

Religious Freedom in Canada: Perspectives from First and Second-Generation Canadians

Study compares Canadians opinions on faith, values and enduring societal questions

September 13, 2018 – Canada's religious landscape has shifted in recent decades, as its composition has grown more diverse with each decade. New permanent residents are increasingly likely to identify as following a faith other than Christianity, which in turn is testing the nation's respect and treatment of religious minorities.

A new study from the Angus Reid Institute asks Immigrants and Second-Generation Canadians for their perceptions of Canada's performance on religious tolerance, and finds a generally satisfied population. Roughly four-in-ten newcomers say that Canada is better than their home country when it comes to religious freedom, while a similar number say it is about the same.

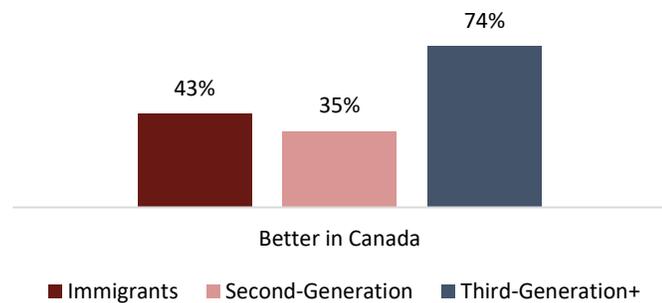
Interestingly, Third-Generation+ Canadians, who presumably have less experience regarding religious culture abroad, are considerably more positive about their nation's religious freedom and treatment of religious minorities.

This report also compares the perspectives of these three groups, newer and older in their Canadian lineage, on questions of morality and values. Across each of the groups, Canadians are divided over personal definitions of right and wrong, the place of religion in society, and how best to live ones life.

More Key Findings:

- Across three measures, freedom of religion, respect for religious minorities, and harmony among religious groups in Canada, four-in-ten immigrants say Canada performs better than the country they came from, while four-in-ten say Canada compares similarly

**How do you think the situation here in Canada compares to your home country/parents home country/other countries when it comes to:
Religious Freedom**



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from June 13 - 19 among a representative randomized sample of 1,509 Canadian adults who are members of the Angus Reid Forum. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

An additional online survey was conducted from June 15 - 22 among a sample of 494 Canadian adults who are members of Ethnic Corner. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

- Just over half (55%) of Canadians say religion has a positive effect on the world overall, and immigrants are twice as likely to strongly agree with this sentiment when compared to Third-Generation+ Canadians
- Regardless of how long they have been in Canada, Canadians are divided on the question of what makes for the best life. Half say focusing on helping others, while half say focusing on individual achievements

INDEX:

- **Is religious freedom better in Canada for new residents?**
 - **Canadians happy with the country's treatment of religious minorities**
 - **Harmony among different religious groups?**
- **Many common values (and divisions) among all Canadians**
 - **Majority say religious impact positive overall**
 - **Life's biggest questions**
- **A spiritual continuum**
 - **New Canadians on the spiritual continuum**

Is religious freedom better in Canada for new residents?

Given that immigrants have direct, lived-experience with religious norms in other countries, this study presents an opportunity to garner some comparisons between their experiences abroad and in Canada.

The Angus Reid Institute asked about three separate measures - religious freedom, respect for religious minorities, and harmony between different religious groups – and how newer Canadians believe this country compares with the one they or their family emigrated from on each. For Canadians who have been here longer than two generations, they were asked how they think Canada compares to other countries more generally.

