working (24%) or are working with major problems (42%), while the remainder believe they are either broken but working in some areas (25%) or completely broken (9%).

Attitudes about the effectiveness of governments are strongly linked to views about democracy as outlined above. Among Gen Z youth, governments are most likely to be seen as generally working among Hustling Hedonists (33%) and Dutiful Accomplishers (33%), with this view shared by less than half as many Reflective Realists (15%). Among Millennials, it is Diverse Strivers (34%) who express the most positive opinion, compared with Lone Wolves (17%) (on this question, Critical Counterculturalists conform to the generational average). The social values segments that are positive about government effectiveness are also the ones with a strong sense of belonging to a local community.

Confidence in Canadian institutions. Canadian youth were asked to rate their level of general confidence in each of nine major Canadian institutions or sectors. None receive high marks by more than half of each generation, but there is considerable variation across the list. A high level of confidence (ratings of “4” or “5” on a 5-point scale) is most widely given to the **health care system** (50%), followed by **major non-profit organizations** (e.g., YMCA, United Way) (43%), and the country’s **universities and colleges** (42%); in each case fewer than half as many express low confidence (ratings of “1” or “2”).

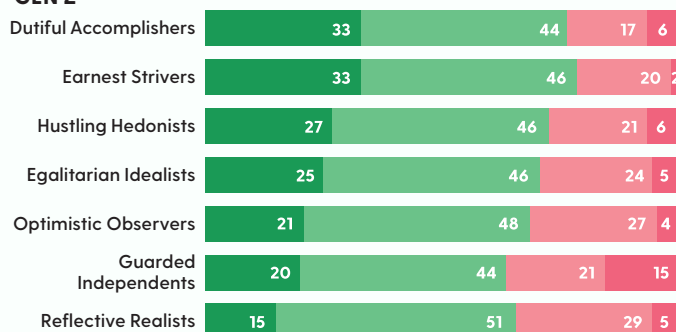
Ratings are more balanced between positive and negative in the confidence ratings given to Canada’s **banks** (36% high confidence, versus 29% low confidence) and **school system** (33%, versus 30%). High confidence ratings fall well below negative ones in terms of the **justice system and courts** (28%

high confidence), the **Canadian media** (24%) and the **federal Parliament** (24%). Finally, Canadian youth express the least confidence in the country’s **major corporations** (apart from banks), with only 17 percent giving them high marks.

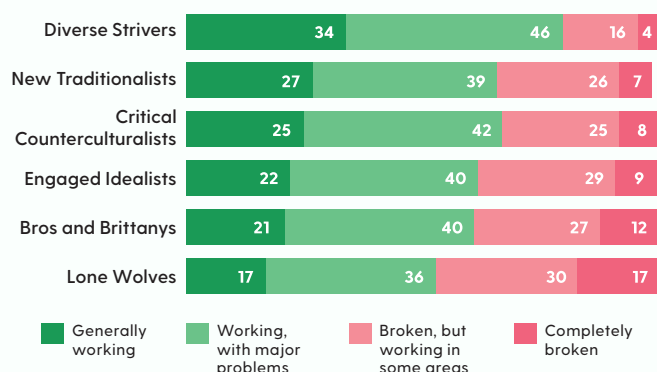
Across the institutions rated, confidence levels vary by social values group in a pattern similar to the questions about democracy and government. Among Gen Z youth, strong confidence is most widely expressed by Hustling Hedonists and Dutiful Accomplishers, and least so among Reflective Realists, and in some cases Optimistic Observers. The gaps in such ratings across groups is most pronounced in terms of major corporations, the justice system and the school system. For instance, a high level of confidence is given to major corporations by roughly

### Are governments in Canada working or broken? by social values group

#### GEN Z



#### MILLENNIAL

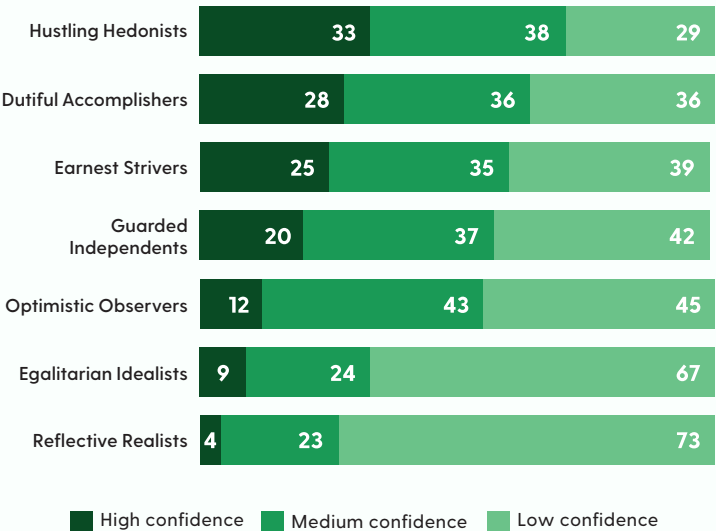


Q.57

Would you say that [SPLIT SAMPLE: the federal/your provincial/your municipal] government today is:

