

## Focus Canada – Winter 2018

### Canadian public opinion about immigration and minority groups

---

*As part of its Focus Canada public opinion research program, the Environics Institute partnered with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation to update its ongoing research on Canadian attitudes about immigration and multiculturalism. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted with 2,000 Canadians (aged 18 plus) between February 5 and 17, 2018. 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

**Immigration and refugees.** Immigration and refugee issues have been prominent over the past year, both worldwide and in Canada. Migration levels continue to surge from conflict zones in the Middle East and elsewhere, with receiving countries struggling with accommodation and political backlash. The situation is much quieter in Canada, where more than 30,000 Syrian refugees have now been settled across the country with little apparent controversy. At the same time, record numbers of refugees have shown up at the southern border, looking for respite from new US government policies targeting undocumented residents and people from Muslim countries. The past year has also witnessed our own unfortunate incidents of harassment and hate crimes against people of colour, which remind us that xenophobia also exists here. But how do Canadians as a people feel today about our increasingly diverse society and the treatment of people who are different?

Results of this latest survey show that Canadians as a whole continue to be more positive than negative about the current levels of immigrants coming to this country, and with the legitimacy of refugees who have been arriving. A significant proportion still believe too many immigrants not adopting Canadian values remain, but this concern continues to gradually wane over time. Moreover, results from an international survey conducted by Gallup make it clear that Canada stands out among nations as a country that accepts, if not welcomes, people from elsewhere.

As before, opinions vary somewhat across the country. Positive views about immigration and refugees continue to be more widespread in B.C., among younger generations (ages 18 to 29), Canadians with a university education, and immigrants (who now make up more than 20% of the population). This perspective is least apt to be shared in Alberta, among Canadians aged 60 plus, and those with a high school diploma.

**Treatment of minority groups.** Canada is often celebrated as a diverse, multicultural country with little inter-group conflict, but discrimination and racism are a documented reality that is acknowledged by most Canadians, although there are differences in opinion about the treatment of various groups, and the extent to which each faces mistreatment in society.

Muslims, people from Middle Eastern countries, and Indigenous Peoples are most widely seen as experiencing ongoing discrimination. Black people and South Asians somewhat less so, while Jews and Chinese people are least apt to be seen as victims of such treatment. Perceptions of the frequency of discrimination has declined marginally for all groups since 2015. The reason for this shift isn't clear from the data, but may possibly be due to the increased attention now being given to racism and sexism (e.g., Black Lives Matter, #MeToo) that might lead some Canadians to believe these problems are now being addressed more than before.

**Muslims in Canada.** Of all the distinct groups in Canadian society today, Muslims are most widely considered to be the “other” because of where they come from, associations with terrorism in other countries, and specific religious practices like head coverings. The non-Muslim public’s view of Muslims continues to be mixed and quite possibly ambivalent. Canadians are somewhat more likely to be positive than negative in their overall opinion of Islam, but they are more apt than not to believe that Muslims want to remain distinct from Canadian society rather than fit in.

## Immigration and refugees

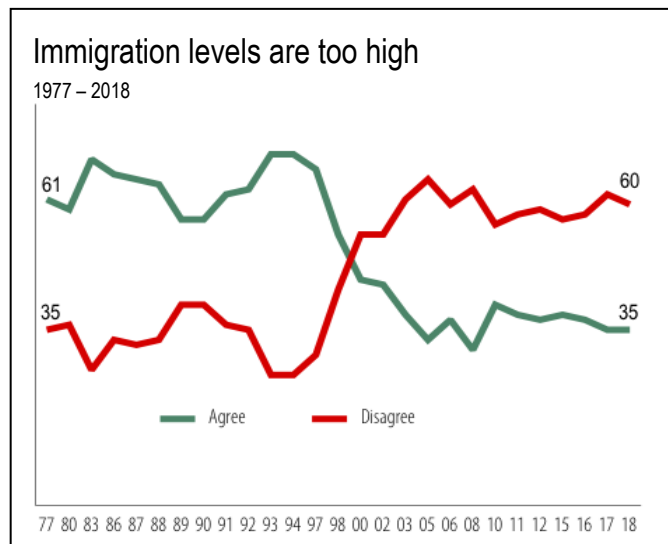
**Public opinion continues to be more positive than negative in terms of support for current immigration levels and the legitimacy of refugees, with sentiments a bit less polarized than before. Many Canadians continue to say too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values, but this view continues to wane. Worldwide, Canadians are among the most accepting of immigrants in their country.**

This survey includes questions that have been asked repeatedly on Focus Canada surveys dating back 25 to 40 years, in order to provide an empirical basis for measuring how public opinion is changing or not over time. This section updates questions about immigration consisting of “agree-disagree” statements that serve as key benchmark indicators of public attitudes about immigration. These questions were last asked in April 2017. This report also presents selected results from the 2017 Gallup World Poll, which shows how Canadians’ views about immigrants compare with people in other countries around the world.

