

# The big picture: Non-Aboriginal perspectives on Aboriginal peoples

## Introduction

This survey measured public opinions across a range of topics and issues to determine what non-Aboriginal Canadians currently know and think about different aspects of Aboriginal peoples. Essential to this initiative is to understand how these opinions are similar or different across regions and socio-demographic groups across the country because the data show clearly that there is indeed a range of opinions; there is no one singular non-Aboriginal Canadian point of view on any of the topics covered. But underlying the many differences in attitudes by region, age, gender and socio-economic status are distinct perspectives or world views that have been shaped by many factors (family upbringing, social values, living circumstances, community context). Identifying these perspectives provides an important way to fully understand how mainstream society views Aboriginal peoples.

This is accomplished through statistical methods commonly known as “segmentation analysis,” which uncovers patterns of responses to the full set of survey questions that reveal consistent orientations on relevant issues. The results produce clusters or segments of the population, each of which represents a conceptually distinct world view toward Aboriginal peoples. This provides a valuable means of understanding perspectives beyond what is possible through

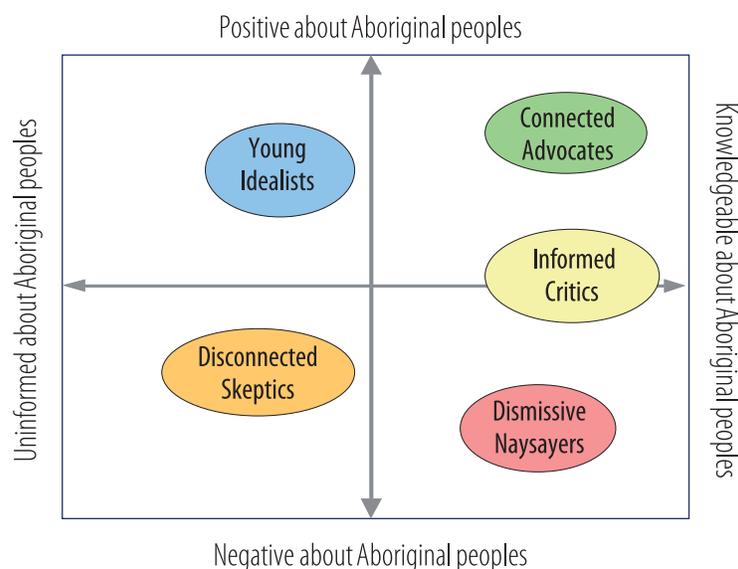
the individual findings alone, and can offer guidance for future communications and educational initiatives.

In 2009, this type of segmentation analysis was undertaken with non-Aboriginal urban Canadians in 10 major cities as part of the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study. For the current survey, a new analysis was conducted, based on a full national sample (including the Territories) and the updated set of survey questions, some of which cover new topics such as reconciliation.

**THE FIVE NON-ABORIGINAL WORLD VIEWS ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES.** The segmentation analysis conducted in 2016 yielded five distinct groups or segments of non-Aboriginal Canadians, based on their overall perspective toward Aboriginal peoples.

The five groups differ primarily along two dimensions: a) positive versus negative orientation toward Aboriginal peoples; and b) level of knowledge or understanding of Aboriginal peoples and the issues they face. The groups can be plotted on these two dimensions as presented in the accompanying chart.

The following pages provide a portrait of the five mainstream world views about Aboriginal peoples.



## Connected Advocates

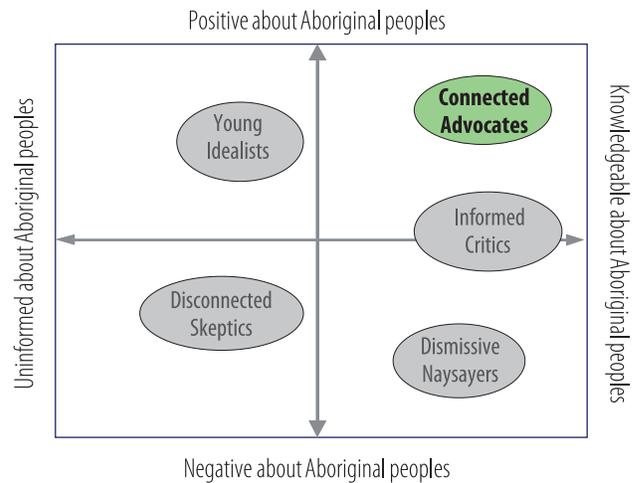
Connected Advocates (18% of the non-Aboriginal population) stand clearly at one end of the spectrum as the most positive and supportive group with respect to Aboriginal peoples in this country. They are the most knowledgeable about the history and current challenges facing the Aboriginal community, they feel the most connected, and are the strongest proponents of changes to address these challenges.