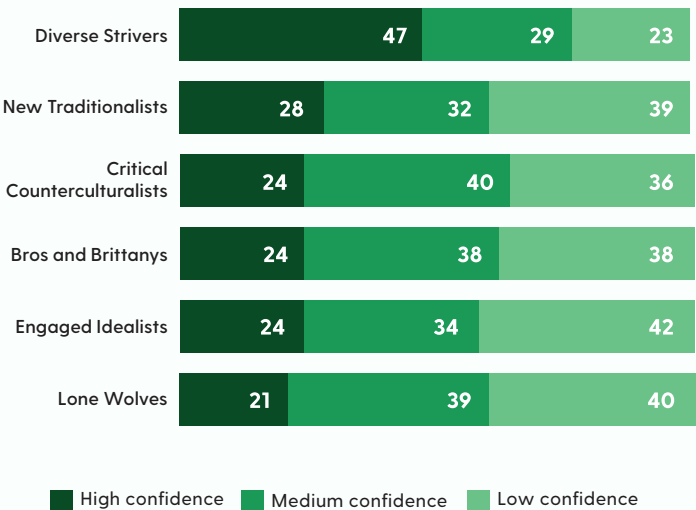
<sup>9</sup> On this survey, the question was asked in reference to each of three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal, so to provide answers that are specific to each level, as well as for government as a whole

**Confidence in major corporations**  
by Gen Z social values group



Q.46e  
Now a few questions about the level of trust you have in various institutions. Using a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" means "no confidence at all" and "5" means "a great deal of confidence", how much confidence do you have in major corporations?

**Confidence in justice system**  
by Millennial social values group



Q.46a  
Now a few questions about the level of trust you have in various institutions. Using a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" means "no confidence at all" and "5" means "a great deal of confidence", how much confidence do you have in the justice system and the courts?

one-third of Hustling Hedonists (33%) and Dutiful Accomplishers (28%), compared with fewer than one in ten Reflective Realists (4%) and in this case also Egalitarian Idealists (9%).

Among Millennials, Diverse Strivers are by far the most positive in their view of the full list of Canadian institutions, and in most cases these ratings have improved by 10 percentage points or more since 2016. Engaged Idealists give strong marks to major non-profit organizations and universities and colleges, but low ones to major corporations. Critical Counterculturalists are noticeably positive about the healthcare system (improving by 14 points since 2016) and major non-profits, but among the most negative when it comes to banks, the federal Parliament (down 10 points), and major corporations (3% high confidence).

As was the case in 2016, Lone Wolves are consistently the most negative in their opinion of most Canadian institutions, especially when it comes to major corporations and the federal Parliament. Bros & Brittany's (the largest of the Millennial groups) conform to the average in most cases, but give lower than average ratings for the school system, the Canadian media and major corporations.

# PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL AND CANADIAN ISSUES

## PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL ISSUES

**Hustling Hedonists and Diverse Strivers express the most positive outlook on the future and addressing major global issues like racism and global warming. This view is least apt to be shared by Reflective Realists and Lone Wolves. Critical Counterculturalists are especially pessimistic about the global future.**

**Optimism-pessimism about the world's direction**— The world has always been turbulent. But the last couple of years have witnessed an unprecedented degree of disruption and instability in the areas of politics, environment, and most recently public health, as the first global pandemic in more than a century is wreaking havoc in almost every inhabited corner of the planet. In this context, how do Canada's youth view the future, in terms of the direction the world is heading over the next 10 years?