**“Overall, there is too much immigration in Canada.”** Public opinion about the level of immigration to Canada has remained largely unchanged since April 2017. Six in ten (60%) Canadians disagree with this negative statement about immigration levels being too high (down 2 percentage points), compared with one-third (35%) who agree (unchanged). However, sentiments appear to be a bit less polarized than a year ago, as fewer now either “strongly agree” (down 3) or “strongly disagree (down 2). The overall stability of opinion over the past year marks an end to a small but steady increase in the proportion of Canadians who reject the view that the country is taking in too many immigrants, dating back to 2015 (when 57% expressed this opinion).

Across the country, rejection of the idea that immigration levels are too high continues to be most widespread in British Columbia (66%), among Canadians 18 to 29 years of age (66%) and those with a university degree (69%), and this is also the case among second generation Canadians (those born in the country with one or both parents being immigrants (66%)).

Since last April, this view has become a bit less polarized in Ontario, Vancouver, among Canadians 45 to 59 years of age, those with a college diploma, those with household incomes of \$60 – 100K, and immigrants, while strengthening in all three Prairie provinces, and among Canadians with no more than a high school education.

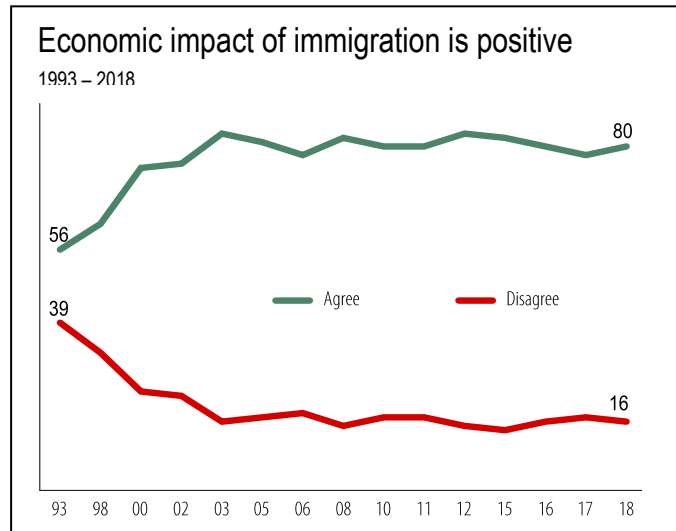


The belief that Canada is taking too many immigrants is most evident among Albertans (42%, although down 3 points since 2017), Canadians 45 to 59 (40%), and those with the lowest levels of education and income. As in 2017, opinions in Quebec mirror the national average and are essentially unchanged from 10 months ago.

**“Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada.”** Canadians’ level of comfort with immigration is grounded in part on their belief that it is good for the country’s economy, and this view has strengthened further over the past year. Eight in ten (80%) now express this sentiment (up 2 points since 2017), while the proportion expressing disagreement has declined (to 16%, down 4).

The positive impact of immigration is the majority view across the population, and the upward shift is evident across most groups but especially in Quebec and the western provinces, while holding steady in Atlantic Canada and Ontario.

As before, agreement with the statement is most widespread among Canadians 18 to 29 (86%), those with a university education (88%; 53% strongly agree) and incomes over \$100K, and immigrants (88%). This view is less apt to be shared in Alberta (74%) and among Canadians without a university degree (73%).

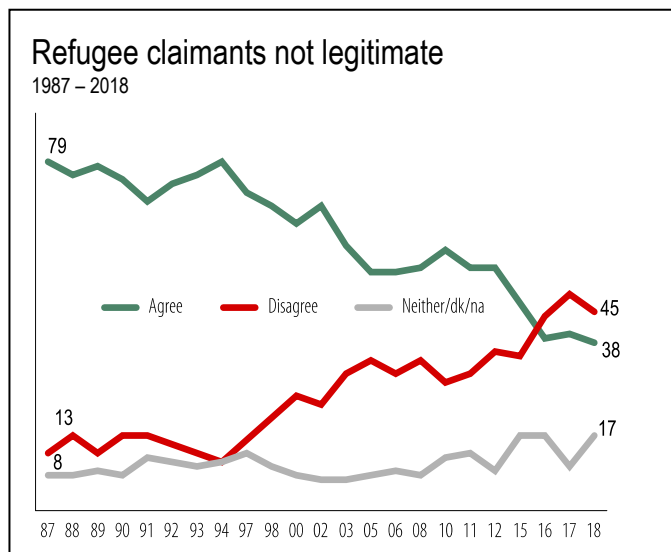


**“Most people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees.”** The past 10 months has seen the winding down of the unprecedented settlement of more than 30,000 Syrian refugees across the country who arrived in the past two years. This period also included a new influx of refugees crossing the border from the USA as the Trump government hardened its policies toward immigrants and undocumented residents. What impact have these events had on Canadians’ views about these newcomers arriving in their country?