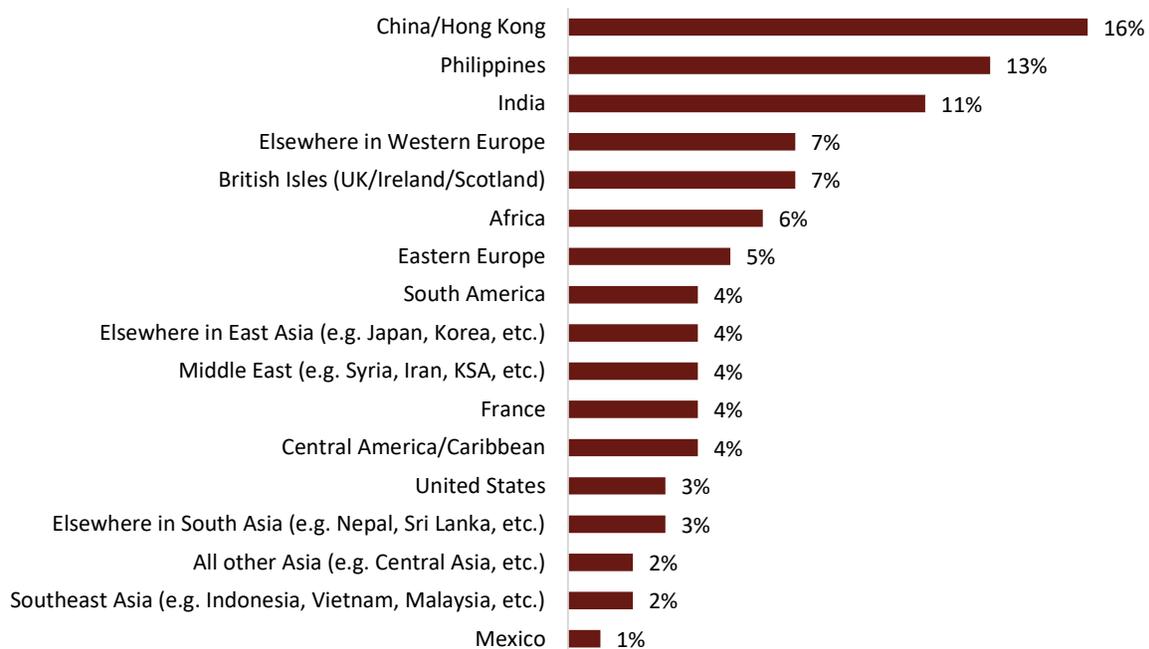
Third-Generation+ Canadians - those whose grandparents (or even further back) were born in Canada - are significantly more positive about Canada's performance compared to other countries, than First or Second Generation Canadians are when considering their own experience. This is not to say that any group is particularly negative, but a more muted praise from immigrants and Second-Generation Canadians, many of whom are members of minority groups themselves, suggests that their experience has not always been significantly better here than in other countries. Much of this can depend on the nation of origin for each individual. Below is a summary of the immigrant sample for the survey, for consideration when viewing responses to different questions:

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

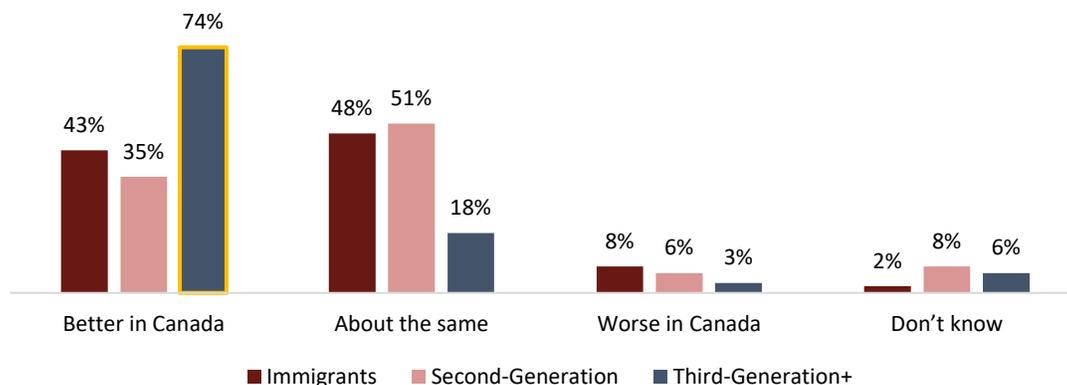
Origin for First Generation Immigrants

n = 386



With respect to freedom of religion, more than four in-ten (43%) immigrants say that Canada compares favourably to other places in the world, while half (48%) say that this nation rates similar to other countries. The perception that Canada outpaces other countries on religious freedom drops slightly among Second-Generation Canadians, to one-in-three (35%), but rises almost two-fold among Third-Generation+ Canadians (74%).

