

Focus Canada – Fall 2022

Canadian public opinion about immigration and refugees

As part of its Focus Canada public opinion research program (launched in 1976), the Environics Institute updated its research on Canadian attitudes about immigration and refugees. This survey was conducted in partnership with the Century Initiative. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted (via landline and cellphones) with 2,000 Canadians between September 6 and 30, 2022. A sample of this size drawn from the population produces results accurate to within plus or minus 2.2 percentage points in 19 out of 20 samples.

Executive summary

The past year has seen Canada gradually emerge from the persistent grip of COVID-19, but the country has yet to return to pre-pandemic stability. Public attention has shifted to other pressing matters including spiking inflation and plunging housing affordability, a health care system teetering into crisis, regional weather-related catastrophes, and the apparent emergence of right wing politics with the Freedom Convoy occupation in Ottawa and polarizing new leaders at the federal and provincial levels. How is all of this affecting Canadians' capacity to welcome the expanding flow of immigrants into the country and their communities?

The latest Focus Canada research reveals that, despite the many disruptions and challenges facing Canadians today, the public as a whole has never been more supportive of their country's welcoming path when it comes to immigration and refugees. Even as the country is now taking in more than 400,000 newcomers each year, seven in ten Canadians express support for current immigration levels – the largest majority recorded on Environics surveys in 45 years. This view is driven in large part by what is now an established public consensus that immigration is important to the country's economy, along with increasing acknowledgement that Canada needs people from other countries in order to keep its population growing.

While many continue to express concerns about the legitimacy of some refugees being accepted, there is widespread and growing public support (if not expectation) for Canada to welcome people from places experiencing major conflicts, especially from Ukraine but also from Afghanistan.

Public concerns about immigrants and refugees continue to be centred around issues related to their integration into Canadian society, and the threat this poses to the prevailing culture and identity; concerns expressed by a significant but stable proportion of the population. But a growing majority of Canadians are also rejecting the prejudiced attitude that their country accepts too many immigrants from racialized cultures.

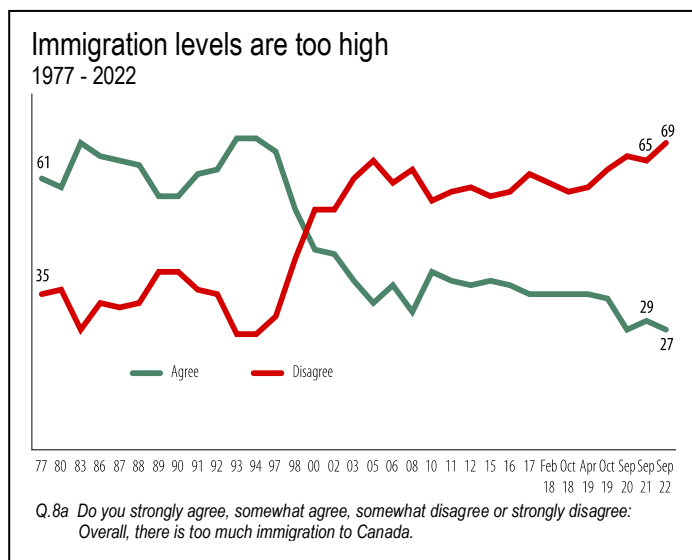
Not all Canadians agree on most of these issues. Opinions are most likely to diverge across partisan political lines, and this gap has widened a bit further over the past 12 months, as supporters of the federal NDP, Liberal and Green parties have become stronger in their support of immigrants and refugees. Conservative Party of Canada supporters are the least likely to share this sentiment, but their views have not become more negative since 2021. Finally, the just-concluded Quebec provincial election featured heated rhetoric around immigration, but this research reveals that Quebecers as a whole are no less supportive of immigration and welcoming refugees than Canadians elsewhere in the country.

Overall level of immigration

A record-setting majority of Canadians disagree that immigration levels are too high, and increasingly say the country needs more immigrants to boost its population. Opinions continue to diverge most along political lines.