A plurality (45%) of Canadians continue to disagree with this statement about refugees not being legitimate, compared with 38 percent who agree with it. Since last April, the balance of opinion has shifted a bit from strongly-held views on each side toward greater uncertainty, essentially returning to the levels recorded in 2016. There has been a decline both among those who strongly agree with the statement (14%, down 4 points) and among those who strongly disagree (18%, down 7), with a growing number who have no clear opinion either way (17%, up 7).

This softening trend is evident across much of the population, but is most noticeable in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It is also evident in Quebec and Alberta, but in these provinces the sentiment toward refugees is the most negative (especially in Alberta where close to half (48%) believe many refugee claimants are not legitimate).

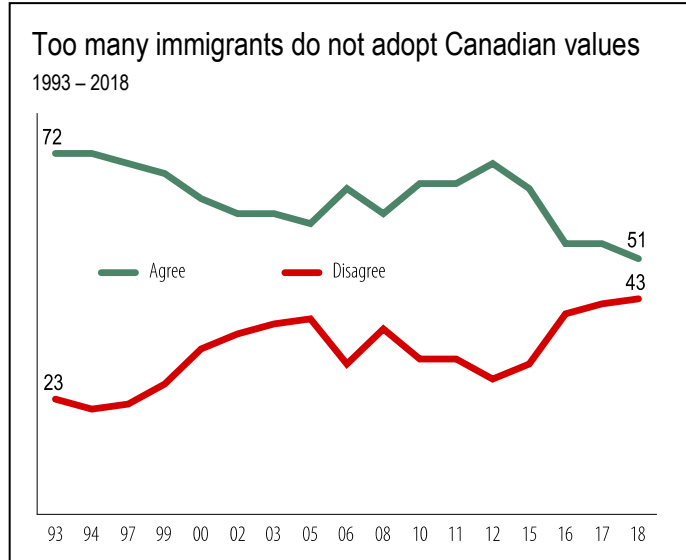
As before, perceptions about refugees not being legitimate increases with age, and decreases with socio-economic status. It is also more common among men and immigrants, although the gap between immigrants and native born Canadians has shrunk since 2017.



**“There are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values.”**

Integration into Canadian society has been the most contentious aspect of immigration and refugee issues in Canada, as documented in Focus Canada research dating back 25 years. But such concerns at a broad level continue to gradually wane over time. Just over half (51%) of Canadians now agree that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values, down three percentage points from April 2017; this is now the smallest percentage of Canadians expressing this opinion since the question was first asked on surveys in 1993.

Across the country, this downward shift is most noticeable in Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, among immigrants, and among Canadians with lower levels of household income. The belief that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values remains most prominent in Alberta (62%, but down 3 points since 2017), and lowest in Manitoba/Saskatchewan and B.C. (46%, respectively). Concerns about integration continue to be more prominent among older Canadians, but this is less the case than in 2017, as those 45 and older are now less apt to express this opinion than before.

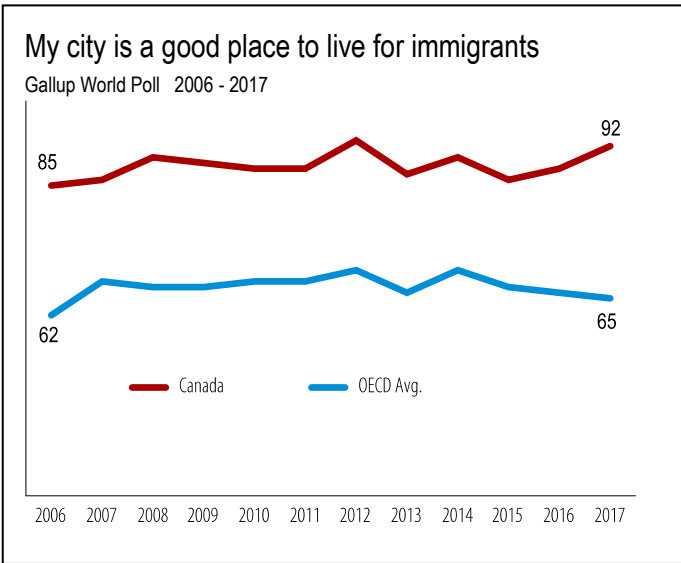


Immigrants are less likely than native-born to share this concern, and second generation Canadians (those with one or both parents born abroad) are less likely to hold it than those with older roots in the country. The largest gap continues to be based on education level: Two-thirds (66%) of Canadians with no more than a high school diploma agree that too many immigrants are not doing enough to fit in, compared with only four in ten (41%) who have a university degree.