How do you think the situation here in Canada compares to that country when it comes to: Religious Freedom



CONTACT:

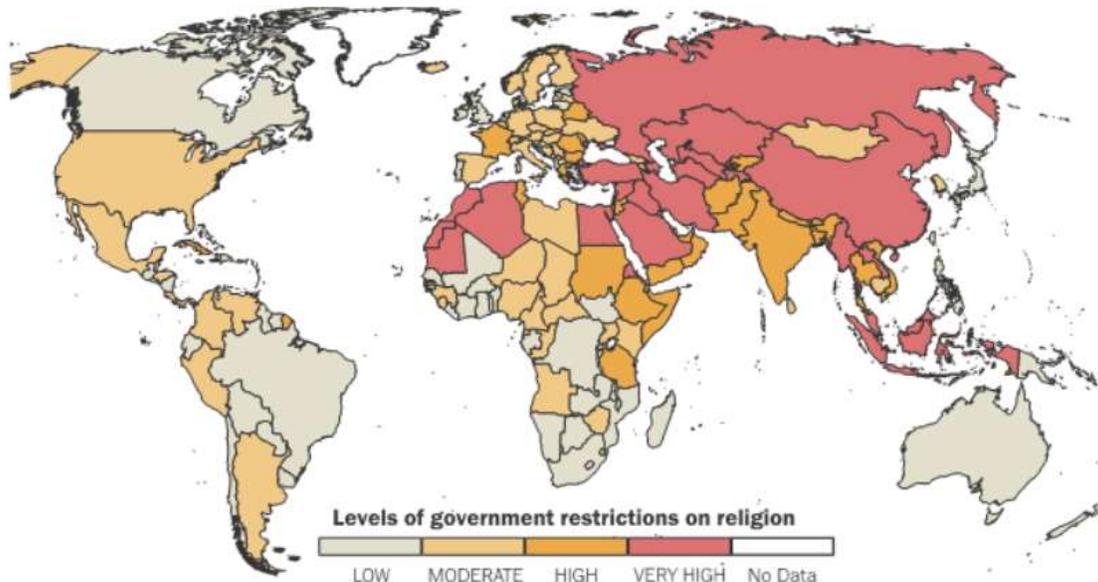
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

A [recent report](#) from Pew Research provides contextual confirmation of this generally positive notion. While the report noted a global uptick in harassment and government restriction on religion, including in the Americas, it found that Canada remains one of the global leaders on the issue of upholding religious freedom, with low levels of restriction on expression of faith:

Government restrictions on religion around the world

Level of government restrictions on religion in each country as of December 2016



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
"Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Canadians happy with the country's treatment of religious minorities

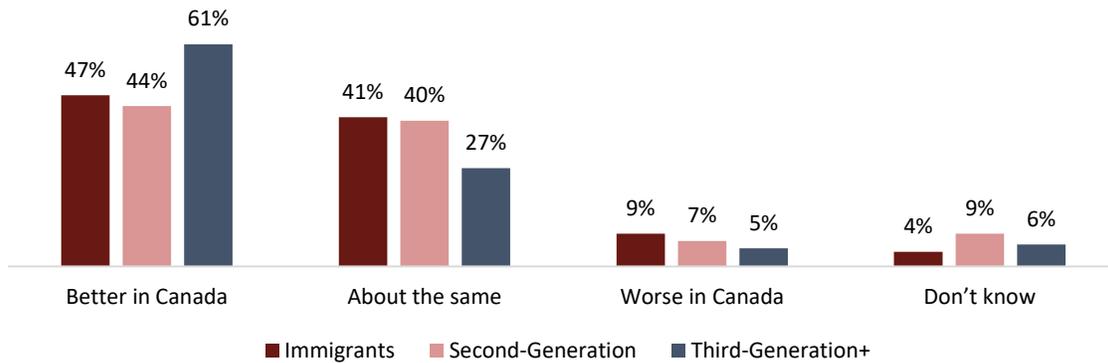
While the largest number of religious Canadians identify as Catholic (39%) or Protestant (27%), a number of other religions maintain a significant and [growing presence](#) in this country. Thus, the treatment of religious minorities is an important issue for faith-based communities and society as a whole.