Connected advocates can be distinguished in terms of:

- Placing the greatest importance on Aboriginal history and culture as a defining aspect of Canada;
- Seeing Aboriginal peoples as unique rather than as another ethnic or cultural group (88%);
- Closely following Aboriginal issues in the news;
- Having frequent contact with Aboriginal peoples;
- Seeing a large and growing gap in the standard of living between Aboriginal peoples and others;
- Being most likely to see discrimination happening at both the individual and institutional levels;
- Believing most Canadians are prejudiced against Aboriginal peoples;
- Seeing governments and the public as the main obstacles holding Aboriginal peoples back from achieving the same standard of living as other Canadians;
- Expressing the strongest support for TRC Calls to Action; and
- Feeling strongest about individual Canadians' role in achieving reconciliation (96% feel strongly);

At the same time, they are not especially optimistic about the realization of reconciliation in their lifetimes.

**Who are they?** Connected advocates can be found across the country, but they are more likely to be women, older (especially in the 60 plus cohort) and have a post-graduate degree, but not necessarily the highest household incomes. They are equally spread across urban, suburban and rural communities, and are most apt to be found in the Territories, Atlantic Canada and B.C.



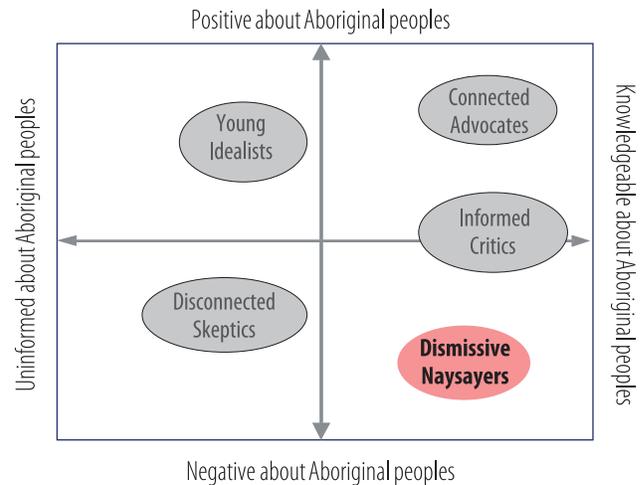
## Dismissive Naysayers

Dismissive Naysayers (14%) can be found at the opposite end of the spectrum of world views from Connected Advocates. They stand out as being the most negative of non-Aboriginal Canadians, and embody much of the visceral resentment that sometimes emerges in online commentary and racist incidents.

Dismissive Naysayers can be distinguished in terms of:

- Placing the least importance on Aboriginal history and culture as defining Canada;
- Being most likely of all groups to consider Aboriginal peoples as no different from other ethnic or cultural groups;
- Being least apt to see socio-economic disparity between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians;
- Being most likely to believe that Aboriginal peoples have an unhealthy sense of entitlement (55% strongly agree with this view);
- Being most critical of Aboriginal leadership (62% say they are doing a worse job than local government leaders in their province);
- Looking at Aboriginal peoples as being responsible for their own problems;
- Being least supportive of all groups in supporting TRC Calls to Action;
- Being least likely to feel individual Canadians have a role in realizing reconciliation (only 24% agree strongly); and
- Expressing by far the most pessimism about the likelihood of reconciliation happening in their lifetimes.

**Who are they?** Dismissive Naysayers are most likely to be male, older (but not necessarily in the 60 plus cohort), and have higher than average incomes, but not higher than average levels of education. They are the least urban of all groups, and tend to live in smaller towns and rural areas, and are concentrated primarily in the three Prairie provinces (and least evident in Quebec).



## Young Idealists

Young Idealists (23%) are one of two groups composed mostly of younger urban non-Aboriginal Canadians. The world view of this segment shares much in common with that of Connected Advocates in being very positive in its orientation to Aboriginal peoples. In some ways, this group is even more sympathetic about the place of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society and noticeably more positive about the future. But at the same time they are much less knowledgeable about the history and current challenges, and do not have the same level of personal engagement.