**Acceptance of immigrants: Canada in a world context**

How accepting of immigrants are Canadians, compared with people in other countries? The answer comes from the Gallup World Poll, which is conducted annually in 140 countries. Results from 2017 show that Canadians are in fact among the most positive across the globe in terms of accepting their communities as a place for immigrants.

**City as a good place for immigrants.** Over nine in ten (92%) Canadians say the city or area where they live is “a good place” to live for immigrants from other countries. This reflects an increase from 88 percent of Canadians who expressed this view in 2016, and is largely consistent with results recorded in each year since 2006 when this question was first asked.



Canadian public opinion on their community as a place for immigrants is significantly more positive than for all other 34 OECD countries (where the average is 65 percent), and has been consistently so since 2006. Canada stands at the top of OECD and global results on this question.

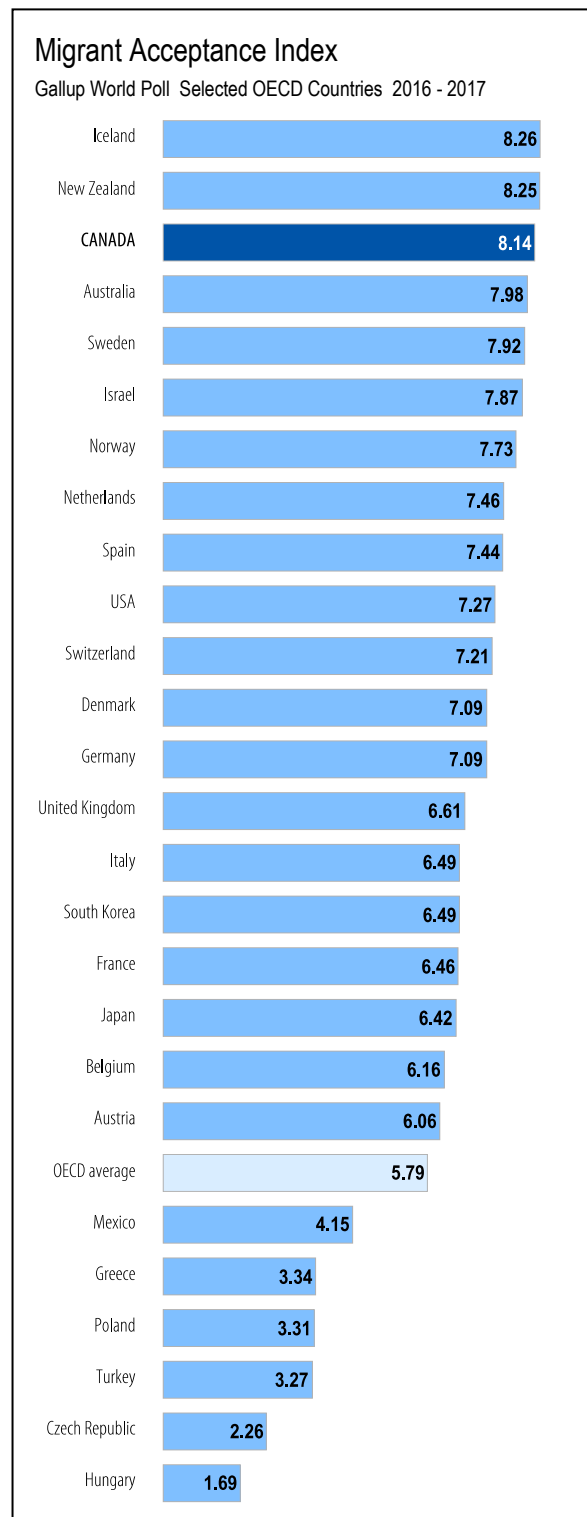
Following Canada, countries with positive views about their communities as a good place for immigrants include Norway (87%), New Zealand (86%), Iceland (86%) and Ireland (85%). The USA ranks 10th (81%), with other lower ratings for such countries as France (69%), Italy (65%) and Hungary (20%).

**Migrant acceptance index.** Gallup also created a “migrant acceptance index” to measure the public’s level of comfort and tolerance of people who come to live in their country from abroad. The index is based on responses to three questions about whether it is a good thing or a bad thing that immigrants: a) live in their country; b) become their neighbours; and c) marry a close relative.

Similar to results from the question about rating one’s city as a good place for immigrants, Canadians are very near the top of the global list in terms of acceptance of migrants. Among OECD countries, Canada ranks third (8.14), close behind Iceland and New Zealand. This places Canada well ahead of other Nordic and western European countries, as well as the USA (which ranks 11th). The weakest tolerance of immigrants can be found in eastern Europe and such countries as Turkey, Greece and Mexico.