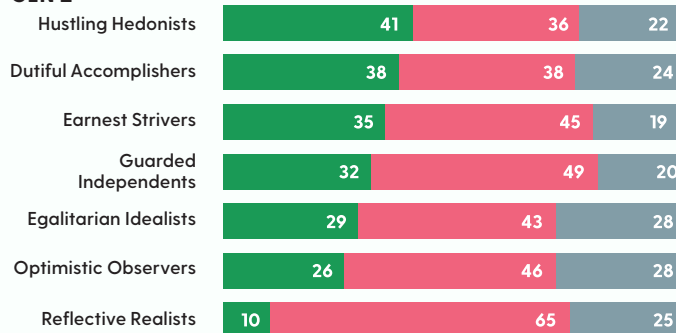
Collectively, the outlook is mixed but more negative than positive. Three in ten (30%) Canadian youth say they are basically optimistic about the direction the world is taking over the coming decade, compared with more than four in ten (44%) who are basically pessimistic; the remaining 26 percent indicate they are neither optimistic nor pessimistic (a response that likely reflects a mix of ambivalence and uncertainty).

Opinions about the direction of the world depend in large part on one's current life situation. As with views about democracy and governance, an optimistic outlook is linked to having more education (especially a post-graduate degree), a strong sense of belonging to one's

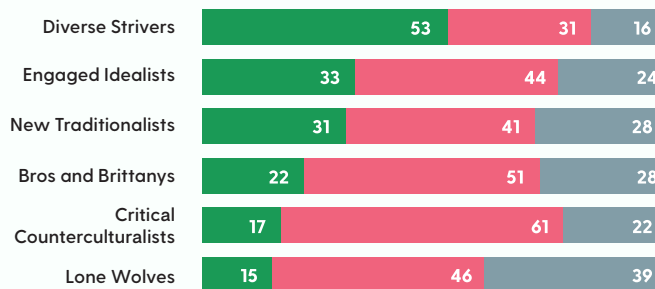
### General view of the world's direction over the next decade

by social values group

#### GEN Z



#### MILLENNIAL



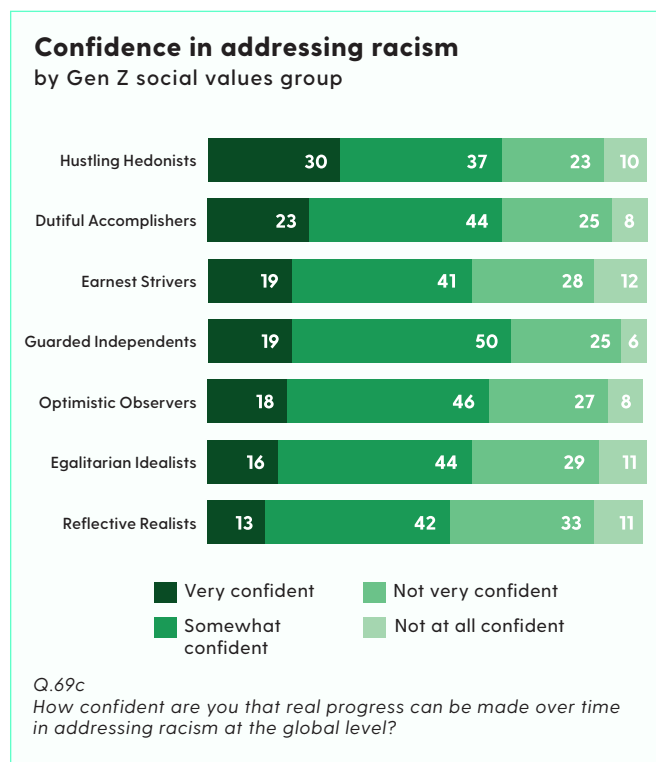
Legend:   
■ Basically optimistic   
■ Basically pessimistic   
■ Neither

Q.66

Would you say you are basically optimistic or basically pessimistic about the direction you think the world is heading over the next 10 years?

community, paying close attention to news and current events, and enjoying a high level of life satisfaction. There is almost no difference in the respective outlooks of leading-edge Gen Zers and Millennials, nor among youth across regions of the country.

Social values also have a noticeable impact on how youth view the future. Optimism is most widely expressed among the two most ethnically diverse groups. Among Gen Zers, it is Hustling Hedonist Gen Zers (41% optimistic),



followed by Dutiful Accomplishers (38%) and Earnest Strivers (35%), with this outlook least apt to be shared by Reflective Realists (10%). Among Millennials, Diverse Strivers (53%) are by far the most positive in their view of the world's future, compared with fewer than one in five Lone Wolves (15%) and Critical Counterculturalists (17%; versus 61% who are basically pessimistic).