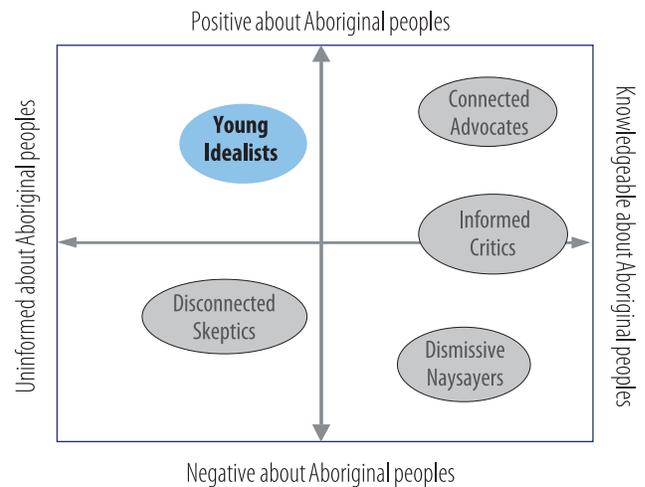
Young Idealists share a number of characteristics with Connected Advocates in terms of:

- Placing strong importance on Aboriginal history and culture as important in defining Canada;
- Seeing governments and the public, rather than Aboriginal peoples, as the biggest obstacles to achieving social and economic equality with other Canadians; and
- Expressing strong support for TRC Calls to Action.

At the same time, they are less likely than Connected Advocates to:

- Closely follow Aboriginal issues in the news or have direct contact with Aboriginal peoples;
- Have heard or read anything about Indian residential schools or the TRC;
- Consider Aboriginal peoples as unique and distinct from other ethnic or culture groups;
- See the gap in standard of living between Aboriginal peoples and others;
- Believe discrimination is happening, especially at the institutional level;
- Believe that control over land and resources is critical to the success of Aboriginal communities; and
- Feel strongly about the role of individual Canadians in reconciliation.

This group stands out as being the most positive of all about current relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, and as the most optimistic about the prospects



for meaningful reconciliation in their lifetimes (84% are optimistic versus 13% who are pessimistic).

**Who are they?** Young Idealists share many opinions in common with Connected Advocates, but they are a very different group. They are, by far, the youngest group of Canadians (with the largest proportion under 24 years of age), female, urban, concentrated in Toronto and Montreal, and is the group most likely to include individuals born outside of Canada. Being young, they are less likely than most other groups to have a post-secondary degree (though many are currently students) and they have lower than average household incomes. This group may well be the next generation of Connected Advocates.

## Disconnected Skeptics

Disconnected Skeptics (21%) are the other group of young urban Canadians, but one with a very different orientation toward Aboriginal peoples. In contrast to Young Idealists, Disconnected Skeptics are mostly tuned out and unsympathetic to the existence of Aboriginal peoples and the challenges they face. In some respects, they are a 'lite' version of Dismissive Naysayers, with less emotional negativity because they are mostly disengaged: they know the least and care the least of any of the five groups.

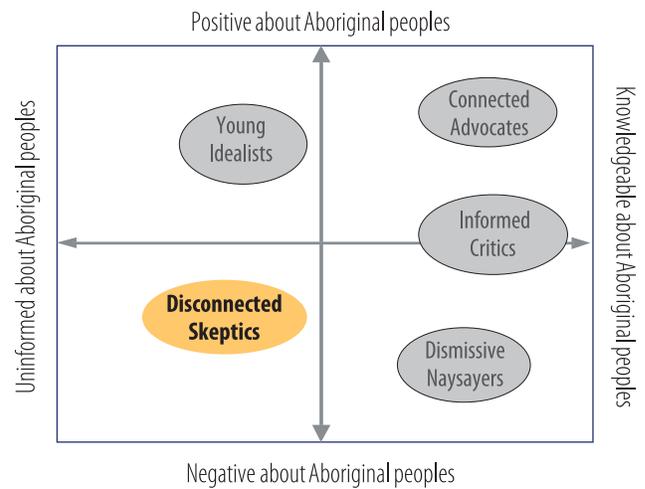
Disconnected Skeptics share a number of characteristics with Dismissive Naysayers, although not to the same degree, in terms of:

- Placing low importance on Aboriginal history and culture as defining Canada;
- Believing Aboriginal peoples are no different from other ethnic or cultural groups;
- Not seeing institutional discrimination against Aboriginal peoples;
- Believing Aboriginal peoples are most responsible for their own problems;
- Expressing comparatively lower levels of support for TRC Calls to Action;
- Not feeling that individual Canadians have a role in achieving reconciliation; and
- Demonstrating a lack of interest in learning more about Aboriginal peoples.

