

Indian residential schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Awareness and knowledge about Indian residential schools

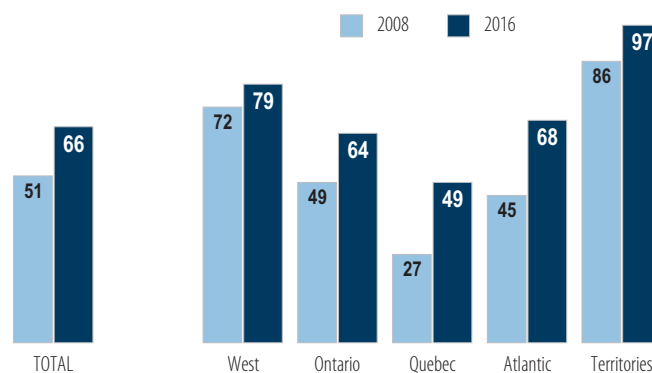
Two-thirds of non-Aboriginal Canadians have heard or read something about Indian residential schools, up noticeably from 2008. Canadians most closely associate residential schools with the mistreatment of young students, the break-up of families, and the loss of culture and language.

In the past decade or more, Canadians have been witness to troubling stories of the mistreatment of Aboriginal children in Indian residential schools, to public declarations about cultural genocide, and to reports and recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. So in 2016 it would be expected that this part of the country's history would now be widely recognized, and there is evidence that awareness is in fact growing. Two-thirds (66%) of non-Aboriginal Canadians say they have read or heard something about Indian residential schools; this represents a significant increase from the proportion expressing such awareness in 2008 (when 51% did so).

Awareness of Indian residential schools varies across provinces and territories. Canadians in the Territories (97%), Manitoba (84%), Saskatchewan (84%) and B.C. (82%) are most likely to have read or heard something about the schools, with awareness lowest in Quebec (49%). Awareness of residential schools has increased in all regions since 2008, but most dramatically in Quebec (up 22 points) and Atlantic Canada (up 23 points).

Across population groups, awareness of Indian residential schools is highest among women, and rises noticeably with age, education level and household income, but has increased across all groups (except those in the lowest income bracket). Age appears to have the most defining impact, with awareness reported by only 52 percent of Canadians 18 to 29 years of age, rising to 80 percent among those 60 and older.

Have read or heard about Indian residential schools



Q.20

Have you read or heard anything about Indian Residential Schools?

WHAT NON-ABORIGINAL CANADIANS KNOW ABOUT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS.

Those reporting awareness of Indian residential schools were asked, unprompted, what they recall hearing or reading. Almost everyone in this group could recall something, with the following themes most commonly given:

- **The mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples**, including the abuse and molestation of students (42%) and general mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples and discrimination (29%);
- **The impact on Aboriginal families**, with mention of children being separated from their families (31%), and the long-term impact on families having to deal with trauma and dysfunctional relationships (6%); and
- **The cultural impact on Aboriginal peoples**, including being forbidden to speak their languages or learn their culture (18%), their integration and assimilation into mainstream society (11%), and cultural genocide (4%).

Other responses focus on the fact that the schools were run by government or church staff (6%), and more recent developments in terms of the schools being closed due to poor living conditions (3%), lawsuits and financial settlements (5%), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (3%).

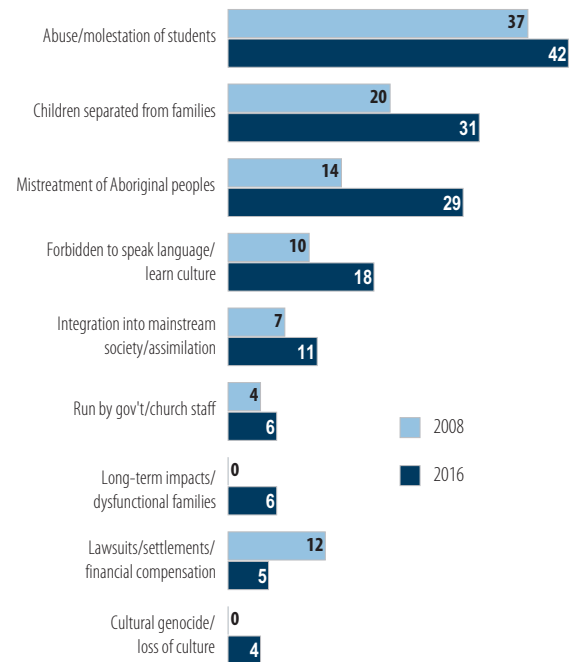
A very small number mention neutral or positive responses, including that the schools provided Aboriginal children with an education (4%) or were not all bad (1%).