**Confidence in addressing global issues—** Canadian youth were asked about their level of confidence in real progress being made over time in addressing each of five major issues at the global level. Among the issues presented, youth expressed the greatest confidence in progress being made to address **gender inequality** (with two-thirds very (19%) or somewhat (48%) confident), and **pandemics like Covid-19** (18% and 43%, respectively). Just over half say they are very (16%) or somewhat (41%) confident about real progress being made on addressing **racism**.

By comparison, fewer than half of Canadian youth are very (12%) or somewhat (34%) confident about making real progress in addressing **climate change** at a global level, compared with a greater proportion who are not very (38%) or not at all (15%) confident about this. Finally,

the least optimism is expressed in making progress in addressing **poverty and economic inequality** at a global level; just over four in ten are very (11%) or somewhat (31%) confident about real progress on this issue.

As might be expected, confidence in progress on major issues is strongly linked to one's broader sense of how the world is heading over the coming decade. Youth who are generally optimistic are more likely to express confidence in seeing progress on all five issues, especially in terms of climate change and addressing poverty/income inequality. This is reflected in how confidence levels vary across social values groups.

Among Gen Zers, Hustling Hedonists are the most confident across all five issues (especially climate change and racism), with Reflective Realists least apt to share this perspective. Among Millennials, Diverse Strivers are most apt to believe progress can be made on these global problems, in sharp contrast with Lone Wolves, and Critical Counterculturalists in terms of climate change and poverty/inequality.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**Most groups express confidence in the effectiveness of community mobilization for making positive change, but this is strongest among Millennial Engaged Idealists and Gen Z Egalitarian Idealists. Lone Wolves stand out as having the lowest confidence in such initiatives.**

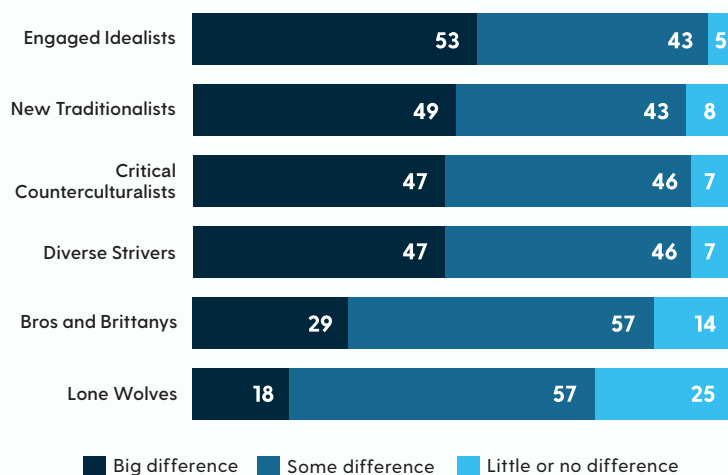
Effectiveness of local community mobilization. The survey also asked about confidence in the impact that collective action can have on making a difference at the local level. Four in ten (40%) Canadian youth say that people working together as a group can make a "big difference" in solving problems in their community. About half (49%) believe such action can make "some difference", while few (11%) maintain it would make "little or no difference."

Age appears to play a role in how youth respond to this question. Leading-edge Gen Zers are the most likely to say that local collective action can make a big difference, and this is less so among Millennials and progressively so as they get older. Among Millennials, confidence in a big impact from collective action is marginally lower in 2020



### How much difference collective action can make in addressing local problems

by Millennial social values group



Q.79

Thinking about problems in your community, how much of a difference do you believe people working together as a group can make in solving problems that you see?

than in 2016 (declining from 41% to 38%). As with other topics covered in this survey, belief in collective action making a big difference is closely linked to one's sense of belonging to a local community; this view is expressed by more than half (57%) of those with a very strong sense of community, compared with only one-third (32%) of those with a weak sense of community connection. Ethnic/racial identity also appears to play a role.

Perspectives about the effectiveness of community mobilization is also strongly reflected in the social values of Canadian youth, especially among Millennials. It is Engaged Idealists (53%) who are most apt to believe that it can make a big difference, followed by New Traditionalists (49%), Diverse Strivers (47%) and Critical Counterculturalists (47%), in sharp contrast with Lone Wolves (18%) and Bros & Brittanys (29%). Social values differences are less apparent among leading-edge Gen Zers, but it is Egalitarian Idealists (the younger version of Engaged Idealists) who stand out most on this question (63%), followed by Hustling Hedonists (51%). Least apt to share this view are Earnest Strivers (31%) and Optimistic Observers (34%).