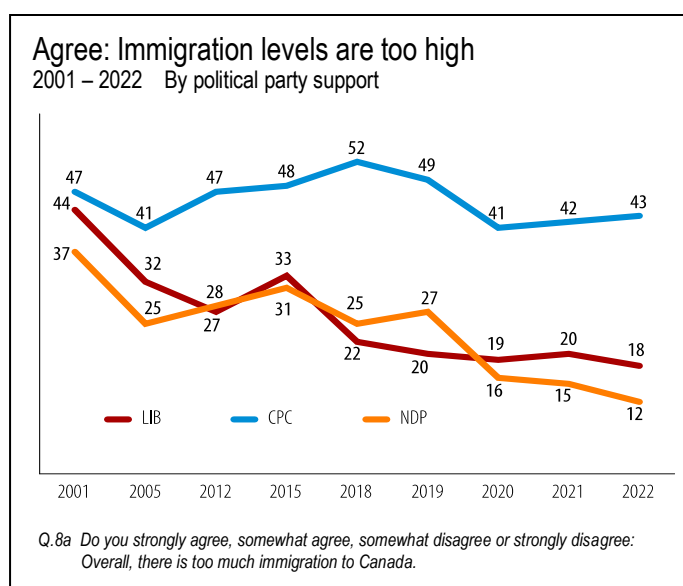
Agree-Disagree: “Overall, there is too much immigration to Canada.” Over the past two decades a majority of Canadians have rejected the premise that their country accepts too many immigrants, and this sentiment has strengthened over the past 12 months. Seven in ten strongly (38%) or somewhat (31%) disagree with this statement about too much immigration to Canada, up four percentage points since Fall 2021 and now at its highest level since Focus Canada began asking the public this question in 1977. Just over one in four somewhat (15%) or strongly (12%) agrees with the statement (down 2 points), while four percent offer no clear opinion.

Across the country, acceptance of current immigration levels is voiced by at least seven in ten Canadians, except in Ontario (66% disagree, up 1 point) and Alberta (60%, down 2). The most significant change has been in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where disagreement with the statement has jumped to 76 percent (up 23 points), more than reversing a previous downward trend. In Quebec – where immigration featured prominently in the just-concluded provincial election – opinions about immigration levels mirror the national average (70% disagree, versus 25% agree, unchanged from 2021).¹



As in past surveys, positive views about immigration levels generally increase with educational attainment and household income. But the strengthening of this sentiment over the past year has been primarily among Canadians with less education and income, thereby narrowing the gap. As before, neither age, gender, nor residence in major cities versus other areas make much difference in how Canadians think about current immigration levels.

As before, opinions about immigration diverge most sharply across federal political party lines, and this divide has widened a bit further over the past 12 months. Since 2021, disagreement with the statement has increased among supporters of the federal Liberal Party (79%, up 4), NDP (85%, up 4) and Green Party (84%, up 19). By comparison, just over half of federal Conservative Party supporters share this view (53%, down 1), compared with 43 percent (up 1) who agree immigration levels are too high.



Support for the Peoples Party of Canada is now too low to provide a reliable subsample, but those in this group continue to be, by far, the most likely to believe that Canada accepts too many immigrants.

¹ The survey fieldwork was conducted during the Quebec provincial election campaign.

Reasons for too much immigration. The minority of Canadians who agree with the statement that Canada accepts too many immigrants were asked why they believe this (in an open-ended question, without offering prompting response options). A range of reasons are offered, but none by as many as a quarter of this group. The most common reasons for too much immigration are that it represents a threat to Canadian or Quebec culture (e.g., identity, values, language) (24%), that immigrants are a drain on public finances and the welfare system (23%), or that they are generally bad for the economy (e.g., taking jobs away from other Canadians (21%)). Each of these reasons reflect the views of no more than six or seven percent of all Canadians.

Others oppose current immigration levels because they believe there are already too many people living in Canada (19%), that immigrants are driving up home prices and making them unaffordable for others (15%), or that immigration is being poorly managed by the government (e.g., inadequate screening). By comparison, very few in this group cite concerns about immigrants posing a security (3%) or public health (1%) risk.