Overall, the depth of knowledge of Indian residential schools among the non-Aboriginal Canadian population has jumped considerably since 2008. This is evident on two levels: the significant drop in the proportion of Canadians unable to mention anything about what they heard about residential schools (from 26% in 2008 to just 2% in 2016); and in the significant increase in the proportion of Canadians who identify many of the specific issues (e.g., mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples – up 15 points, children separated from families – up 11, forbidden to speak their language – up 8, abuse/molestation of students – up 5).

Recall of specific elements of Indian residential schools is consistent across the country, and among different population groups. Standouts include: 23 percent of Northerners mention the schools were run by the church

What have you heard or read about residential schools?

Top mentions – Those aware of residential schools



Q.21

What have you heard or read about Indian Residential Schools?

and government staff (compared to 6% overall); 47 percent of university graduates recall the abuse/molestation of Aboriginal students (compared to 37% of those with high school or less); and 28 percent of younger Canadians mention Aboriginal students being forbidden to speak their language (vs. 16% of those 30 and older).

Not surprisingly, Canadians who pay more attention to Aboriginal stories in the news are more likely to recall specific elements of Indian residential schools. This is particularly true in the case of those mentioning the abuse/molestation of Aboriginal students, children being separated from their families and cultural genocide.

Impact of residential schools experience on Aboriginal peoples

Three-quarters of non-Aboriginal Canadians believe the challenges facing Aboriginal peoples today are to some extent the result of the residential schools experience. But the public is divided on whether the residential schools system was intended to destroy Aboriginal culture.

Do non-Aboriginal Canadians appreciate the long-term impacts the residential school experience has had on the affected families and the Aboriginal community generally? Among those who are aware of residential schools, three in four believe that the challenges facing Aboriginal communities today are to a great extent (32%) or to some extent (41%) a result of the residential schools experience. Moreover, this view has strengthened considerably since 2008, when only 18 percent felt the impact of residential schools was being felt to a great extent in the present day.

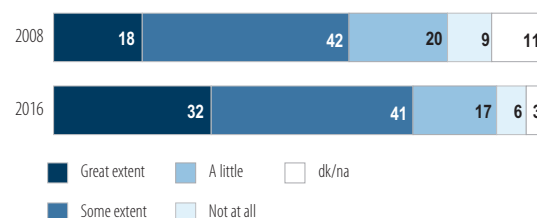
This increasing appreciation of the long-term impact of residential schools has taken place across the population, but most significantly in eastern Canada, among women and younger Canadians. Today, this connection is most widely acknowledged by British Columbians (38% say to a great extent), women (39%), Canadians aged 18 to 29 (42%), those in the lowest income bracket (43%), immigrants (39%) and those who follow Aboriginal issues closely (48%). This view is least apt to be shared in Saskatchewan (22%), Alberta (25%), and among Canadians earning \$100K or more in household income (25%). In Saskatchewan today, close to one in five (18%) holds the view that the residential school experience has no connection to current challenges in the Aboriginal community.

Intent of Indian residential schools. In the past year, Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin, former Prime Minister Paul Martin and TRC Commissioners all asserted that Canada's Indian residential schools system was part of a deliberate policy of cultural genocide against Aboriginal peoples.

The non-Aboriginal public is divided on this issue. Just over four in ten reject the idea of cultural genocide, strongly (16%) or somewhat (26%) agreeing with the statement: "Canada's residential schools policy was not an intentional effort to destroy Aboriginal culture and connection to the land," with almost half somewhat (19%) or strongly (28%) in disagreement. Another one in ten (11%) did not offer an opinion either way.

Extent of connection between residential schools experience and current challenges facing Aboriginal communities

Those aware of residential schools

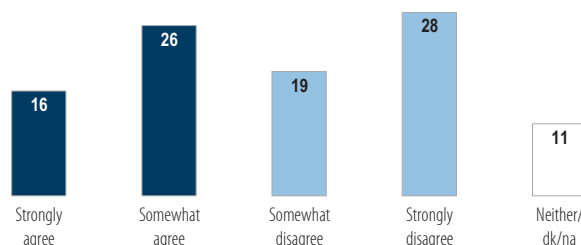


Q.22

To what extent do you think that the challenges facing Aboriginal communities today are a result of Aboriginal peoples' experiences in residential schools? Would you say to a great extent, some extent, a little or not at all?