On this question of how Canada treats its religious minority groups, those born outside Canada and those born to immigrants – i.e. Second-Generation Canadians - give a strong positive assessment regarding respect for religious minorities. In each case, more than four-in-ten say Canada is better than other countries when it comes to respecting religious minorities. This rises to six-in-ten (61%) among the rest of the country. Notably, however, one-in-ten First Generation Canadians (9%) say Canada actually fares worse on this issue:

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

How do you think the situation here in Canada compares to that country when it comes to: Respect for religious minorities

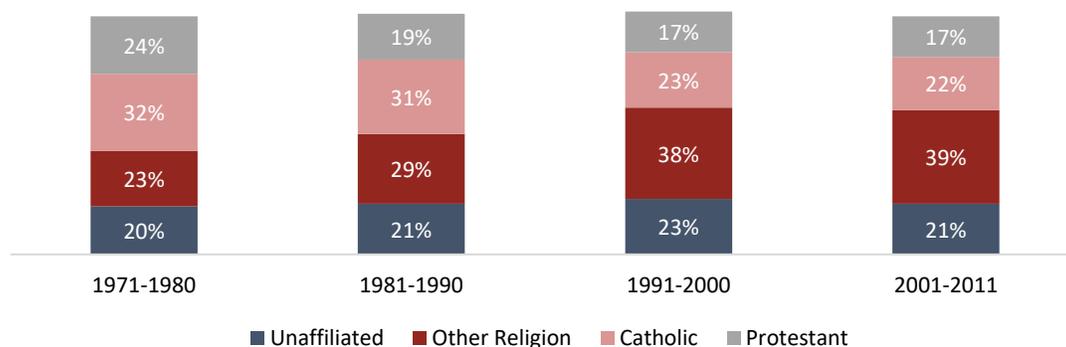


Harmony among different religious groups?

Canadians are encouraged when they consider the overall relationship between religious groups in their country. At least eight-in-ten across each of these three grouping say that Canada has either the same level of religious harmony, or better, than other countries that they have seen.

This is an issue that has garnered more attention in recent years as it has emerged as a “[fact of contemporary societies](#)”. Some observers have advocated for [more government involvement](#) in this policy area, pointing to the growing diversity of religion in the country in the years since Canada’s adoption of official multiculturalism. Policy, they contend, would help to promote and maintain religious harmony, which will be increasingly important given the diverse makeup of new Canadians. The graph below shows the growth in non-Christian religious immigration by decade:

Religious affiliation of immigrants in Canada by decade of arrival
Source: StatsCan

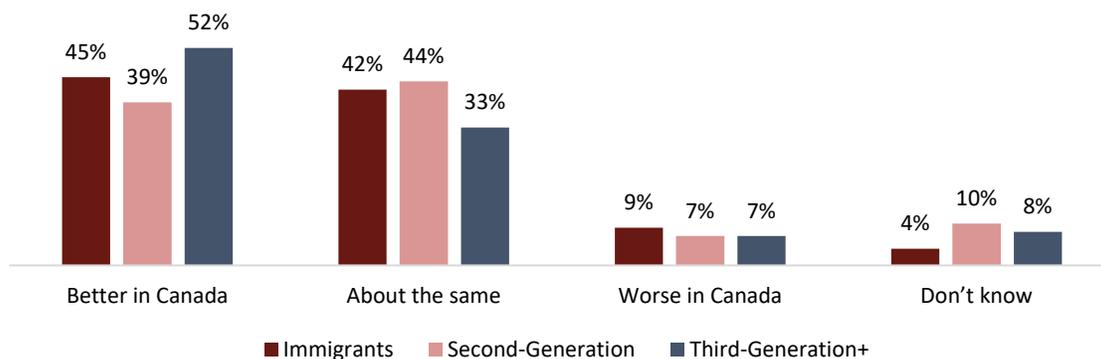


It is worth noting that the response to this question of religious harmony is likely swayed by which nations these Canadians may have in mind. Someone who immigrated from a peaceful, relatively