The relatively small size of the subsample asked this question limits the analysis of subgroups, but a few differences are apparent. As might be expected, Quebecers are the most likely to mention concerns about the threat to culture and identity (48%, representing 12% of all Quebecers). Residents of B.C. (29%) and Ontario (20%) are most apt to emphasize immigrants' impact on housing prices and affordability, while their drain on public finances is most evident among women and older Canadians. Supporters of the Conservative Party of Canada make up the largest proportion of this subgroup opposing immigration levels, but their reasons for doing so are not noticeably different from those expressed by those supporting other federal parties.

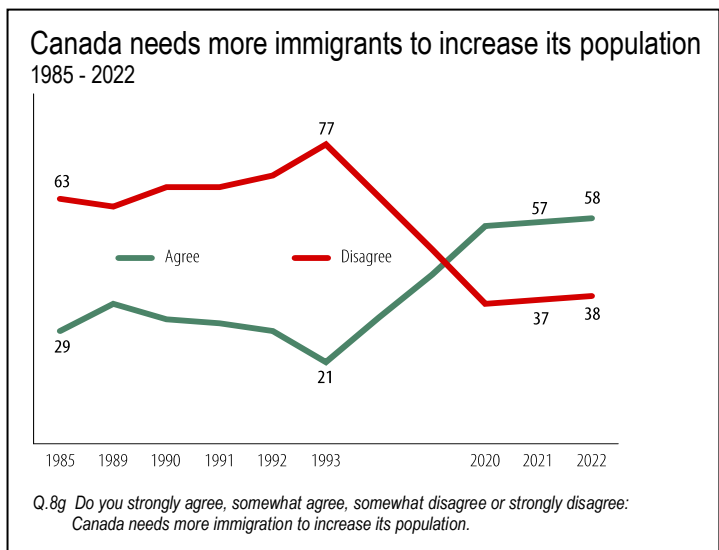
Why there is too much immigration to Canada
2022 Unprompted responses

	Those who agree there is too much immigration %	Total population %
Threat to Canadian / Quebec culture (identity / language / values)	24	7
Immigrants are a drain on public finances / cost too much	23	6
Bad for economy / take jobs from other Canadians	21	6
Over-population / already too many people on Canada	19	5
Immigrants drive up housing prices / less housing for other Canadians	15	4
Immigration is poorly managed by government / lack of screening	13	4
Immigrants are a security risk / risk of terrorism / extremism	3	1
Immigrants are a public health risk / COVID-19 threat	1	<1
Other reasons	5	1

Q.9 Why do you say there is too much immigration to Canada?

Agree-Disagree: “Canada needs more immigration to increase its population.” Immigrants have made up almost all of the country's population increase over the past decade or so, and this trend is projected to continue into the foreseeable future.

A majority of Canadians acknowledge this reality, with close to six in ten saying they strongly (26%) or somewhat (32%) agree that Canada needs more immigration to increase its population (up 1 point from 2021, and now at its highest level since this question was first asked in 1985). Almost four in ten somewhat (22%) or strongly (16%) disagree with this view (also up 1 point), while three percent offer no clear opinion.



While opinions on this question have changed little at the national level, there have been notable shifts within specific groups over the past year. Most notably, agreement with the need for immigration to boost population has increased significantly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (61%, up 15 points since 2021), and to a lesser extent in B.C. (53%, up 4, reversing a previous downward trend), Alberta (53%, up 3, continuing a previous upward trend) and Ontario (61%, up 3), while dropping in Atlantic Canada (58%, down 9).

The past year has also seen a widening in the gap based on socioeconomic status, with increasing agreement among Canadians with higher levels of education and income, and those with lower levels now less apt to share this view. As with opinions about immigration levels, agreement with the need for immigration to boost population is most widespread among supporters of the federal Liberal Party (76%, up 3 points since 2021) and New Democratic Party (67%, up 1), and least evident among those endorsing the Conservative Party (45%, down 2) and Bloc Québécois (49%, down 13).