Canada's residential schools policy was not an intentional effort to destroy Aboriginal culture and connection to land

Those aware of residential schools



Q.31

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: Canada's residential schools policy was not an intentional effort to destroy Aboriginal culture and connection to the land

Belief in the government's deliberate intention to destroy Aboriginal culture and connection to land is most widely held among residents in the Territories (72% disagree with the statement, 52% strongly so), while least evident in Saskatchewan (43%). Opinions on this question also vary depending on how closely one pays attention to stories involving Aboriginal peoples: those who pay a great deal of attention tend to subscribe to the belief in cultural genocide (57% disagree with the statement), compared with 36 percent of those who pay little or no attention.

Awareness and knowledge about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Four in ten non-Aboriginal Canadians say they have heard or read anything about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but few within this group can recall anything specific about the Commission's recommended Calls to Action.

In 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada began a multi-year process to listen to survivors, communities and others affected by the Indian residential school system. The Commission issued its final report in June 2015, which included an extensive list of "calls to action."

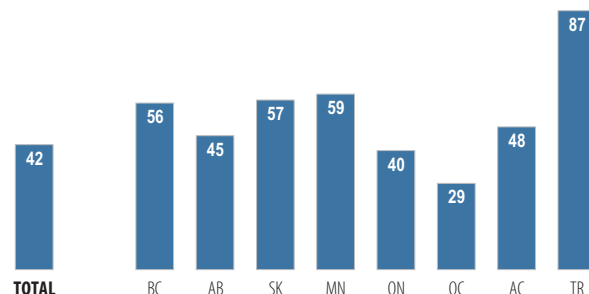
Despite considerable media coverage devoted to the Commission when the final report was issued, the level of public awareness today is modest. Just over four in ten (42%) non-Aboriginal Canadians say they have heard or read anything about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Even more surprising is the fact that 40 percent of those aware of Indian residential schools had not read or heard anything about the TRC. Moreover, the same is true for more than a third (35%) of non-Aboriginal Canadians who say they pay a great deal of attention to news and stories about Aboriginal peoples.

Awareness of the TRC varies dramatically across the country, ranging from a high of 87 percent in the Territories to a low of 29 percent in Quebec. Awareness also increases noticeably by age cohort, education level and household income. Only one-quarter (24%) of non-Aboriginal Canadians aged 18 to 29 say they have heard or read about the TRC, rising to 56 percent among those 60 plus.

Awareness of the TRC Calls to Action. It is one thing to have heard about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but another to know something about what it actually was about. When those indicating some awareness of the TRC were asked, unprompted, what they recall about the Commission's recommended calls to action, few could do so: Two-thirds (67%) of this group could offer nothing specific about what they heard or read about, and none of the calls to action or topics identified were mentioned by more than five percent.

The most often mentioned calls to action relate to some form of financial arrangement for Aboriginal peoples: government funding (5%), funding for Aboriginal education (4%), and

Have read or heard about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

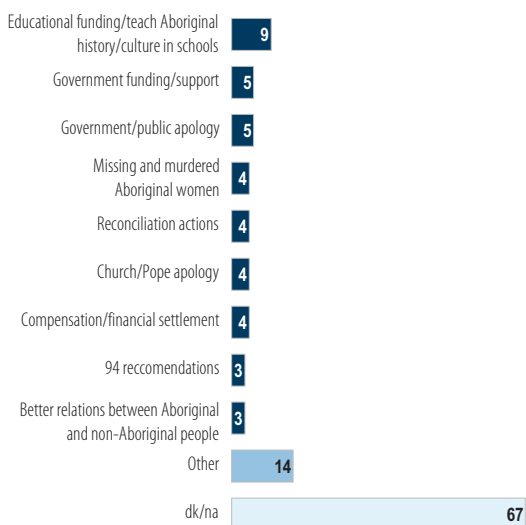


Q.23

Have you read or heard anything about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Recall of TRC Calls to Action

Those aware of the TRC



Q.24

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established by the federal government to hear testimony from residential school survivors across the country, and to make recommendations for how to move forward toward reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and institutions. Do you recall anything specific about the recommended Call to Actions that the Commission released several months ago?

compensation/financial settlements (4%). Others cite education curriculum/teach Aboriginal history and culture (5%), government/public apology (5%), launch of a missing and murdered Aboriginal women inquiry (4%), actions to achieve reconciliation (4%) and church apologies (4%).