**Immigrant well-being.** Another notable indication of Canada being a good place for migration can be found in immigrants’ own assessment of their overall subjective well-being (or happiness), as reported in the just-released 2018 World Happiness Report. Immigrants to Canada are among the most positive in the world in their self-reported well-being, ranking seventh (out of 140 countries).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, Canadian immigrants’ well-being is notably consistent regardless of the country or region from which they came, and their rated happiness is much closer to that of native-born Canadians than to the average score of their source country. This is part of a larger pattern in which the happiness of migrants tends to converge toward the overall level experienced by the overall population of the country in which they settle.



<sup>1</sup>Helliwell, J., Layard, R. & Sachs, J. (2018), World Happiness Report 2018. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network

## Treatment of minority groups

**Most Canadians believe there is ongoing discrimination in Canada against ethnic and racial groups, especially Muslims and Indigenous Peoples, and to a lesser extent Black people, South Asians, Jews and Chinese people. The perceived extent of such mistreatment has declined somewhat since 2015, reversing an earlier trend.**

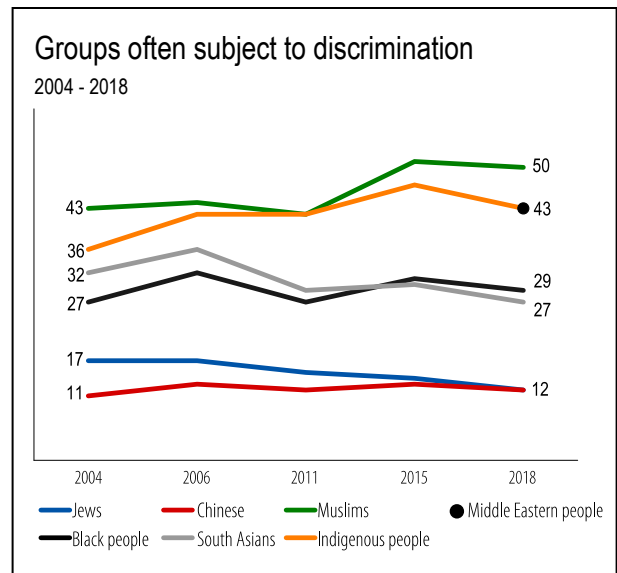
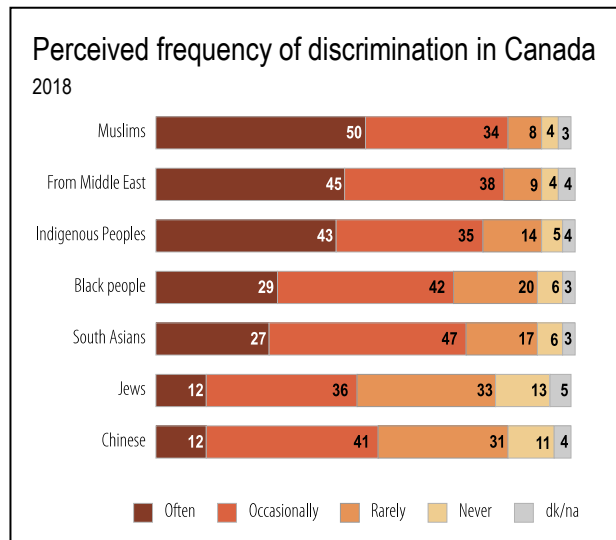
Canada is widely celebrated as a country that accepts if not celebrates its ethnic and cultural diversity. But at the same time there is the undeniable reality of endemic racism and discrimination, mostly directed at people because of their race, ethnic background, cultural practices, religion and/or gender. The latest survey results confirm previous findings showing that most Canadians are aware that such discrimination is directed toward specific groups in their country. At the same time, public perceptions of such mistreatment have declined for all groups since 2015, largely reversing a previous upward trend dating back to 2011.

The survey asked about the extent to which each of seven specific ethnic or minority groups experience discrimination in Canadian society today (in all but one case, the survey updates findings from previous surveys dating back to 2004). In all cases, a majority say each of the groups experience discrimination at least “sometimes” if not “often”, but since 2015 these proportion in each case has declined by three to seven percentage points, reversing an earlier trend dating back to 2011.

Across the seven groups, Canadians continue to be most likely to say that **Muslims** experience discrimination either often (50%) or sometimes (34%); this represents a three percentage point decline from 2015, reversing a more significant increase between 2011 and 2015. A slightly smaller proportion say that such treatment is experienced by **people from Middle Eastern countries such as Syria and Afghanistan** often (45%) or sometimes (38%) (a high proportion of Canadians from such countries are Muslim) [Note: this group was included on the survey for the first time]. Three in four believe that **South Asians** (from countries like India and Pakistan) experience discrimination in Canada, either often (27%), or sometimes (47%) (down 7 points from 2015).

