

Social Values in Canada: Consensus on assisted dying & LGBTQ2 rights, division over abortion rights, diversity

Political divide, common for most issues, largely absent from assisted-dying discussion

January 24, 2020 – With the federal government set to end its consultation process on possible changes to assisted dying legislation Monday, Canadians have only a short window left to comment.

But new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute already indicates support for fewer regulations associated with doctor assisted dying has increased in recent years.

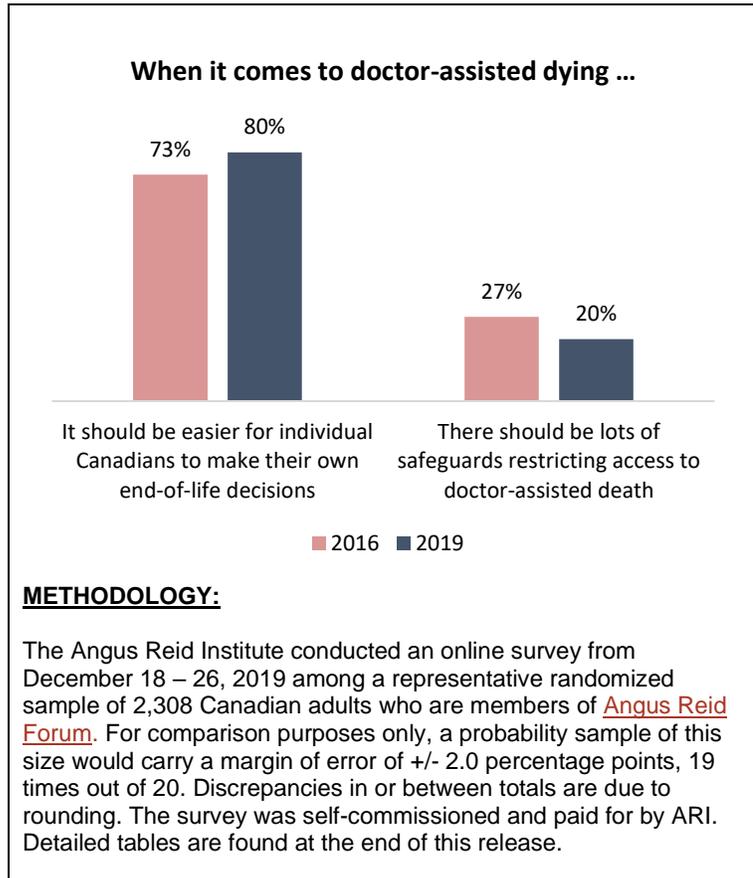
Indeed, four-in-five (80%) Canadians now say it should be easier to make their own end-of-life decisions, compared to nearly three-quarters (73%) in 2016. This, compared to one-in-five who say there should be greater restrictions to doctor-assisted dying procedures.

These findings comprise part of a larger, wide ranging survey on attitudes towards social values in Canada, a subject area that came to define last year's federal election campaign and – against the backdrop of a budding Conservative Party leadership race – continues to play a prominent role in political and policy discussions today.

The survey shows that while some issues are now the domain of general agreement, others remain bitterly divisive.

More Key Findings:

- The debate over whether legislation to ban third trimester abortion is needed continues to divide. Half say a law should be in place to prohibit the procedure unless the mother is in danger, while half would leave the situation as it currently is, with no formal law in place
- On the issue of religion in public life, three-in-five say it should be hidden largely from view in a secular society (60%) while a significant segment, two-in-five would prefer if Canada celebrated the role of faith in society more often.
- Half of Canadians say the government should be more involved in regulating aspects of the economy, while half would leave it more to the free market



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About ARI

*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.*

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Part One: What, if anything, unites us?

There is perhaps no better exemplification of ongoing divisions within the Canadian public than the result of the 2019 federal election. The Conservative Party won the most votes, [sweeping entire provinces](#), yet sustaining almost no presence in others. The Liberals formed government, [dominating Ontario and Atlantic Canada](#) but failing to win a single seat in Alberta or Saskatchewan. In Quebec, four federal parties, all with distinct platforms, received double digit support.

