

Immigration

Most Canadians continue to reject the notion that we are taking in too many immigrants and that they are a drain on the economy. There is increased public confidence that the system is keeping criminals from entering the country, and a reduced majority who now feel that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values.

Canada is a nation of immigrants – one in five were born elsewhere and the country welcomes more than 200,000 newcomers each year. Treatment of newcomers, and visible minorities in particular, has a troubled history, but opinions have improved significantly over generations. The latest Focus Canada survey reveals that public opinion remains divided on some aspects of immigration, but that attitudes have improved or held steady since 2012.

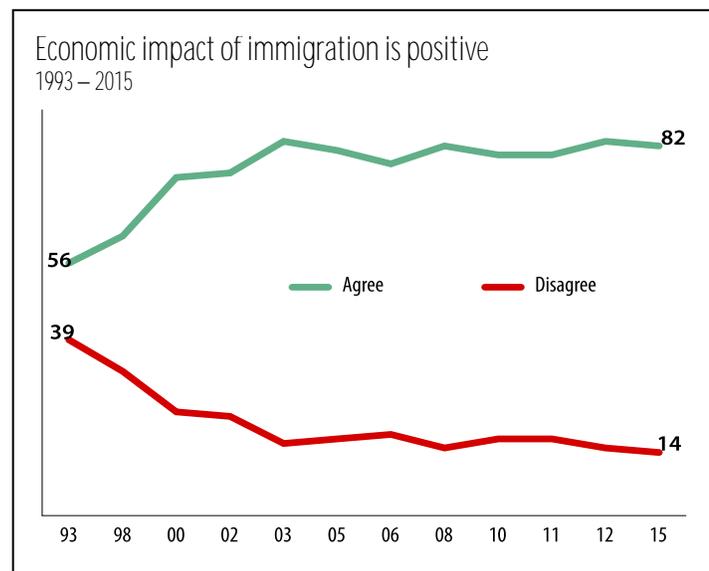
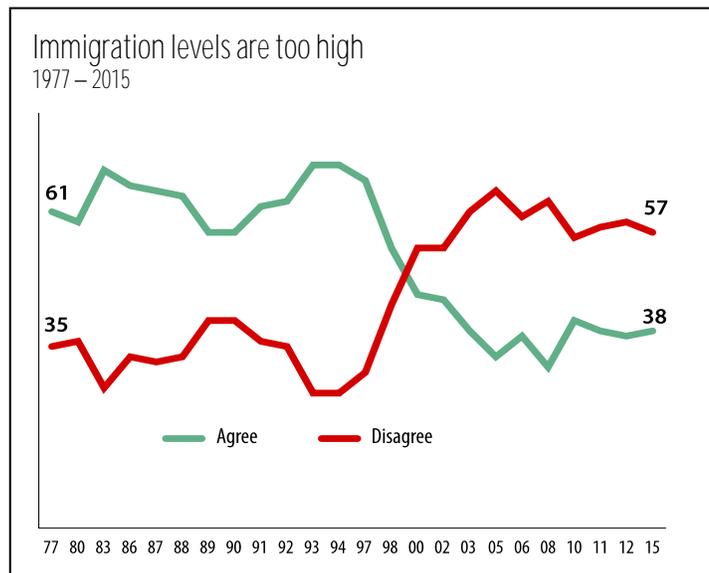
The results are based on responses to a set of “agree-disagree” statements that serve as key benchmark indicators of public attitudes about immigration.

“Overall, there is too much immigration in Canada.” A clear majority (57%) of Canadians continue to disagree with this statement, compared with 38 percent who agree. These proportions are essentially unchanged from 2012, and generally reflect the balance of opinion dating back to 2005 (in contrast to the more negative sentiments expressed in the 1980s and 90s). Attitudes remain generally stable across the country, except for rising agreement with the statement in B.C.

As in 2012, the belief there is too much immigration is most evident among older Canadians, those with lower socio-economic status, and those who live in smaller-sized communities, along with those who support the Federal Conservative Party and the Bloc Quebecois. While Quebecers are often portrayed as being least receptive of immigrants, they are in fact less likely than residents of other regions to say there is too much immigration.