Close to eight in ten say that **Indigenous Peoples** in Canada experience discrimination often (43%) or sometimes (35%), a six point drop from 2015 and returning to 2011 levels. One in five Canadians believes such treatment of this group rarely (14%) or never (5%) happens (up 5 points). Seven in ten Canadians say that discrimination happens often (29%) or sometimes (42%) against **Black people** in this country, down seven points from 2015, and once again reversing an earlier trend.

By comparison, relatively few Canadians believe that Jews (14%) and Chinese people (13%) in this country experience frequent discrimination, although significant pluralities say this happen sometimes (36% and 41%, respectively). As with other groups, these proportions have declined modestly from three years ago, reversing an earlier trend.



Across the country, increasing perceptions of systemic discrimination against minority groups is evident across most of the population, and also varies somewhat across segments:

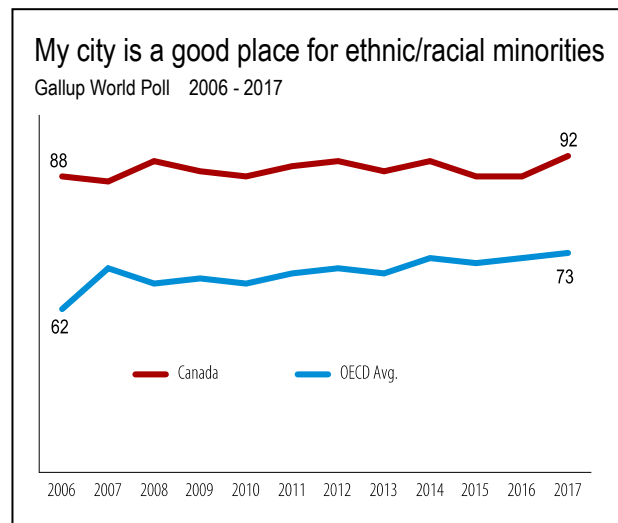
- Perceptions of frequent discrimination against Muslims is most evident in Quebec (but has dropped most noticeably in this province, to 58%, down 10 points since 2015), and least so in Alberta (42%, down 5) and British Columbia (43%, up 5). Age is an important factor, with Canadians 18 to 29 (61%) more likely to say Muslims are often the target of discrimination, compared with those 60 plus (43%). Education also matters, and most of the decline in frequency of perceived mistreatment since 2015 has occurred among Canadians with a high school diploma or less. Immigrants are less likely than native-born Canadians to say such discrimination is frequent, and there is no difference between second generation and third generation plus citizens.
- Those most apt to believe there is frequent discrimination against people from Middle Eastern countries include Quebecers (50%) and Canadians aged 18 to 29 (52%), with this view least evident among Albertans (36%), those 60 plus (36%), and immigrants (35%). No more than one in five from any group maintains that such treatment is rare or never happens.
- Perceptions of frequent discrimination against Indigenous Peoples continue to be more widespread in western Canada than in the east, especially in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (54%) and British Columbia (50%). The decline in the belief that such mistreatment is common is evident across the country, but most noticeably in eastern Canada and Alberta. There is no clear pattern across age cohorts, although the downward shift is least apparent among Canadians 18 to 29. As before, perceptions of frequent discrimination against Indigenous Peoples increase along with socio-economic status.
- Sensitivity to frequent discrimination against Black people in Canada has declined across the population since 2015, with the notable exceptions of Manitoba/Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and among Canadians aged 18 to 29 (43% in this group say this happens often, up 13 points, opening a sizeable gap with older age cohorts). In Toronto (home to the country's largest Black population), a declining proportion say discrimination happens often (34%, down 8 points), with another 45 percent indicating this happens sometimes (up 3). Across the country, it is Quebecers (35%) who are most likely to identify frequent discrimination against Black people, and Albertans (20%) and British Columbians (21%) who are least apt to share this view.
- Concerns about the treatment of South Asians is now most evident in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (39%, up 12 points from 2015), as well as among Canadians aged 18 to 29 (43%, up 5, and widening the gap with older generations). This view is least apt to be shared in Quebec (19%) and Alberta (23%), and among Canadians aged 60 and older (21%). In Vancouver (with a significant South Asian population), views about frequent discrimination have increased over the past three years, and is now at the national average (27% say such discrimination happens often, with another 46% saying "sometimes).
- The belief that Jews experience discrimination often or sometimes is similar across the country, but has declined most noticeably since 2015 in Quebec and Alberta, among Canadians aged 30 to 59, and those with no more than a high school diploma. In Toronto (with Canada's largest Jewish population), this view has strengthened marginally (55%, up 2 points), while declining significantly in Montreal (the second largest Jewish population) (50%, down 12).
- Perceptions of frequent or occasional poor treatment of Chinese people is highest in British Columbia (66%), and especially in Vancouver (with the largest Chinese population) (72%), reflecting an increase since 2015. In contrast, this view has diminished in most other parts of the country, and especially in Quebec (where only 38% now express this opinion) and Alberta (50%). In Toronto (home to the second largest Chinese population), more than six in ten (62%, down 4 points) say Chinese people experience such discrimination. This view is increasingly shared by Canadians aged 18 to 29 (64%), widening the gap with older generations.