Impact of one's generation. Canadian youth are positive, if not enthusiastically so, about their generation making a

positive impact on the country and society over the next several decades. Seven in ten say they are very (14%) or somewhat (55%) confident about their generation making this type of difference, with the remainder either not very (24%) or not at all (6%) confident. Leading-edge Gen Zers (21%) are almost twice as likely as Millennials (12%) to be very confident about their generation's future contribution to society.

Among Millennials, confidence in their generation making a difference is most evident among Diverse Strivers (30% are very confident), with this view least apparent among Lone Wolves (3%) and Bros & Brittanys (6%). Among Gen Zers, once again there are fewer differences across groups, but Hustling Hedonists are the most positive (26%) and Optimistic Observers (14%) the least so.

# CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

## ENGAGEMENT IN ISSUES AND POLITICS

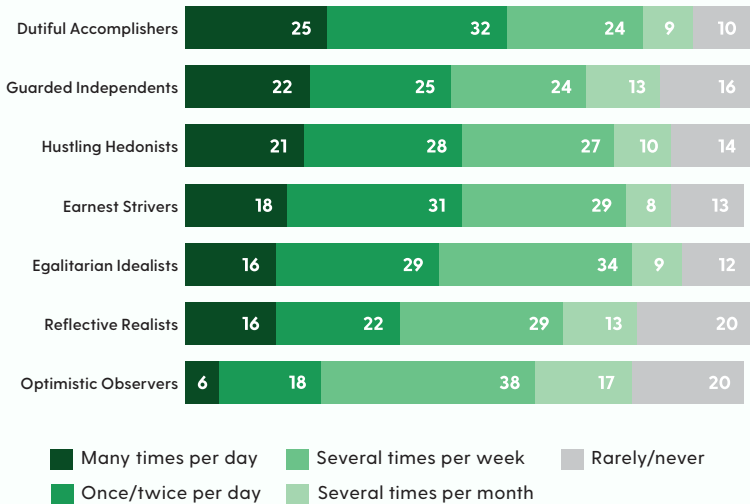
Youth most apt to be engaged with politics and current events are Gen Z Dutiful Accomplishers and Egalitarian Idealists, and Millennial Critical Counterculturists and Diverse Strivers. Such interest is least evident among Reflective Realists and Lone Wolves.

**Frequency of attention to issues and current events—** One of the dated stereotypes about youth is that they take little interest in what is happening in the world of politics and current events. The 2016 survey of this generation demonstrated there was little truth to this myth, and this is reaffirmed in the current research for both younger generations. Among Canadian youth ages 18 to 40, half say they follow news and current events (whether local, regional, national or international) at least once a day (30%) if not many times throughout the day (20%). Fewer than one in six (14%) does so rarely or never.

Frequency of attention is most closely linked to educational attainment, with daily or more frequent attention most widespread among youth with post-graduate degrees (73%), compared with just 43 percent among those without a high school diploma. Daily attention is also somewhat more evident among men (58%, versus 44% of women) and among youth on the political right (65%, versus 57% among those on the left). By generation, Millennials (54%) are somewhat more frequent than leading-edge Gen Zers (46%) in following news and current events on at least a daily basis, and this generation’s practice has changed very little since 2016 (when Millennials were last surveyed on this topic).

Among Gen Z Canadians, attending to news and current

Frequency of following news and current events by Gen Z social values group



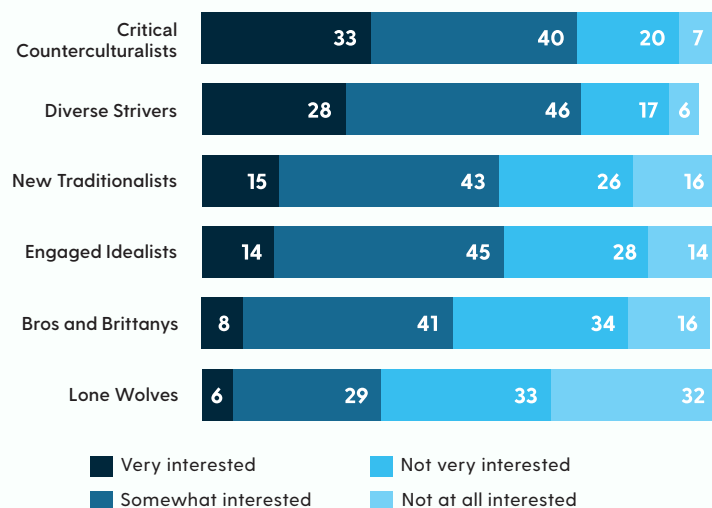
Q.47  
How frequently do you follow news and current events (e.g., international, national, regional or local)?