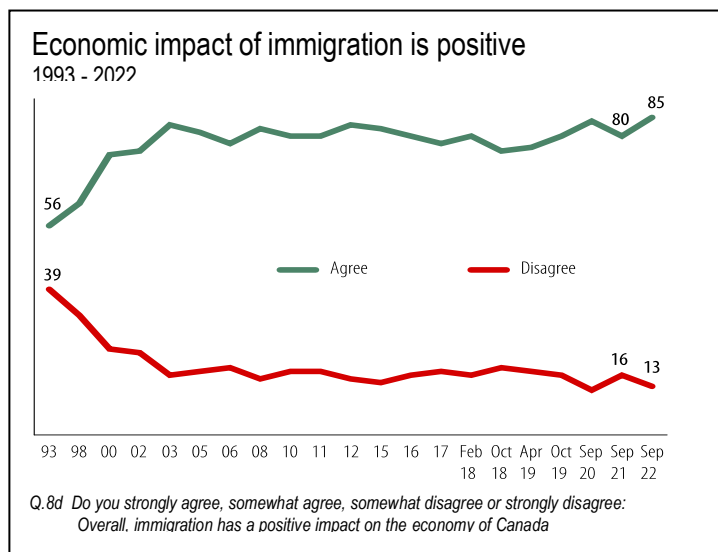
Economic impact of immigration

There is an emerging public consensus that immigration is beneficial to the country's economy, a view that is acknowledged even by a majority who still maintain that immigration levels are too high.

Agree-Disagree: “Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada.” Public support for immigration is grounded in part in the belief that it supports the country's economy, and the public consensus around this view has strengthened over the past year. More than eight in ten now strongly (50%) or somewhat (35%) agree that immigration has a positive impact on the Canadian economy, up five percentage points since 2021 and now at its highest level since the question was first asked almost 30 years ago. Just over one in ten somewhat (7%) or strongly (6%) disagrees (down 3), with another three percent with no clear opinion.

Broadening agreement with this statement is evident across the population, but is most significant in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (89%, up 12 points since 2021). *Strong* agreement is most widespread in Ontario (57%), among Canadians under 45 years of age (54%), those with a university degree (58%), and first generation Canadians (62%).

Across the political spectrum, *strong* agreement about the economic benefits of immigration continues to be expressed by supporters of the federal Liberals (61%) and NDP (62%), and least so among those supporting the Conservatives (36%) and Bloc Québécois (29%); but among the former group agreement is higher than it was 12 months ago (75% of Conservative Party supporters agree strongly or somewhat, up 6 points since 2021).



This consensus around the importance of immigration to the Canadian economy is further reflected in the fact that it is acknowledged even among a majority (64%) of Canadians who believe current immigration levels are too high.

Refugee policy

Canadians continue to be more likely to reject than accept the idea that most refugee claimants are not legitimate, unchanged over the past year. At the same time, an increasing majority support accepting more refugees from conflict zones, especially Ukraine.

Agree-Disagree: “Many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees.” Refugees make up a small percentage of newcomers arriving each year, but their profile periodically becomes significant when there is an influx arriving through authorized channels or unexpectedly at the border. For much of the past 35 years, Canadians have tended to believe that many claiming to be refugees are not in fact legitimate, and while this view has diminished over time the public continues to be somewhat divided on this question.

Just over one in three now strongly (15%) or somewhat (21%) agree with this statement that “many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees” (up 2 points since 2021), while a plurality somewhat (24%) or strongly (22%) disagree (unchanged). A significant proportion continue to say neither may be true (3%) or remain uncertain (15%) (down 1).