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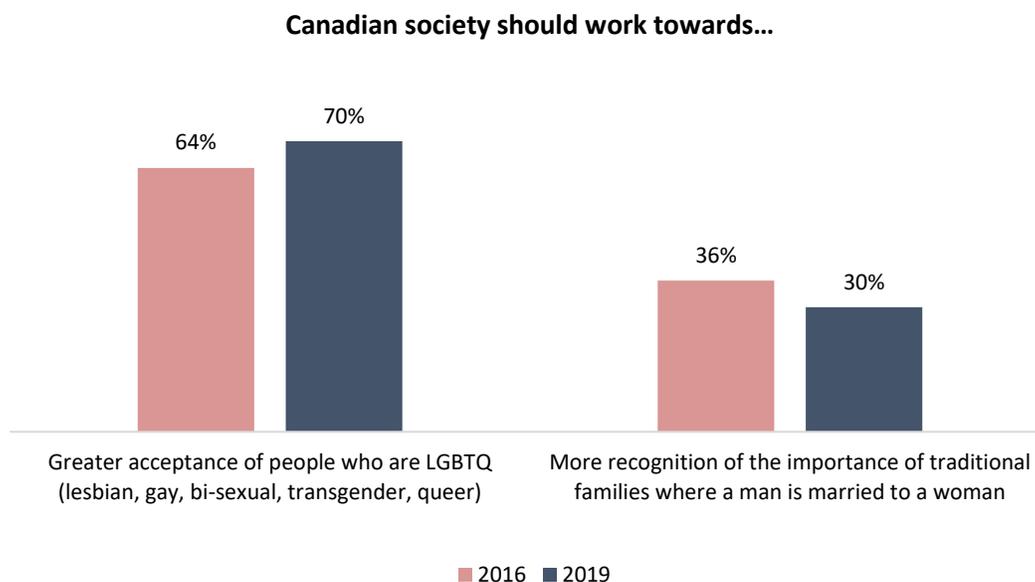
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It is important to remember that these political divisions are manifestations of individual issues, aggregated into formal party platforms. Underpinning the Canadian story are myriad values, some unifying and some separating.

To better understand the Canadian story, the Angus Reid Institute asked a series of faceoff questions about values and perspectives. It is clear that certain challenges face Canada, but before diving into the divisions, it is worth noting the areas where Canadians generally agree.

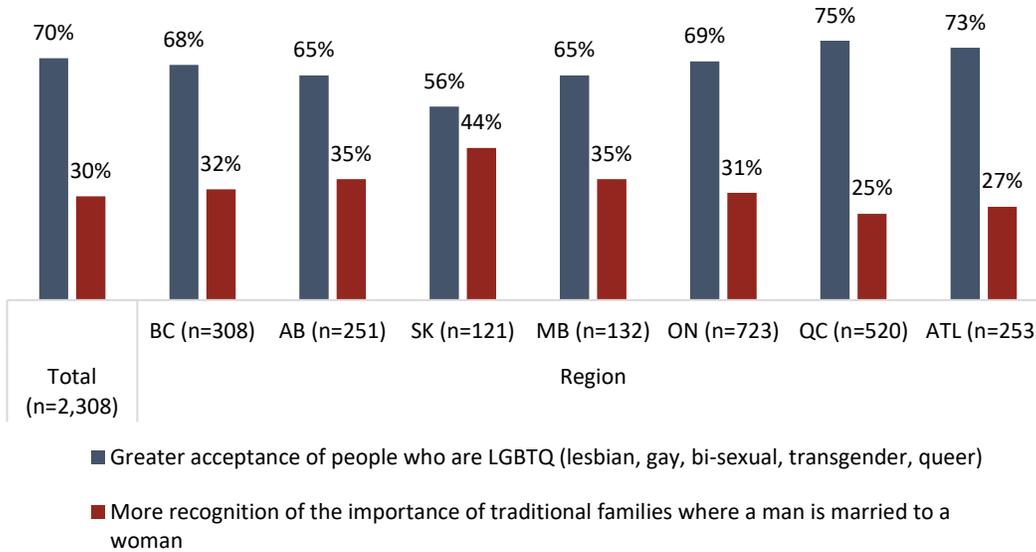
Acceptance of LGBTQ rights

One area of Canadian society that offers an example of unity is the public's perceptions of accepting lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans and queer rights. Views on this file appear to be progressing towards even greater acceptance. Seven-in-ten (70%) Canadians say society should work towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ people, compared to 30 per cent who would prefer more recognition of traditional families where a man is married to a woman. This represents an increase in the number of people who take the more progressive side of this faceoff compared to 2016, when Canadians were asked these questions as a part of [a study of Canadian values](#) done in partnership with the CBC. This finding is consistent across age generations ([see detailed tables](#)).



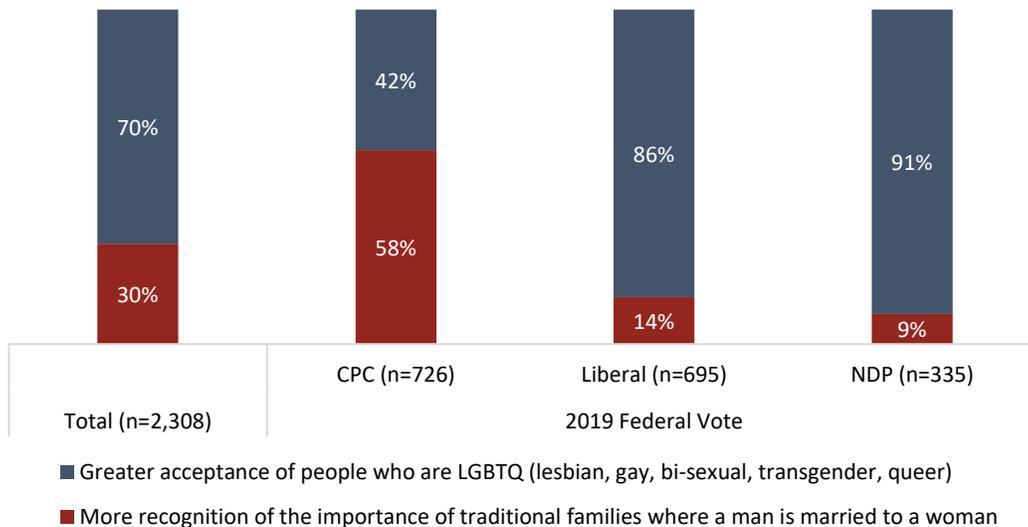
Regionally, a majority of residents in each area of the country lean towards more LGBTQ acceptance, though these proportions are highest in Quebec (75%) and Atlantic Canada (73%):