events on at least a daily basis is most prevalent among Dutiful Accomplishers (57%), and least so among Reflective Realists (38%) and Optimistic Observers (24%). Among Millennials, such activity is most commonly reported by Critical Counterculturists (70%) and Diverse Strivers (70%), reflecting a modest increase in both groups since 2016. By comparison, only 41 percent of Lone Wolves pay this level of attention to what is happening in the world.

**Interest in politics—** How much are Canadian youth paying attention to politics in general? Just over half say they are very (14%) or somewhat (40%) interested in politics generally, with the balance indicating they are not very (30%) or not at all (16%) interested. Responses to this question are largely similar across the youth population, with some modest variations. Across the political spectrum, strong interest in politics is more evident among those on the right (27%), compared with those on the left (21%), and least so among those in the middle (10%). Such interest is also a function of educational attainment, with

## Interest in politics

by Millennial social values group



Q.50

Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics

strong interest especially pronounced among youth with a post-graduate degree (37%).

Interest in politics is also a function of social values, especially among Millennials. Those most apt to say they are very interested are Critical Counterculturalists (33%) and Diverse Strivers (28%), and least evident among Bros & Brittany's (8%) and Lone Wolves (6%). Among Gen Z youth, the range extends from Egalitarian Idealists (17% very interested) and Dutiful Accomplishers (17%), to Optimistic Observers (6%, with 67% in this group expressing little or no interest).

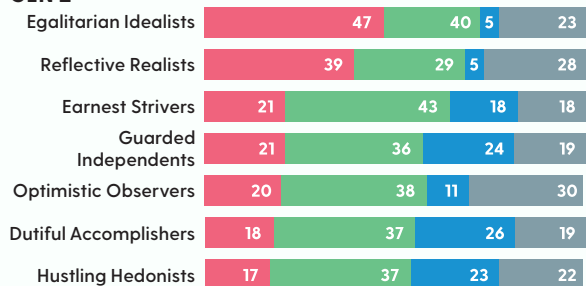
**General political orientation**— The survey measured general political orientation using a question from the Canadian Election Study (2019) which asked respondents to place themselves on an 11-point scale from “0” (extreme left) to “10” (extreme right). As has been recorded on other surveys of Canadians, youth are most likely to occupy the middle of this spectrum (scores of 4 to 6) (37%). Just under one in four (23%) places him or herself on the political left (0 to 3), while somewhat fewer (18%) identify on the political right (7 to 10). Less than one in five (22%) Canadian youth did not respond to the question (either because they were unsure where to place themselves, or because they did not find the concept to be meaningful).

Identification with the political right increases with educational attainment, household income, and sense of belonging to one's community; it is also more prevalent among men (22%, versus 14% of women) and South Asian Millennials (38%). In contrast, identification with the political left is more evenly distributed across the youth population, although most evident among those with weak community ties (26%), those who follow news and events multiple times per day (31%), and those with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual or bisexual (42%). Those unable or unwilling to

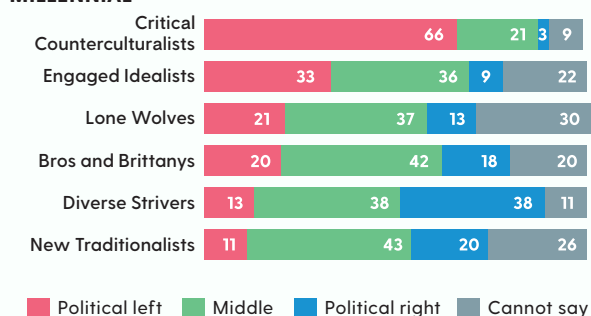
## General political orientation

by social values group

### GEN Z



### MILLENNIAL



Q.51

In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where left means “0” and right means “10”?

identify with a political orientation include women (28%), Atlantic Canadians (28%), youth without a high school diploma (32%), and those who rarely or never follow news and current events (43%).