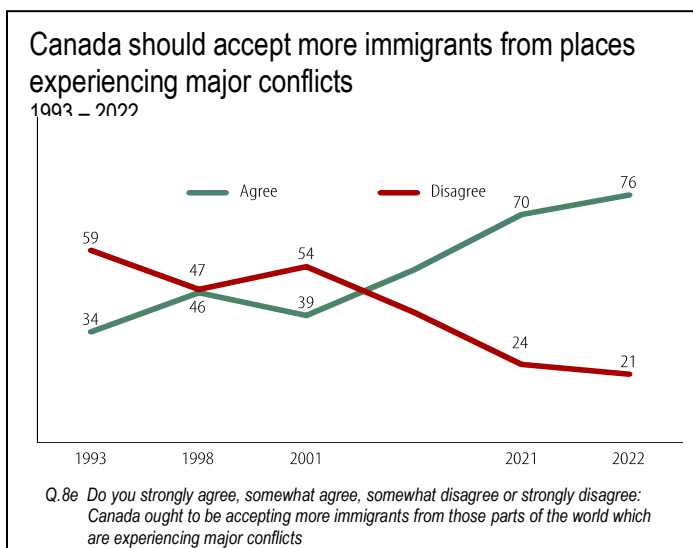
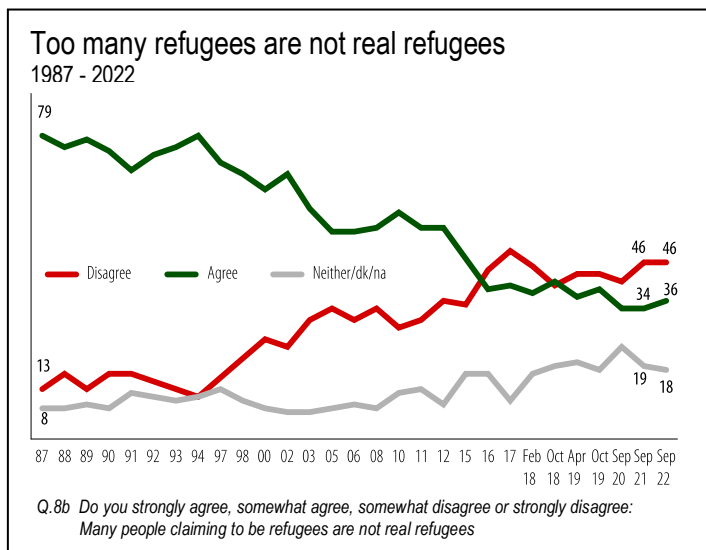
Across the country, concerns about the legitimacy of refugees have increased noticeably in Atlantic Canada (36% agree, up 8 points since 2021), and to a lesser extent in Quebec (38%, up 4) and Ontario (37%, up 3), while declining in B.C. (27%, down 6).

Albertans continue to be among the most likely adherents of this view (41%, down 1). Agreement with this statement continues to be stronger among men, older Canadians, those who are first generation, and those with no more than a high school diploma.

As with immigration, opinions about the legitimacy of refugees is divided along partisan political lines, and this gap has widened a bit over the past year, reversing a previous trend. The belief about too many refugees not being legitimate remains highest among supporters of the federal Conservative Party (53%, up 5 points since 2021) and Bloc Québécois (47%, up 13), less so among federal Liberal Party supporters (31%, up 1) and lowest among those supporting the NDP (18%, unchanged).

Agree-Disagree: Canada ought to be accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world which are experiencing major conflicts. Most refugees accepted into Canada come from countries and regions experiencing conflict and conditions that threaten their safety, and an increasing majority of Canadians support this policy.

Three-quarters now strongly (36%) or somewhat (40%) agree with this statement about Canada accepting more immigrants from places experiencing major conflicts, up six points since 2021 and now at the highest

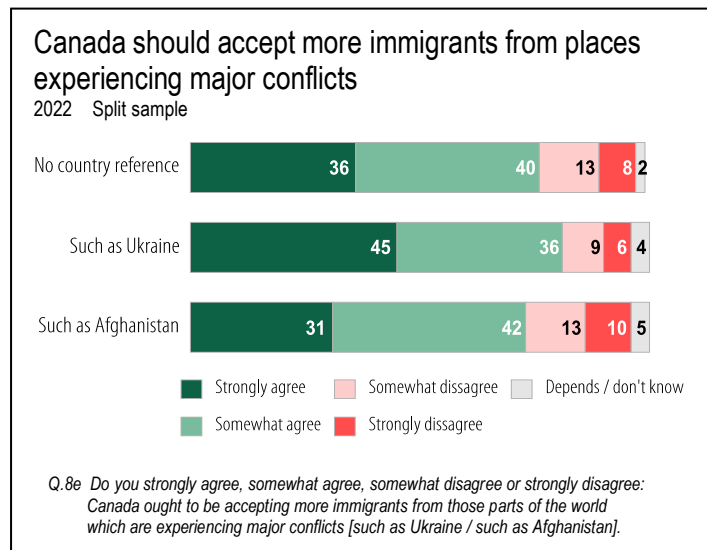


proportion since this question was first asked in 1993. One in five somewhat (13%) or strongly (8%) disagrees, with another two percent not offering a clear opinion.