Canadian society should work towards...



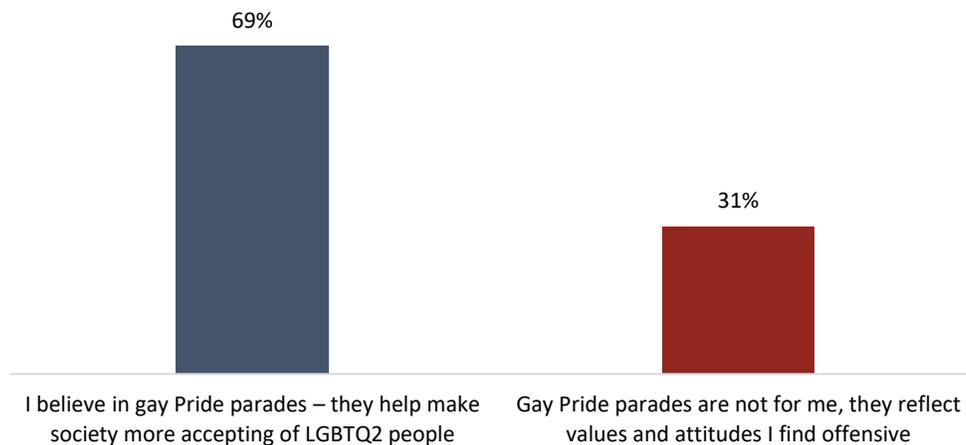
Greater acceptance of LGBTQ Canadians was a much-discussed issue throughout the recent federal election campaign as Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer’s absence from Pride parades across the country [drew criticism](#) from other federal party leaders. It is particularly notable, as that party considers its future ahead of a late 2020 leadership contest, that two-in-five Conservative voters say that their country should work towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ people. The emphasis on traditional families is a majority view, but by no means a unanimous one:

Canadian society should work towards...



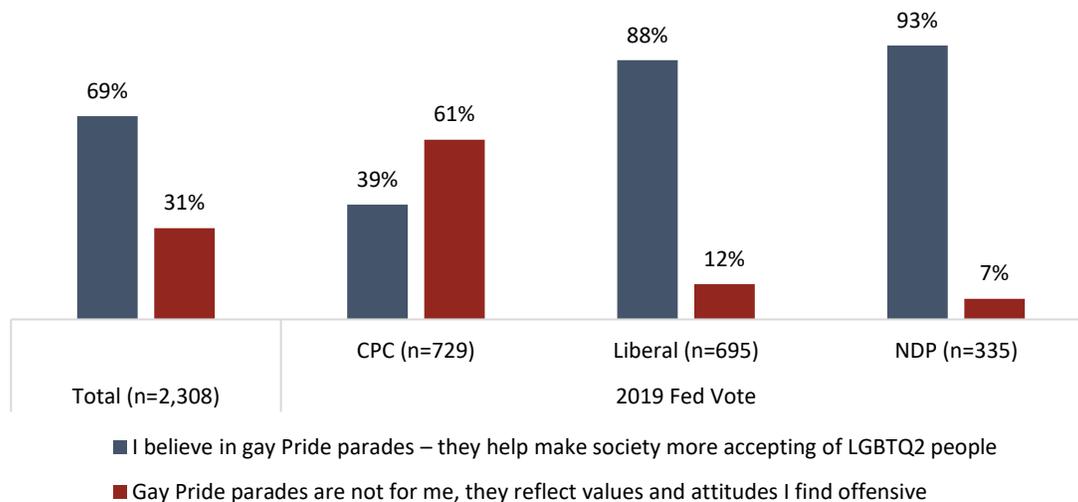
The Angus Reid Institute also asked respondents about their views regarding Pride parades. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has made a point of attending numerous Pride celebrations, as has NDP leader Jagmeet Singh. The vast majority of Canadians (69%) say they look at Pride parades as a way of helping make society more accepting of the LGBTQ2 community. Three-in-ten Canadians (31%) take the opposite stance, saying they find the values and attitudes surrounding Pride to be personally offensive:

Would you say..