Disconnected Skeptics stand out most in terms of:

- Paying the least attention to Aboriginal issues, or to have personal contact with Aboriginal peoples;
- Being least likely to believe in ongoing discrimination against Aboriginal peoples; and
- Having the least awareness of residential schools (28%) or the TRC (4%);

Unlike Dismissive Naysayers, Disconnected Skeptics do not generally agree that Aboriginal peoples have a sense of entitlement or that Aboriginal leaders do a worse job than local government leaders (perhaps because these



are not issues they have ever thought about). One opinion they share with Young Idealists is being among the most positive about current relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Their sense of optimism about future reconciliation is similar to that of Connected Advocates; much more positive than Dismissive Naysayers, but much more negative than that of Young Idealists.

**Who are they?** Disconnected Skeptics are – like Dismissive Naysayers – more of a male-dominated group. They also tend to be young and foreign-born, although not quite as much as Young Idealists. They are most likely to be found in Quebec, and in smaller towns and rural areas. While a bit older than Young Idealists, they are less likely to have a high school diploma or post-graduate degree.

## Informed Critics

Informed Critics (23%) are perhaps the least obvious of the segments, in that unlike the other four groups they are not clearly positioned on either the positive or negative side of the spectrum. Informed Critics are among the most knowledgeable and connected of Canadians, but are not especially sympathetic to the challenges and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples in this country.

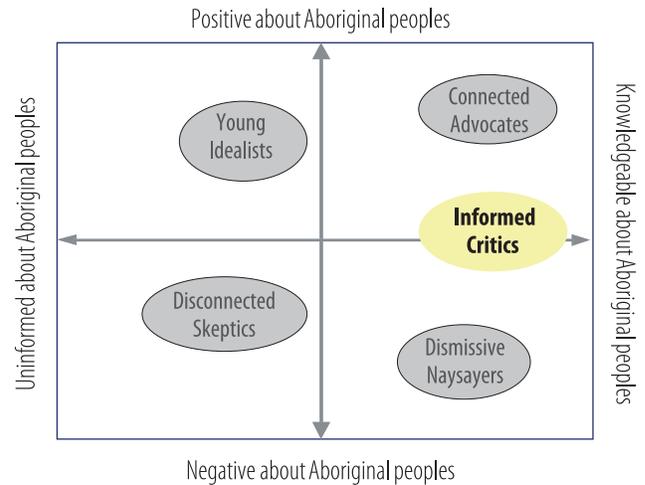
On the one hand, Informed Critics share some opinions with Connected Advocates, in terms of:

- Paying attention to Aboriginal issues and having personal contact;
- Having high levels of awareness of Indian residential schools and the TRC;
- Identifying the gap in standard of living between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, and the necessity of addressing this to achieve reconciliation; and
- Viewing government and the public as having some responsibility for the challenges facing Aboriginal people.

On the other hand, they also tend to line up closer with Dismissive Naysayers and Disconnected Skeptics (although not quite as strongly) in terms of:

- Placing lower importance on Aboriginal history and culture in defining Canada;
- Not considering Aboriginal peoples to be unique versus like other ethnic or cultural groups;
- Expressing lower levels of support for the more contentious TRC recommendations (settling land claims, giving full control over traditional lands);
- Rejecting the idea that mainstream society continues to benefit from poor treatment of Aboriginal people, and that control over land is necessary for communities to be successful; and
- Being critical in assessing the performance of Aboriginal leaders.

This group's level of optimism about future reconciliation is comparable to that of Connected Advocates and



Disconnected Skeptics (more positive than the view of Dismissive Naysayers, but much less so than that of Young Idealists).

**Who are they?** This group can be characterized as the oldest and most affluent of the five groups, comparable to Connected Advocates but more so: this group includes the highest concentration of Canadians 60 plus, and those with household incomes of \$100K or more. This is also the most urban of the groups, and is most heavily concentrated west of Ontario, especially in the Territories, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.