Political orientation across social values groups is linked in part to the socio-demographic characteristics outlined in the preceding paragraph. Among Gen Z youth, a plurality occupy the political middle in five of the seven social values groups. Three of these groups are tilted to the right (Dutiful Accomplishers, Hustling Hedonists and Guarded Independents), while one tilts to the left (Earnest Strivers). The two remaining groups (Egalitarian Idealists and Reflective Realists) are clearly weighted to the left of the political spectrum, with very few (5%) in either group placing themselves on the right.

Among Millennials, four of the six social values groups have a plurality in the middle of the political spectrum, with three tilted to the left (Engaged Idealists, Lone Wolves and Bros & Brittany's) and one to the right (New Traditionalists). Critical Counterculturists stand out as primarily left of centre (66% left, versus 3% right), while Diverse Strivers are the most likely of all Millennial groups to identify on the right (38%, versus 13% on the left).

**Voting in the 2019 federal election—** In democracies, voting at election time has long been considered a key indicator of engagement with politics. Among Canadian youth ages 19 and over, just over six in ten (63%) say they voted in the most recent federal election (held in October 2019). Among those who did not vote, two-thirds (68%) indicate they were eligible to do so in this election. This proportion who reported voting in this election is highest among Canadian youth who are third or more generation in the country (i.e., both parents were born in Canada) (85%), compared with those who are first generation (30%).

Voting turnout is positively linked to educational attainment and household income, as well as gender (65% among men, versus 60% among women), and region (participation is 70% in Quebec, compared with 57% in Atlantic Canada and Manitoba/Saskatchewan, and 58% in B.C.). Youth on the political right (73%) are marginally more likely than those on the left (69%) to report voting in the

2019 federal election, compared with those in the political middle (64%) and those who did not identify themselves on the spectrum (46%).

Compared with other factors, voting in the previous federal election does not vary significantly across social values groups, although a few stand out. Among Gen Z youth, participation is highest among Egalitarian Idealists (71%, compared with 59% among all Gen Zers), as well as Critical Counterculturists (85%) and Engaged Idealists (70%) (compared with the Millennial average of 65%).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Among Millennials, community engagement in the form of volunteer work and group participation is most common among Diverse Strivers and least so among Lone Wolves and Bros & Brittanys. Among Gen Z youth, Reflective Realists and Optimistic Observers are least apt to participate in group activities.

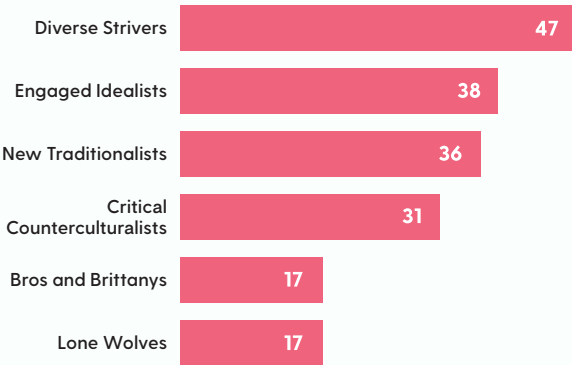
**Volunteer activity in the past year—** An important type of civic engagement is volunteering one’s time to an organization, group or worthwhile cause. One in three (33%) Canadian youth reports having done unpaid volunteer work in the past 12 months. This activity is closely linked to educational attainment, and is especially prevalent among youth with a post-graduate degree (45%).

Volunteer activity does not vary much across Gen Z social values groups. Among Millennials, however, this form of engagement is most widely reported by Diverse Strivers (47%), Engaged Idealists (38%) and New Traditionalists (36%), compared with fewer than half as many Bros & Brittanys (17%) and Lone Wolves (17%). These differences, however, do not appear in the amount of time spent volunteering per month among those who have done so at all.

**Group participation—** Another form of community engagement entails membership or participation in groups and organizations, which may be formally constituted or informal groups of individuals who get together regularly for activities or discussion. Among Canadian youth, fewer than half (45%) report belonging to or having participated in any of eight broad categories of organizations or groups in the past 12 months. As with volunteering, leading-edge Gen Zers (53%) are more likely than Millennials (43%) to participate in one or more such groups (this is slightly lower than the 46% of this latter generation who reported such involvement in 2016).

Group membership varies across social values groups in a predictable pattern. Among Gen Z youth, membership in one or more groups is reported by a majority of Earnest Strivers (62%), Dutiful Accomplishers (59%) and Hustling Hedonists (58%), compared with no more than one in three Reflective Realists (34%) and Optimistic Observers (32%). Among Millennials, it is Diverse Strivers (62%) and Critical Counterculturalists (54%) who are most active group participants, in contrast with Bros & Brittanys (31%) and Lone Wolves (30%).