This question was asked to one-third of the total survey sample, limiting the scope of subgroup analysis. But the results suggest this support for accepting more refugees from conflict zones has strengthened over the past year across all regions and other identifiable groups.

Source of refugees. Does Canadians' support for accepting more refugees depend in part on what conflict zone they come from? Focus Canada addressed this question by presenting three versions of the survey question (splitting the sample randomly across the three versions). The first version was the question used on previous surveys, with the results presented above. The other two versions expanded the question to refer to either refugees from countries "such as Ukraine", or "such as Afghanistan."

Results demonstrate that the source of refugees makes some difference in Canadians' support, but not to a substantial degree. Canadians are more likely to *strongly* agree about accepting more refugees from Ukraine (45%) than from Afghanistan (31%), but there is only a minor difference in the likelihood of opposition.

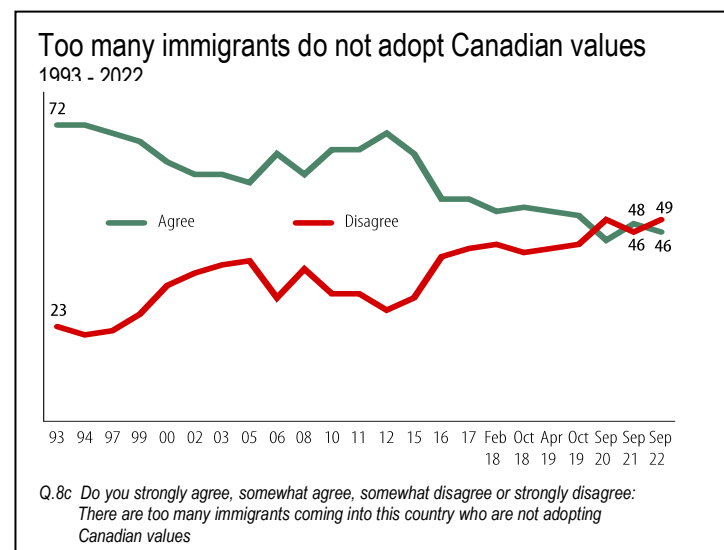


Integration of immigrants into society

Roughly half of Canadians continue to express concerns about some newcomers not integrating into Canadian society, but an increasing majority reject the view that the country accepts too many racialized immigrants.

Agree-Disagree: "There are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values." While there is now a broad consensus on the economic merits of immigration, public concerns tend to centre around whether or not newcomers are adequately integrating into Canadian society, due to differences in culture, religion or appearance. Decades ago most Canadians expressed concerns about this, and in recent years the public has been evenly divided on whether or not this remains a concern.

The present survey finds that just under half of Canadians strongly (22%) or somewhat (24%) agree with this statement about too many immigrants not adopting Canadian values (down 2 points from 2021), compared with a slightly higher proportion who somewhat (25%) or strongly (24%) disagree (up 3 points); another four percent have no clear view either way.



Views on this issue have not changed noticeably across much of the population, but agreement with the statement expressing concerns about newcomer integration has strengthened among Albertans (52%, up 5 since 2021), while the opposite trend is evident among British Columbians (42%, down 4) and Canadians ages 18 to 24 (30%, down 9). This view least apt be shared by those who support the federal NDP (27%, unchanged), in comparison with those who support the federal Liberals (40%, up 1), Conservatives (63%, down 1) and Bloc Québécois (67%, up 5). Quebecers as a whole are marginally more likely than Canadians as a whole to agree with this statement, with no change over the past year (51%, down 1).