## Treatment of ethnic/racial groups: Canada in a World Context

As knowledgeable as Canadians may be about the reality of racism and discrimination in their country, they are among the most positive worldwide in their view of how accepting their communities are of people who are different (based on the latest Gallup World Poll). As with immigrants, more than nine in ten (92%) say their city or area is a good place to live for racial and ethnic minorities. This proportion has increased since 2016 (from 88%) and is now at the highest level since this question was first asked on the Gallup World Poll in 2006.

Canada has consistently been ranked at the top of the OECD and wider world on this question. The OECD average response in 2017 is 73 percent, and largely consistent with previous waves although a bit higher than in the previous decade, including 2006 (62%) and 2008 (67%). After Canada, countries with the most positive attitudes about the acceptance of ethnic/racial minorities include New Zealand (90%), Norway (88%), Ireland (86%) and Luxembourg (85%).

The USA is ranked 8th (83%), followed mostly by countries in western Europe, then Asia (Japan, South Korea), and finally eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland and Estonia, where the proportion who say their city is welcoming to ethnic and racial minorities is well below 50 percent).



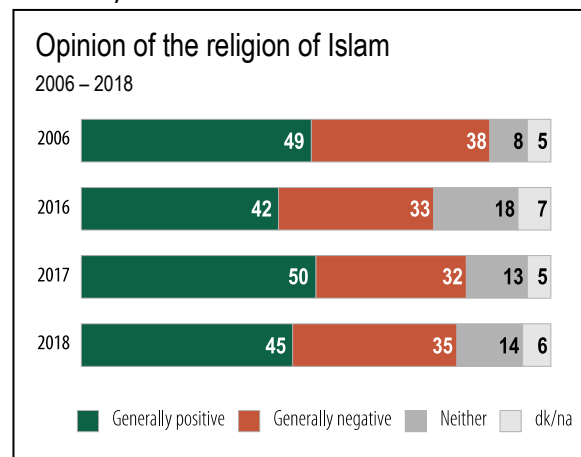
## Muslims in Canada

**Canadians remain largely divided in their opinions about Islam, with views worsening noticeably in Alberta (and to a lesser extent Ontario) over the past year. A plurality continues to think that most Muslims want to remain distinct rather than integrate into Canadian society.**

Muslims now make up more than three percent of the Canadian population and are among the fastest growing groups within the country. They are also among the most poorly understood and stigmatized groups, in part because of their recent arrival and ethnic origins, and in part because of specific religious and cultural practices (e.g., face coverings) make many Canadians uncomfortable. Islamic terrorist activity (mostly overseas) has complicated life for the Canadian Muslims, the large majority of whom clearly reject such violence.<sup>2</sup> Findings reported elsewhere in this report confirm that the Canadian public overall believes Muslims in this country experience ongoing discrimination. This survey probed further on attitudes about Islam and Muslims in Canadian society.

**Personal opinion of Islam.** As in previous surveys, Canadians' general opinion of Islam remains split, with positive impressions (45%) outweighing negative ones (35%), and another one in five with no clear view either way. These latest results reflect a modest downward shift since 2017 (50% positive versus 32% negative), reversing an earlier upward trend from 2016.

Across the country, this worsening impression of Islam is most significant in the Prairies, especially in Alberta (35% positive, down 14 points since 2017) which is now the only province where negative views outweigh positive ones.



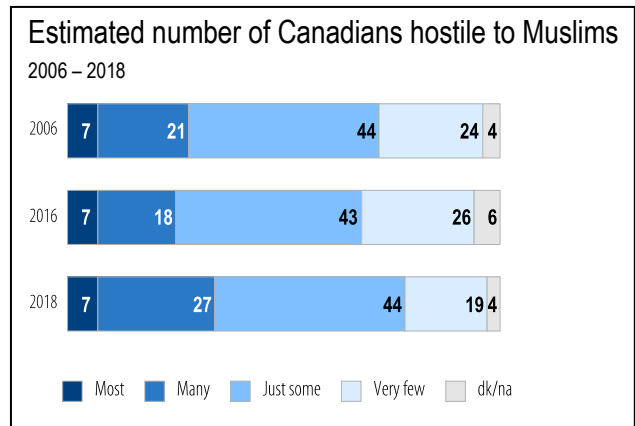
<sup>2</sup> Survey of Muslims in Canada 2016, Environics Institute



Positive impressions are also down to a lesser extent in Ontario (48%, down 5), while holding steady in Quebec (43%; this view has strengthened in Montreal to 49%, up 6). Impressions of Islam are most likely to be positive in Atlantic Canada (51% positive versus 31% negative) and British Columbia (49% versus 28%).