Perhaps unsurprisingly, political affiliation is the biggest factor in a person’s view of this issue ([see detailed tables for more demographic information](#)). Conservatives are considerably more likely to hold the view that the values and attitudes reflected by Pride parades are personally offensive, though again, 39 per cent say they believe in the value of these celebrations:

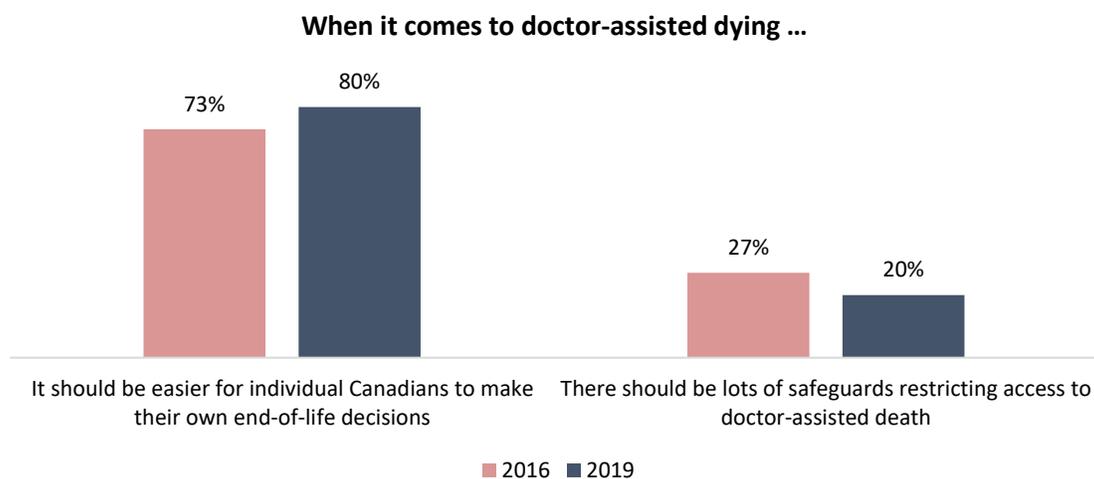
Would you say...



End-of-life decisions

Another ongoing discussion over recent years in Canada has been the right to doctor-assisted dying. The Superior Court of Quebec [ruled this past September](#) that a requirement in the current federal law, which limits access to assisted dying to terminally ill patients, was unconstitutional. The Trudeau government has accepted the court ruling and [began public consultations](#) regarding how best to amend the federal law.

Canadians overall appear in favour of these recent developments, Four-in-five Canadians (80%) say that it should be easier for individual Canadians to make their own end-of-life decisions when it comes to doctor-assisted dying. This represents an increase from 73 per cent in 2016. One-in-five (20%) prefer more safeguards to restrict access to this type of procedure:

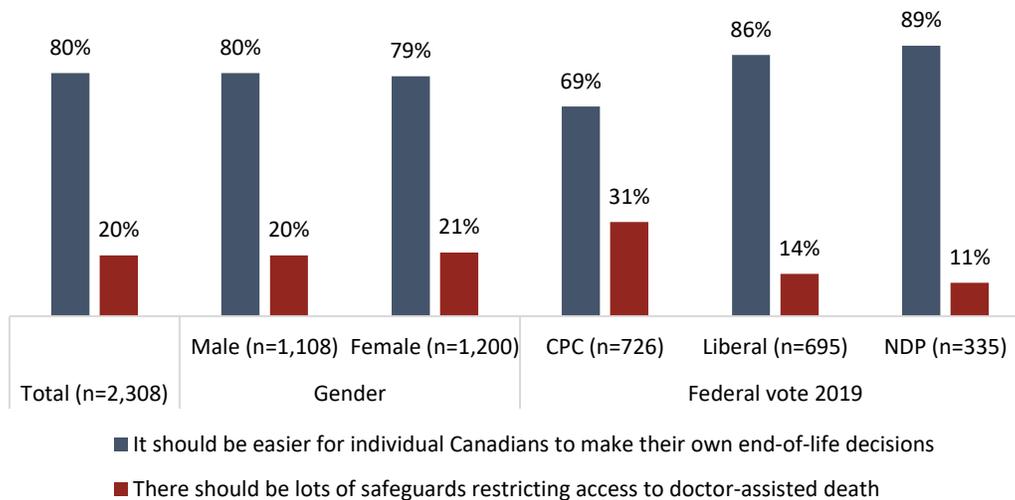


Men and women agree on this issue at an equal rate and across the political spectrum, often a source of disagreement, at least seven-in-ten supporters of each party agree that it should be easier for individuals to make decisions about doctor-assisted dying:

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When it comes to doctor-assisted dying...



Part Two: Divisive issues

Abortion Rights

An issue that generates far less unified opinion is abortion access in Canada. The Angus Reid Institute asked respondents in particular about one of the most controversial aspects of abortion policy, that of third-trimester procedures. Canada is one of few nations with no specific legal restrictions on abortions. After the [1988 Morgentaler](#) Supreme Court case, abortion has been treated as a [medical procedure like any](#) other, having no specific law to regulate it.