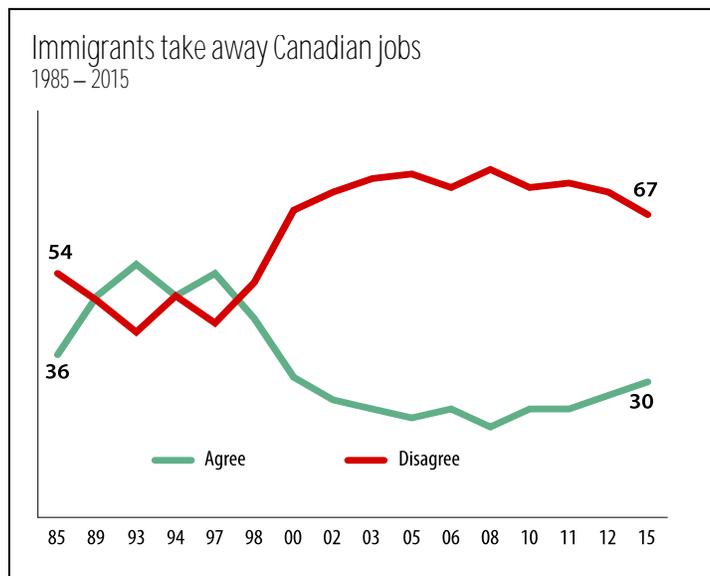
“Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada.” More than eight in ten (82%) Canadians continue to believe that immigration is good for the country’s economy, unchanged from 2012 and consistent with findings dating back more than a decade.

As before, this view is shared by at least three-quarters in every identified group across the country. Opinions have been largely stable since 2012, with increases in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (where 89% now agree with the statement), and decreases in Alberta (75%) and Vancouver (79%).



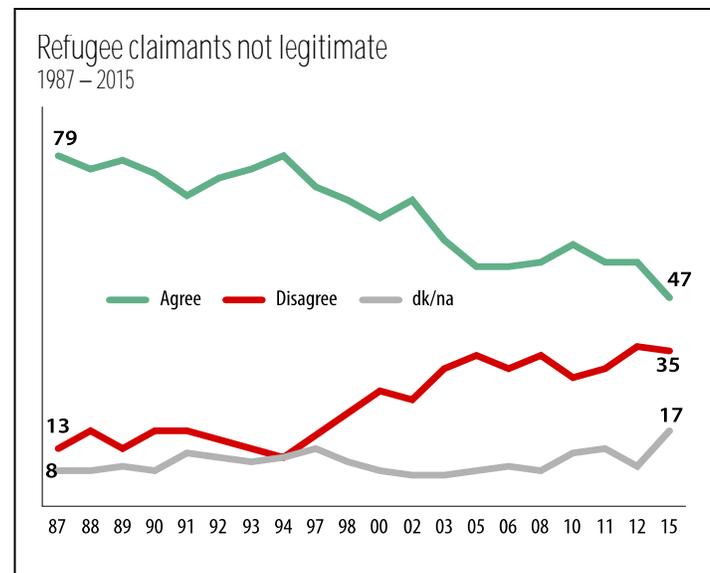
“Immigrants take away jobs from other Canadians.” Consistent with the previous statement, most (67%) Canadians reject the idea that immigrants take jobs away from other Canadians. However, there is a small but steady increase in the number who agree with the statement, a trend that dates back to 2008, that may relate in part to the onset of the international financial crisis.

This latest shift is centred in Alberta, British Columbia, especially in Vancouver), as well as among the least educated Canadians, while largely unchanged among other parts of the country. Belief in the view that immigrants are taking away jobs is now most prevalent in Alberta (43%), among residents of smaller communities (37%), those without a college or university education, and Conservative Party supporters (38%). It is least widely shared by Quebecers (18%) and Canadians with a university degree (15%).



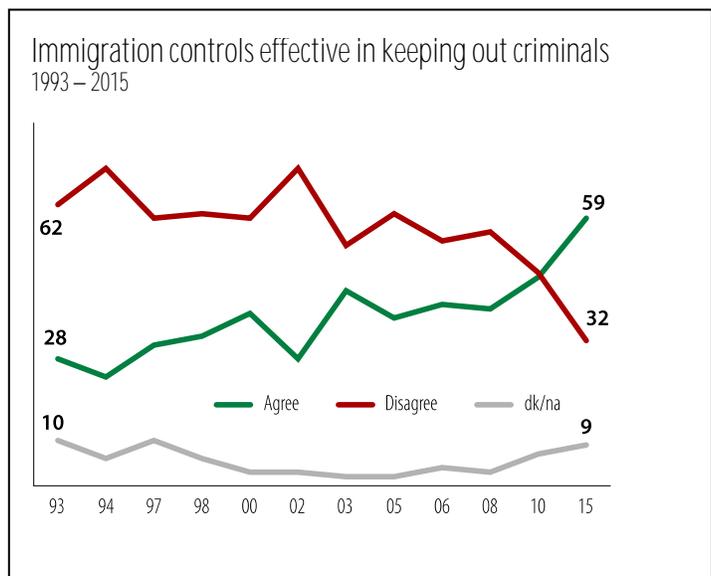
“Most people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees.” Canadians have long believed that most refugees coming to this country do not have a legitimate claim, but the proportion expressing this sentiment is now at an all time low. Fewer than half (47%) now agree with the statement, down noticeably since 2012 and well below the levels recorded in the 1980s and 90s. One-third (35%) disagree, while half as many (17%) are now uncertain about this question.