homogenous nation may have a much different experience than another who came from one with civil strife or an authoritarian regime in power.

Across each of the three cohorts, at least four-in-ten Canadians say that harmony among religious groups is better in Canada, while a similar number say they believe it to be similar:

**How do you think the situation here in Canada compares to that country when it comes to:
Harmony Among Different Religious Groups**



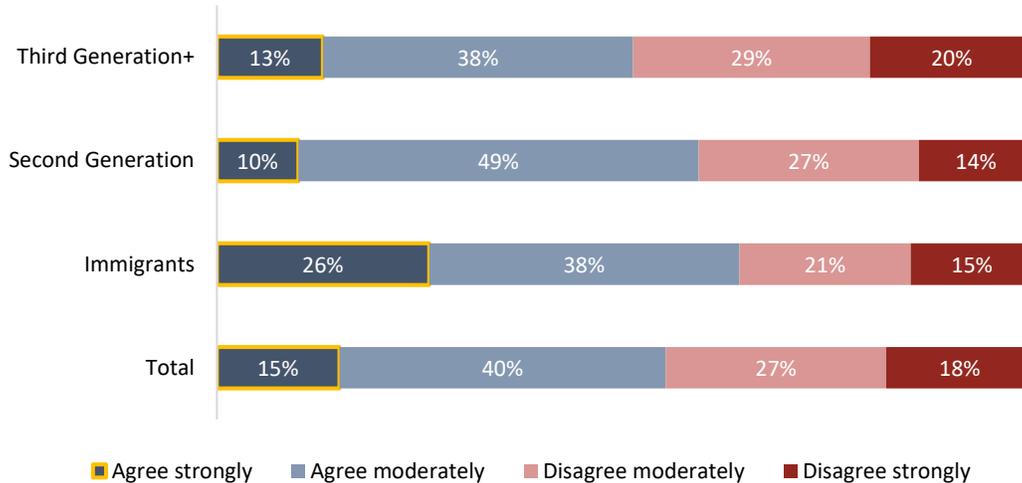
Comparing the beliefs and philosophies of the groups

So, how does a higher religiosity among newer Canadians affect the way that they approach their day-to-day lives? There are significant commonalities in the philosophies and beliefs of each of these groups, as well as areas where each expresses substantial uncertainty.

Majority say religious impact positive overall

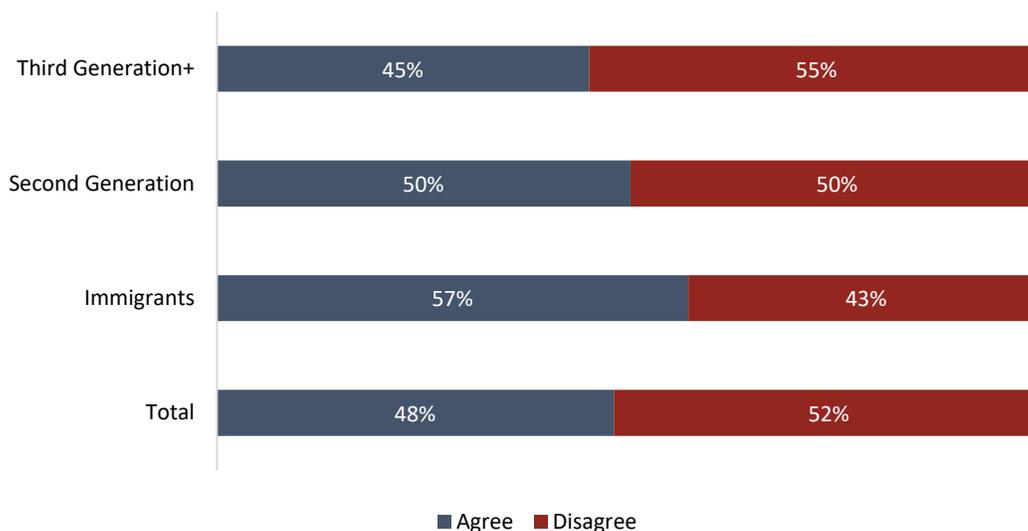
With respect to one long running debate, whether religion is a net positive or negative for the world, Third-Generation+ Canadians are evenly divided in the view that the impact is positive, while two-thirds of immigrants say that they believe it is. Perhaps the best indicator of how these groups differ is in the proportion of those who say they *strongly agree* with this positive sentiment. Immigrants are twice as likely as both groups to say this:

I think that religion's overall impact on the world is positive



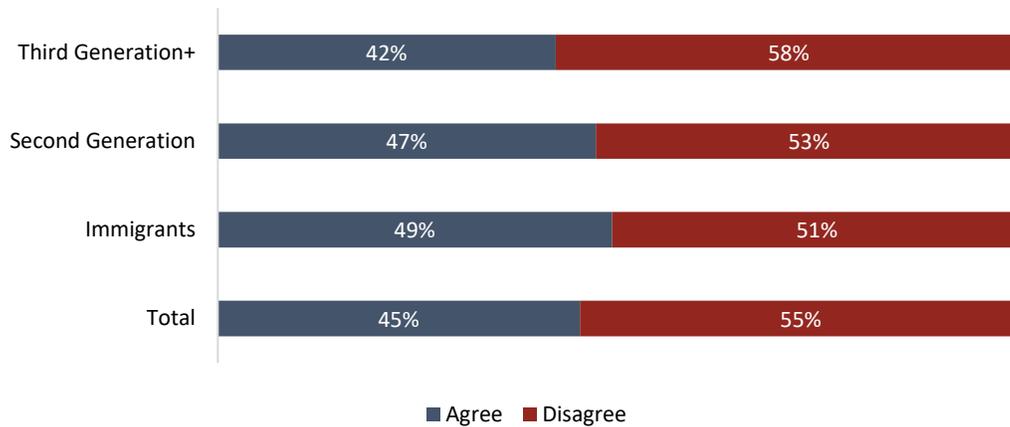
That said, while a majority of Canadians say that religion is a positive for the globe en masse, half are inclined to disagree that all religions bring the same value to the proverbial universal table. More than half (55%) of Third-Generation+ disagree, while four-in-ten immigrants (43%) say the same:

All of the great religions of the world are equally good and true



This uncertainty about the value of all religions appears to extend to some discomfort with those who practice religion most fiercely. A large number from each of these groups say that they are generally uncomfortable around people who are religiously devout.

Generally speaking, I feel a bit uncomfortable around people who are religiously devout