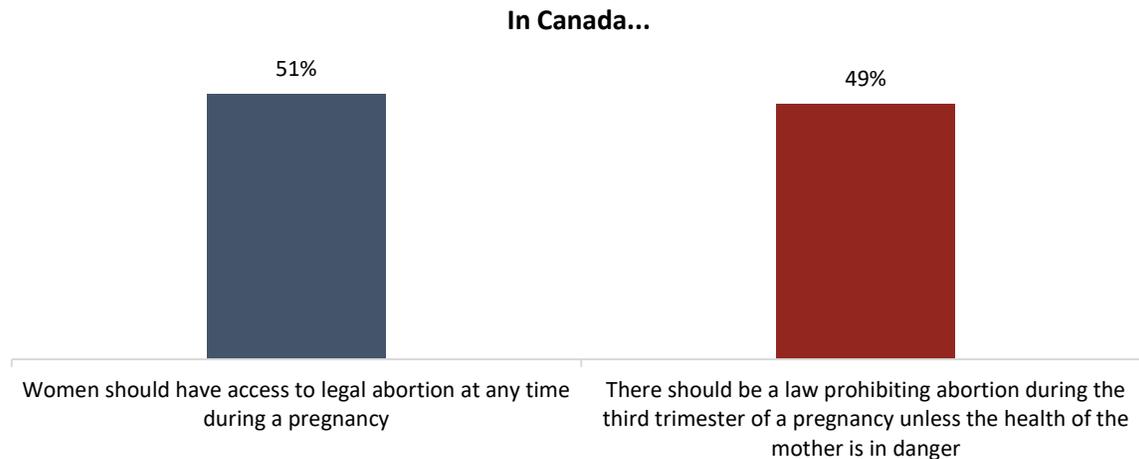
Those on one side of the debate argue only [three hospitals](#) in the country offer abortion procedures up until a [24-week cut](#) off (considered the gestational age of viability), and none offer abortions after that period. They further point out that of the approximately 22,087 abortions recorded by the [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#) in 2017, 3 per cent were performed after 21 weeks of gestation, though nearly 20 per cent were classified as unknown.

For those on the other side of the debate, however, these numbers are moot, as they argue even one late-term termination is one too many. It is their conviction that the unborn have rights, a principle that transcends statistics on the number and prevalence of near-third trimester procedures.

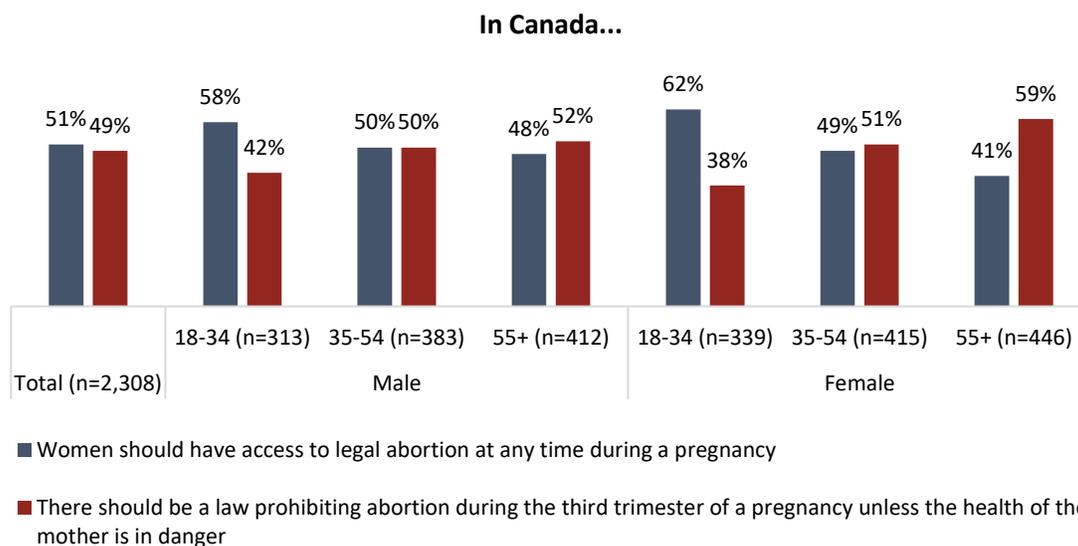
The data show the issue of late-term abortion is far from settled in the minds of Canadians. Half say that the country *should* have a law restricting abortion in the third trimester unless the mother is at risk (the third trimester begins in week 28 of a pregnancy):