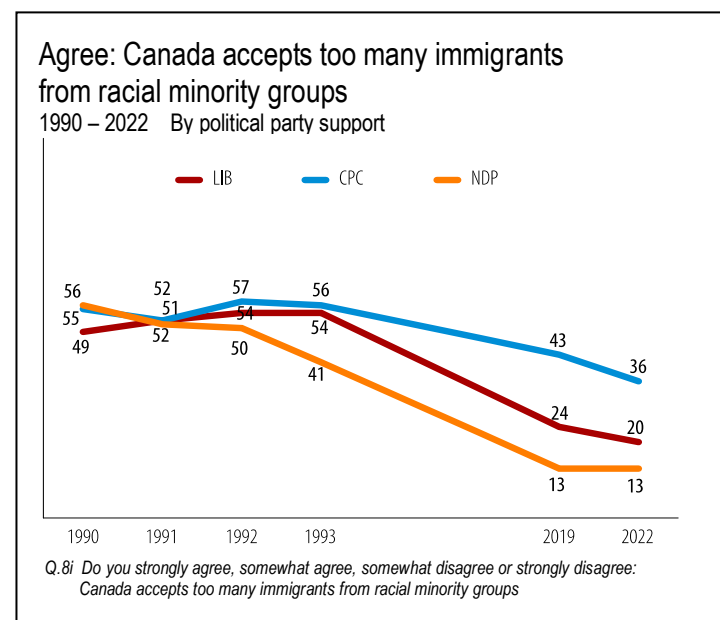
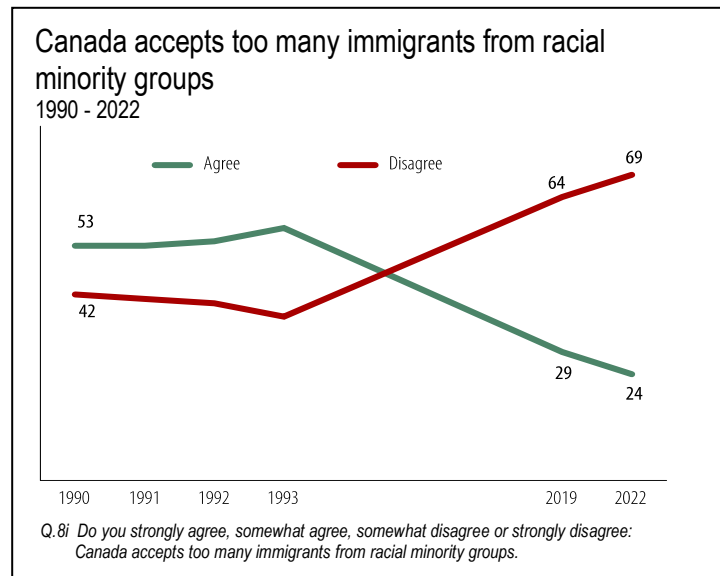
Agree-Disagree: "Canada accepts too many immigrants from racial minority groups." Public resistance to immigration stems in part from prejudice against newcomers with specific racial and ethnic backgrounds (predominantly non-white or racialized). This continues to be evident in current public sentiment, but much less so than in previous generations.

In 2022, seven in ten Canadians strongly (39%) or somewhat (30%) disagree with this statement about Canada accepting too many immigrants from racial minority groups, up five points from 2019, and substantially higher than what was recorded on Focus Canada surveys conducted in the 1990s. One in four somewhat (15%) or strongly (9%) agrees with the statement, with another seven percent offering no clear opinion either way.

Agreement with the statement about accepting too many racial minority immigrants is the minority view across the country, but most evident among Canadians 60 years and older (29%), those without a high school diploma (31%), first generation Canadians (32%) and those who support the federal Conservative Party (36%) or Bloc Québécois (32%). This view is least apt to be shared by British Columbians (19%), Canadians ages 18 to 29 (18%) and supporters of the federal NDP (13%) and Green Party (11%). Of note is the finding that racialized Canadians (32%) are more likely than those who identify as white (22%) to agree that the country accepts too many immigrants from racial minorities.