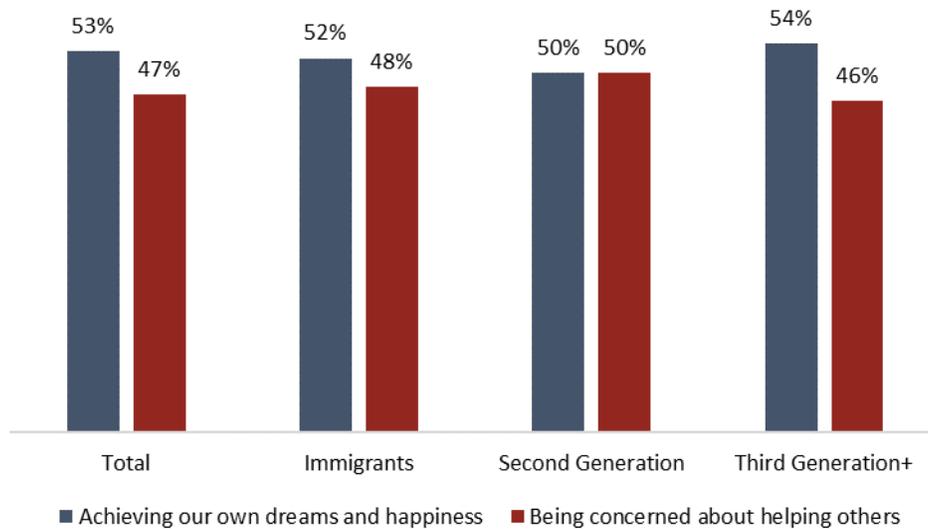


Life’s biggest questions

It is often said that one of the core benefits of a faith-based upbringing is the foundational beliefs and values it can provide. This is evident in a number of face-off questions asked by the Angus Reid Institute. Religiously committed individuals are significantly more likely to say, for example, that the best way to live life it to be more focused on helping others, rather than personal achievement. Seven-in-ten among the Religiously Committed say this, compared to just 38 per cent among the non-religious.

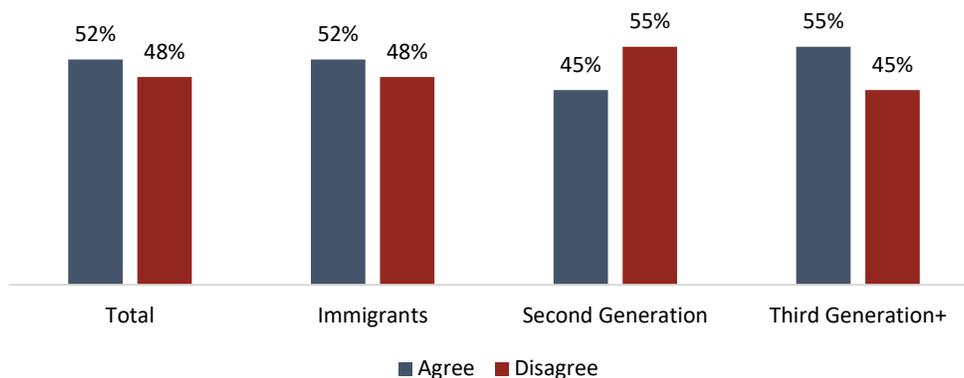
However, when it comes to the distribution of this belief among the three segments with respect to immigration, the responses are nearly identical. Each group is divided about how best to approach life:

What is the best way to live life? Should we be MORE focused on:



Further, the same division in opinion is evident when considering what a person considers to be right or wrong. Roughly half of each of the three segments say that this is a matter of personal opinion, while the other half believe there are inherent rules to govern society that are indisputable:

What's right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion



A spiritual continuum

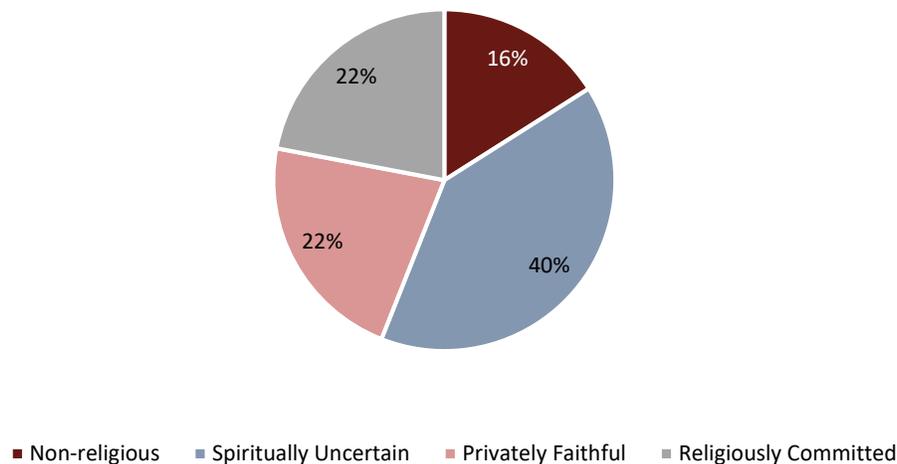
While they have considerable similarities, there are also evident leanings in each group canvassed. In looking at faith in modern society, the Angus Reid Institute created a composite index based on responses to several questions about faith and experience with God or a higher power. This tool has allowed researchers to group respondents into like-minded segments and compare attitudes.