Declining agreement with the statement since 2012 is evident across almost groups, but especially among the youngest and oldest Canadians, Torontonians, those without a college or university education, and Conservative Party supporters. Belief that most refugees are not legitimate continues to be most widespread among men, Canadians 45 and older, those without a high school diploma, and Conservative Party supporters (60%; despite the sharp decline since 2012), in comparison with supporters of the Federal NDP (38%), Liberal Party (47%), Green Party (49%), Bloc Quebecois (39%) and those with no expressed party support (45%).



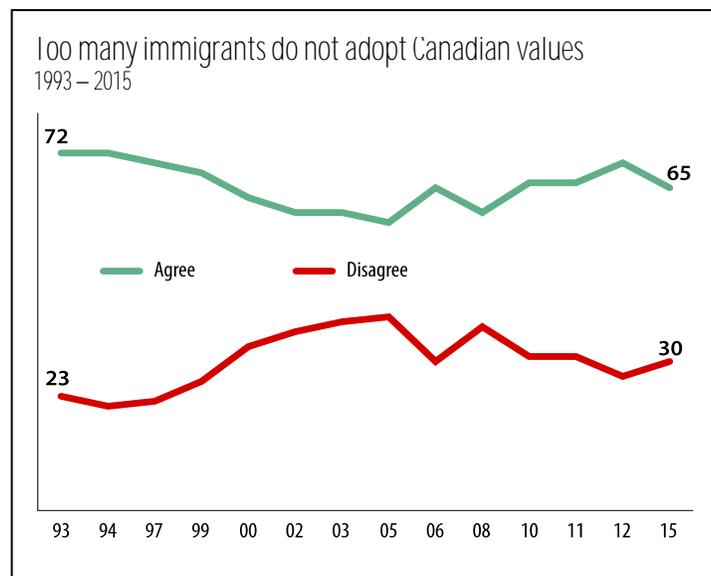
“Canada is doing a good job of keeping criminals and suspected criminals out of the country.” The most significant shift in attitudes about immigration since 2012 has been on this statement, reflecting a sharp rise in agreement that continues an upward trend dating back to 2008. Six in ten (59%) Canadians now express confidence in the immigration system weeding out criminal elements, compared with one-third (32%) who disagree.

This positive trend has taken place across the country, and especially in Ontario and the west, as well as among rural residents and those who support the Federal Conservative and Green parties. Confidence in the system is now strongest among Canadians 18 to 29 years of age (74%), Atlantic Canadians (67%) and Liberal Party supporters (67%), and weakest among British Columbians (49%).



“There are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values.” While most Canadians celebrate the country’s multicultural diversity and see immigration as strengthening the economy, many are also ambivalent about how newcomers fit in. Strong majorities have agreed with this statement starting in 1993 when the question was first posed on Focus Canada. However, the proportion who express this view in 2015 (65%) marks a notable decline since 2012 that reverses an upward trend and is now the lowest recorded since 2008.

Diminishing concern about newcomers adopting Canadian values has occurred across most groups, but especially in Alberta and Toronto and among Canadians without a high school diploma. As before, such concerns are most prevalent among Quebecers (72%), rural residents (74%), Canadians 45 and older (72%), those with a high school diploma (75%) and Conservative Party supporters (77%); in each case these percentages are lower than in 2012. This view is least apt to be shared by Canadians 18 to 29 (54%), those with a university degree (52%), and NDP supporters (55%).



Canada's Refugee Policy

Canadians are divided on whether the country should accept political refugees that would not otherwise qualify for immigration through normal channels. Opinions are unchanged from 2012, but more favourable than in the 1980s. Support for accepting refugees is strongest in Toronto and among Canadian youth.

Refugees make up only a small percentage of the immigrants landing on Canada's shores, but tend to attract the most attention when they arrive in significant numbers. In 2012 a ship full of Tamil refugees arrived off the west coast that forced the federal government to come up with new ways to handle such numbers. More recently, the humanitarian crisis in Syria has sparked a new grassroots initiative to sponsor thousands of Syrian families that would be supported by individual Canadians and organizations, similar to an initiative in the late 1970s that resulted in the successful resettlement of many thousands of Vietnamese refugees.

Canadian public opinion remains divided on what to do with political refugees who do not otherwise qualify for immigration through the normal channels. Four in ten strongly (11%) or somewhat (29%) favour accepting such refugees, compared with a larger proportion who somewhat (25%) or strongly (25%) oppose such a policy. These results are essentially unchanged from 2010, but more supportive than was recorded in the 1980s (consistent with the broader shift in public attitudes towards immigration, as presented earlier in this report).

Support for accepting political refugees is strongest among men, younger Canadians, urban dwellers (especially in Toronto, with 48% expressing support), those with a university degree, and NDP and Green Party supporters. This view is least apt to be shared by Canadians without a high school diploma (31%) and Conservative Party supporters (34%). Since 2012 support has increased in British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, while declining among Canadians 18 to 29 and NDP supporters.