The decline since 2019 in agreement with this view about the country accepting too many racial minorities has taken place across most of the population, but has remained unchanged among Quebecers (27%), first generation Canadians (32%) and NDP supporters (13%).

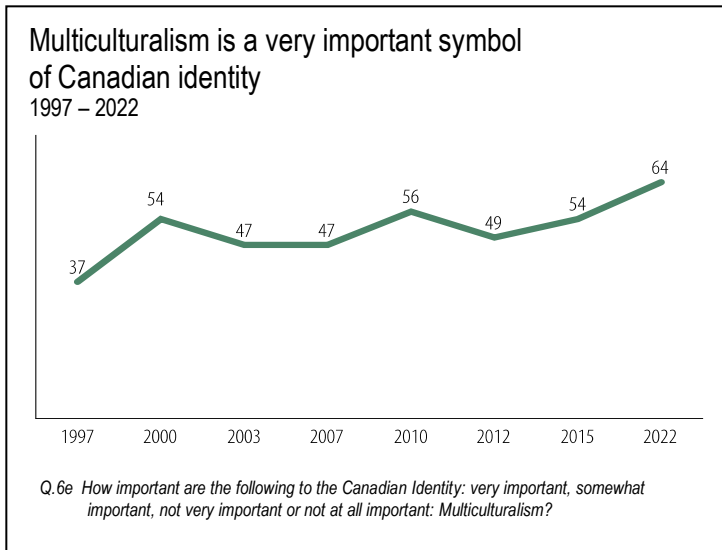
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Multiculturalism as an important symbol of Canada. Another indicator of growing acceptance of immigration and newcomers from different parts of the world is the importance Canadians place on multiculturalism as significant to the country's identity. Two-thirds (64%) say that multiculturalism is a very important symbol of Canadian identity (up 10 points from 2015), with most of the rest (26%) deeming it to be somewhat important. Fewer than one in ten believes it is not very (5%) or not at all (4%) important to Canadian identity.

Multiculturalism is most likely to be seen as very important to Canadian identity by Canadians ages 18 to 29 (78%), first generation Canadians (75%), and supporters of the federal NDP (77%) and Liberal Party (74%). This view is least apt to be shared by Quebecers (51%), Canadians ages 60 plus (54%), and supporters of the federal Conservatives (45%).

Multiculturalism was one of 12 symbols rated by Canadians, and placed sixth in importance, behind the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (78% say very important), Canada's health care system (78%), the country's systems of public education (72%), Indigenous Peoples (69%) and the Canadian flag (65%).²



Multiculturalism is more apt to be seen as a very important symbol of Canada than the national anthem (54%), the RCMP (49%), bilingualism (42%), hockey (35%), the CBC (33%), and the Queen (21%).³ Of the 12 symbols rated, multiculturalism was one of only three that recorded a noticeable increase since 2015 (along with Indigenous Peoples (up 7 points) and bilingualism (up 5)).

The value Canadians place on multiculturalism is further underscored by the fact that almost everyone agrees strongly (71%) or somewhat (24%) that **"young Canadians are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions"**, compared with just four percent who disagree. This statement is endorsed by a strong majority across all regions and groups, with *strong* agreement especially widespread among women and supporters of the federal NDP, Liberal and Green parties, but also by more than six in ten who favour the Conservative Party of Canada.

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

Century Initiative is a national, non-partisan charity with a mission to enhance Canada's long-term prosperity, resiliency and global influence by responsibly growing the population of Canada to 100 million by 2100. Century Initiative delivers its mission by leading, enabling and partnering on initiatives that support long-term thinking and planning in immigration, urban development, employment and entrepreneurship, early childhood supports, and education. The Century Initiative is concerned about our future and believes a bigger, bolder Canada benefits us all. www.centuryinitiative.ca

For more information about this research, contact Dr. Keith Neuman at keith.neuman@environics.ca

² The results of this question will be more fully presented in a subsequent Focus Canada report.

³ The survey fieldwork began two days before the announcement of Queen Elizabeth's death on September 8, 2022.