For a more detailed analysis of this continuum in society [click here](#) or view methodology notes.

Along this continuum, four distinct groups emerge. Roughly one-in-five Canadians place near the two categories on the higher end of spiritual intensity, with 22 per cent of Canadians professing deep devotion - the Religiously Committed – and the same number leading a faith-based life, but more privately – the Privately Faithful.

The largest group of Canadians can be described as Spiritually Uncertain (40%). This group is defined by its relative lack of certainty. For example, while Non-Believers are likely to say they “definitely do not believe” in concepts of God, life after death, heaven and hell, the Spiritually Uncertain are much more likely to choose “I don’t think so” than to say a definitive “no”. That aforementioned Non-Believer group comprises about 16 per cent of the Canadian population.

Four Canadian Mindsets on Religion

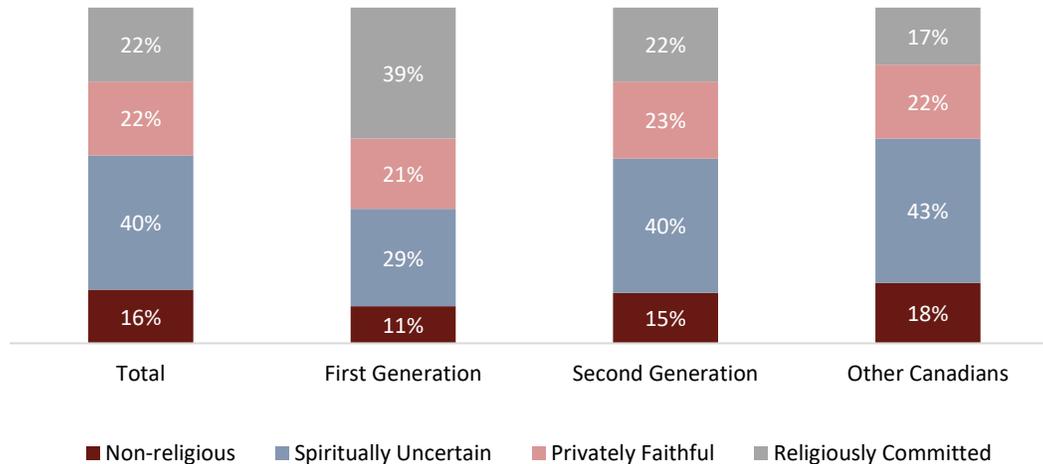


New Canadians on the spiritual continuum

Where do new and newer Canadians fit on this spectrum?

Research shows that foreign born Canadians are more likely to carry with them a faith-based lifestyle which, in recent years, has provided a [boost to declining church attendance](#) in this country. This propensity is borne out in relation to the spiritual continuum. Indeed, four-in-ten First Generation Canadians (39%) are among the most faithfully intense segment – the Religiously Committed. This represents almost twice the proportion of the average population and more than a two-to-one ration when compared to Canadians whose grandparents were born in Canada (39% to 17%):

Index by time in Canada



These ratios are perhaps unsurprising to many who have [observed these trends](#) over past decades, but are nonetheless an important reflection of Canada's religious mosaic.

While, in some senses, faith in Canadian society has appeared to be [fading in favour of secularism](#), many of those who settle in this country are likely to desire a religious infrastructure in order to situate themselves economically and socially. For more on the faith-based community and its relationship with newcomers, read our first report [here](#).

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by generation (1st, 2nd, 3rd+) [click here](#).

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org