Volunteered in past 12 months  
by Millennial social values group



Q.74  
In the past 12 months did you do unpaid volunteer work for any organization?

BRIDGING THE POLITICAL DIVIDE

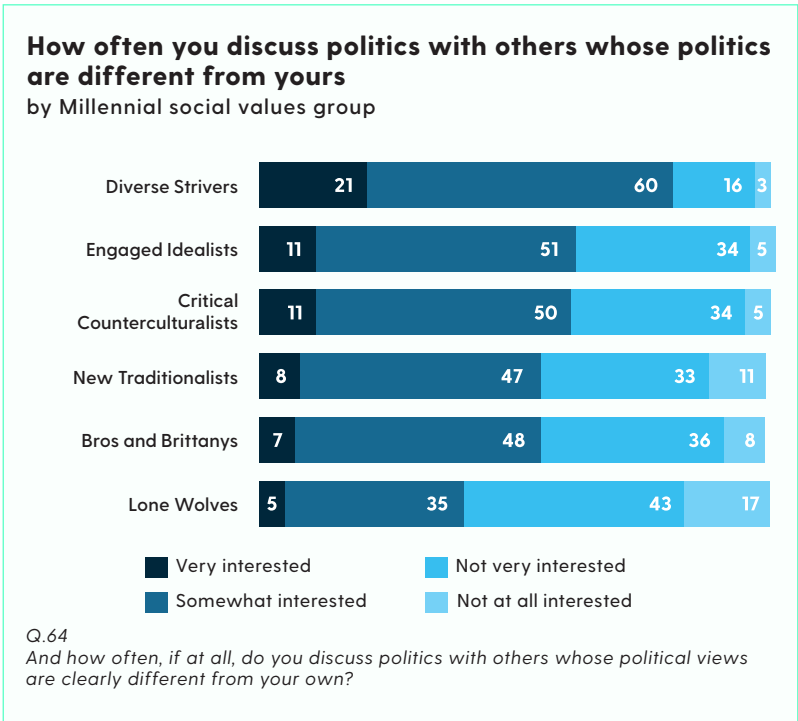
**Most Canadian youth know and engage with others whose political views are different from their own. This experience is similar across social values groups, but Diverse Strivers stand out as being most likely to have friends sharing their own views but also engage with those whose perspective is very different.**

Over the past decade or so politics and political discourse have become increasingly polarized, creating divides between parties and voters. This trend has not emerged in Canada anywhere close to what it has become in the US and some other countries, but nevertheless presents significant challenges to effective governance and a unified country. This raises the question about youth in Canada today, and whether those on the two ends of the political spectrum share much in common. Results from the survey reveal that many youth report having friends and connections with others whose political views are very different from their own.

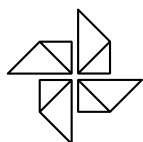
Regardless of political orientation, most Canadian youth do not limit their social circles to those of the same

persuasion. Fewer than four in ten say all or most of their friends share their own political views, and about half say they connect with people (online and in-person) with others whose political orientation is very different from their own. Those who do so are more likely than not to say such interactions involve discussions about politics, at least sometimes if not frequently. Finally, when people have such discussions about politics with others holding opposing views, the experience is equally as likely to be interesting and informative as they are to be stressful and frustrating. Youth on the political right are more likely to report such experiences in positive terms, while those on the left are most likely to find them to be difficult.

Social values appear to have little impact on the extent to which Canadian youth bridge the political divide in their friendships and contacts, especially among Gen Zers (many of whom may be in the midst of forming their political identity). Among Millennials, Diverse Strivers stand out as both having the highest proportion of friends sharing their own political viewpoint, and also engaging in the most bridging with those on the other side of the spectrum (as well as finding such interactions worthwhile). Lone Wolves and Bros & Brittanys are least apt to do the same.







**APATHY  
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Connect, Educate  
and Activate.

**Apathy is Boring** is a non-partisan, charitable organization that supports and educates youth to be active and contributing citizens in Canada's democracy. Our Vision: A Canada where every young Canadian is an active citizen and youth are meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the democratic process.



**Youth Friendly**, a consulting program under Apathy is Boring, collaborates with partners to drive innovation by strategically and intentionally integrating diverse youth perspectives in their work and practices through our carefully curated services. We want to see a Canada where every young person is an active citizen, and diverse youth perspectives are an integral part of designing our future.



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