Canadians 18 to 29 (51%) continue to be more positive than older generations in their views of Islam, but this is less the case than before. Education is also an important factor, but income much less so. Finally, foreign-born Canadians (54%) are more positive about Islam than those native-born (43%), and among the latter second generation citizens are more positive than those whose roots in the country go further back.

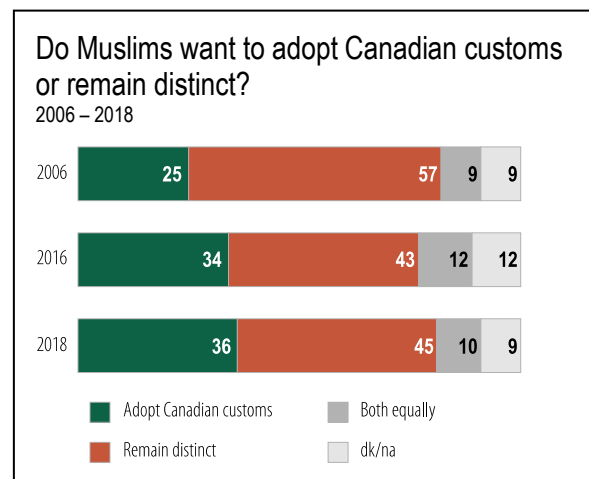
**Perceived hostility toward Muslims in Canada.** The public was asked to estimate the proportion of Canadians they believe are hostile to Muslims. One in three believes that most (7%) or many (27%) Canadians are hostile to this group, with plurality judging it to be just some (44%) and another fifth (19%) saying very few. Perceptions have changed noticeably since 2016, with more now saying “many” and fewer judging it to be “very few.”



This growing perception that many or most Canadians are hostile toward Muslims has taken place across the population. As before this view is most widespread in Quebec (50%), among Canadians with a generally negative impression of Islam (47%), and among those who believe Muslims often experience discrimination. This perspective is least apt to be shared by B.C. residents (23%) and immigrants (25%).

**Integration into Canadian society.** Results presented earlier in this report demonstrate public concern about some immigrants not adopting Canadian values, which for many reflect concerns about them not sufficiently integrating into broader society. Muslims -- because of their countries of origin and religion -- are often the focus of such anxieties. Results from this survey confirm earlier findings that a plurality of Canadians believe that Muslims in this country prefer to remain distinct rather than adopt Canadian customs.

More than four in ten (45%) think Muslims immigrating to this country want to be distinct from the larger society, versus 36 percent who believe they want to adopt Canadian customs. The remainder say both are equally the case or have no clear opinion. These results are largely unchanged from 2016, but reflect a significant shift from 2006 when the balance of opinion was more heavily weighted toward the view that Muslims want to remain distinct (57%, versus 25% who said Muslims want to integrate).<sup>3</sup>



Views on this question do not vary significantly across the population. The belief that Muslims coming to Canada want to remain distinct is most evident in Atlantic Canada (51%), Alberta (52%) and Quebec (50%), but has declined in this last province since 2016, with a big increase in the proportion taking the opposite view (39%, up 11 points). Perceptions of Muslims wanting to remain distinct also continues to be stronger among Canadians aged 60 plus, those without a university degree and especially those who have a negative impression of Islam (69%; compared with only 30% of those with a positive impression).

<sup>3</sup> This public perception notwithstanding, results from two Environics Institute surveys of Muslims in Canada (2006, 2016) show that most Muslims do in fact believe their co-religionists wish to adopt Canadian customs rather than remain separate from larger Canadian society.



---

**Environics Institute for Survey Research** was established by Michael Adams in 2006 to promote relevant and original public opinion and social research on important issues of public policy and social change. The focus of the Institute’s mandate is to survey individuals and groups not usually heard from, asking questions not normally asked. For further information see [www.EnvironicsInstitute.org](http://www.EnvironicsInstitute.org), or contact Dr. Keith Neuman at [keith.neuman@environics.ca](mailto:keith.neuman@environics.ca)

**Canadian Race Relations Foundation** is Canada's leading organization dedicated to the elimination of racism and the promotion of harmonious race relations. Its underlying principle in addressing racism and racial discrimination emphasizes positive race relations and the promotion of shared Canadian values of human rights and democratic institutions. It strives to coordinate and cooperate with all sectors of society, and develop partnerships with relevant agencies and organizations at the local, provincial and national levels. For further information see [www.crrf-fcrr.ca](http://www.crrf-fcrr.ca). or contact Lilian Ma at [lilian.ma@crrf-fcrr.ca](mailto:lilian.ma@crrf-fcrr.ca)

---