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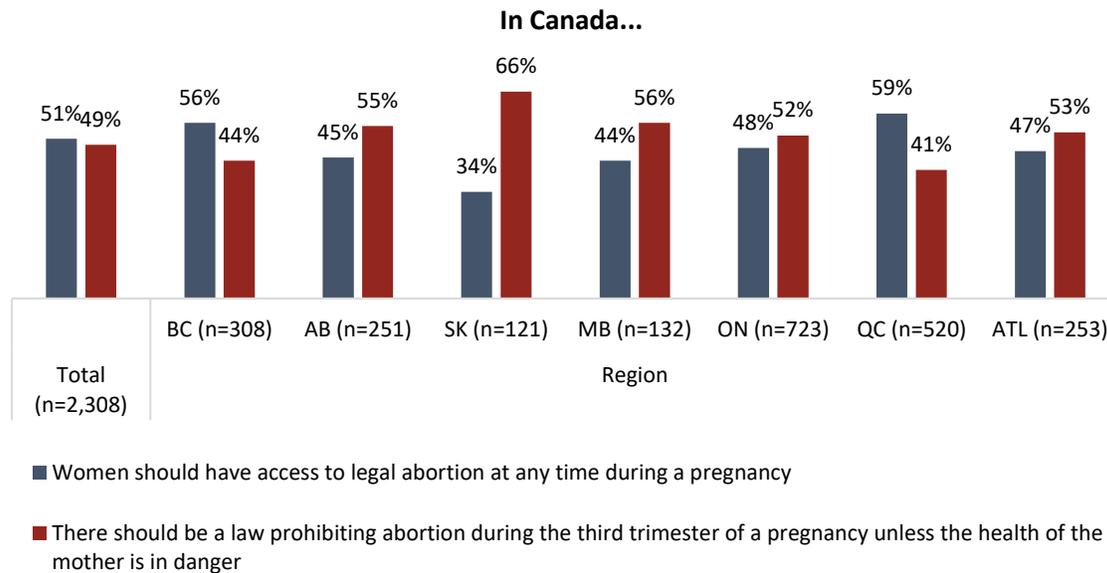
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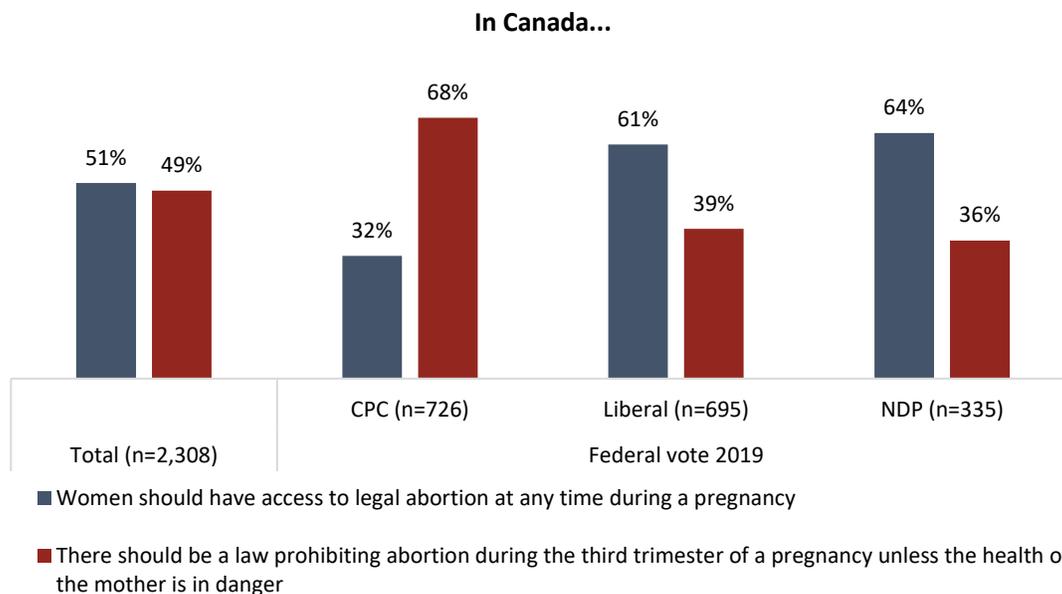
Generationally, younger Canadians are less likely to feel a law is necessary, while a slight majority of those ages 55 and over feel it is:



Canadians are divided on this issue across the country. In Quebec and British Columbia, closer to six-in-ten residents support the right to choose throughout the entire gestation period. Meanwhile, majorities in the Prairies disagree:



As with others, this issue is also one that splits along the lines of political partisanship. The majority of past Conservative voters would like to see legislation introduced. And although the Liberal Party and NDP have taken unequivocal pro-choice stances on abortion policy, at least one-third of their own voting bases support legislation restricting late term procedures as well:



Religion: a complex discussion

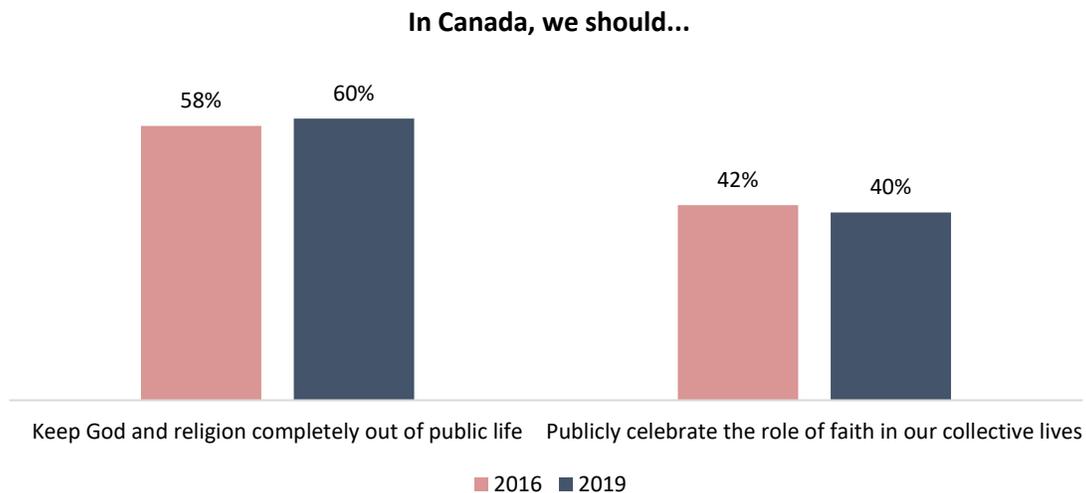
The place of religion in Canada is one that has evolved considerably over recent decades. While formal church attendance has dropped considerably, faith is personally important to a significant number of Canadians. Consider that only 29 per cent of Canadians say they never pray (see detailed tables).

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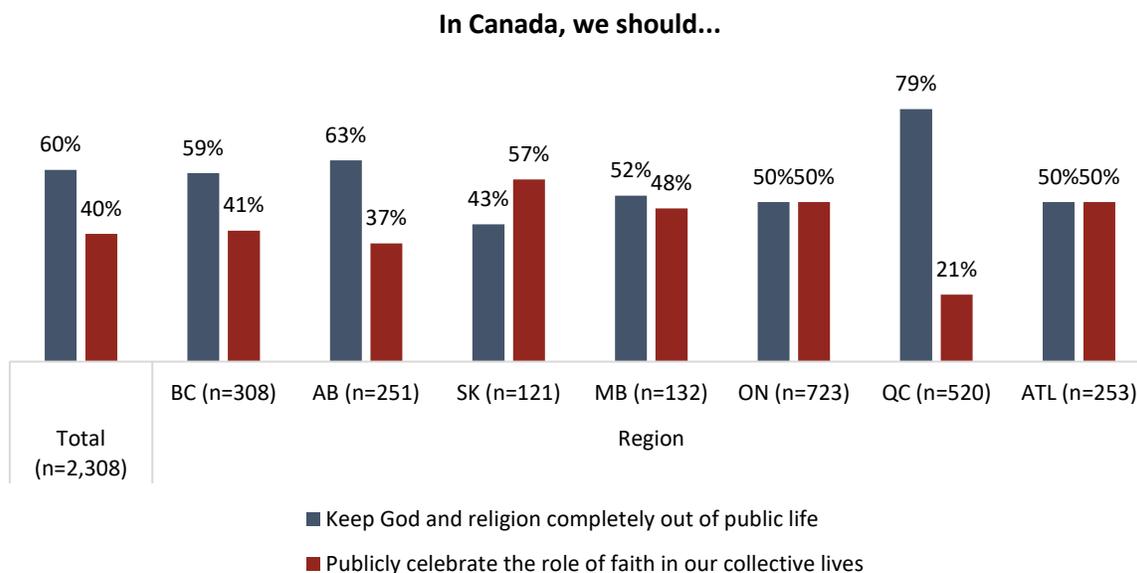
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Where does faith fit in public life?

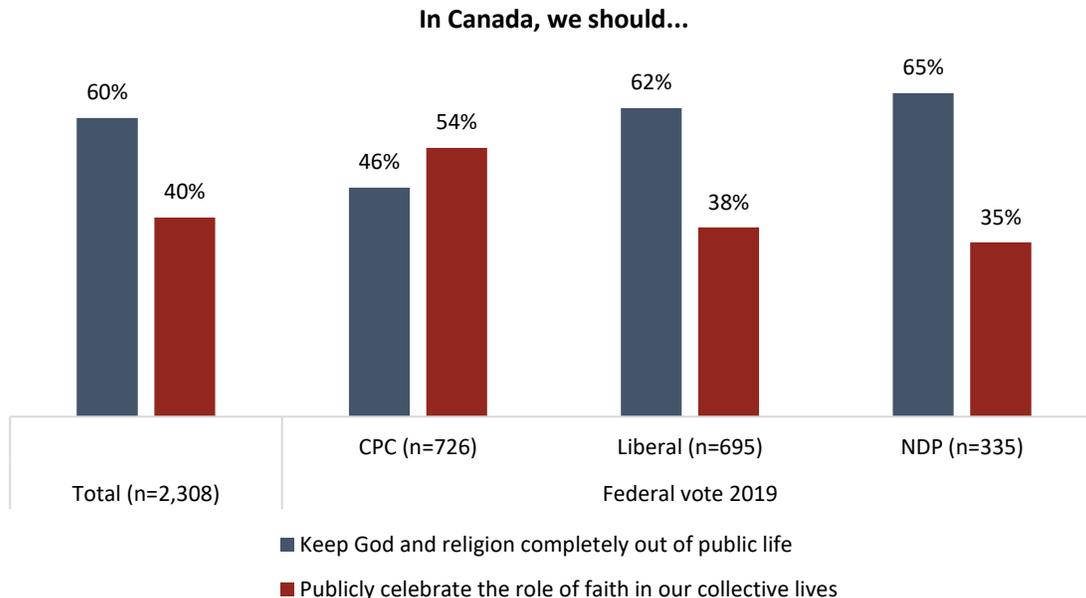
Personal faith in Canada, however, does not necessarily extend to public faith. Overall, three-in-five (60%) Canadians say that they prefer the secular approach of keeping religion out of public life, while the resultant two-in-five say that more emphasis should be placed on publicly celebrating the role of faith in society:



Quebec residents are by far the most likely to support secularism. In that province, 79 per cent say that God and religion should be hidden from public life. The rest of the country is much more divided, including exactly 50 per cent on each side of the debate in both Ontario and Atlantic Canada:



This issue is more divisive than most *within* each major federal party. Conservatives are divided close to evenly about which approach would be better, while significant minorities of Liberal and NDP voters like the idea of celebrating faith in the public square more often:

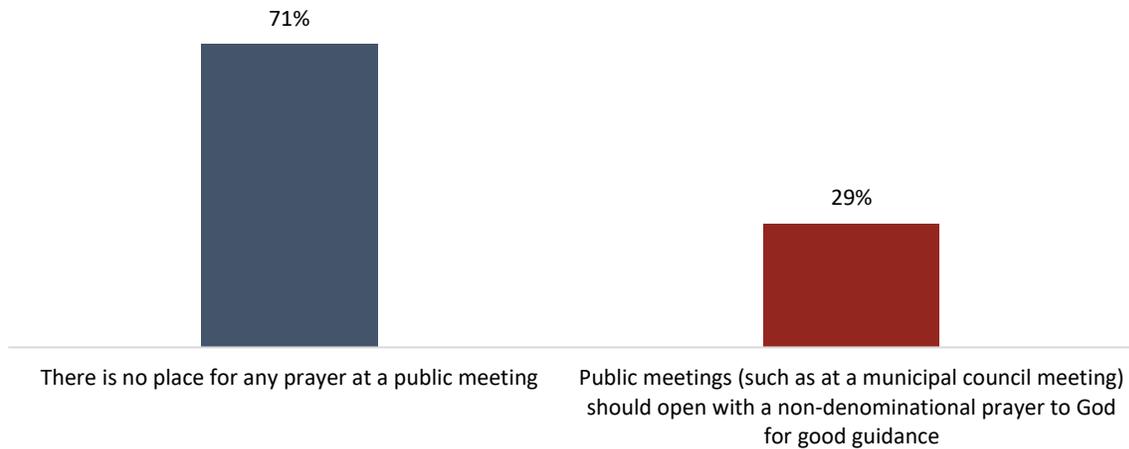


Vast majority do not want public prayer at council meetings

One example of public faith in Canada is the practice of conducting a public prayer at the beginning of council or legislative meetings. For example, the British Columbia legislative assembly begins its meeting with a “daily prayer and reflection”, though the reflection portion was [added just this year](#). Other jurisdictions, [like Calgary](#), have stopped their practice of starting meetings with a prayer over the last several years.

Most Canadians would like to see the practice done away with. Seven-in-ten (71%) Canadians overall say “there is no place for any prayer at a public meeting” compared to 29 per cent that say it is fine for meeting to start in this way:

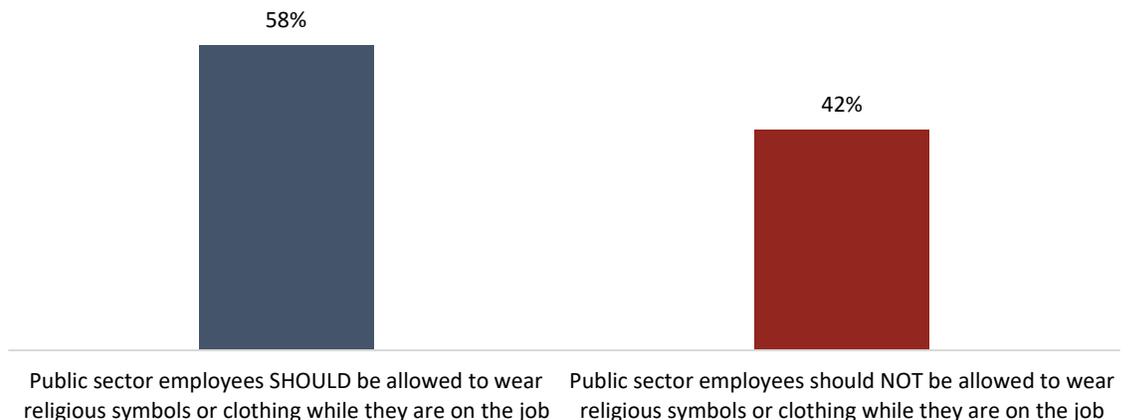
Would you say...



Quebec an outlier on religious symbols

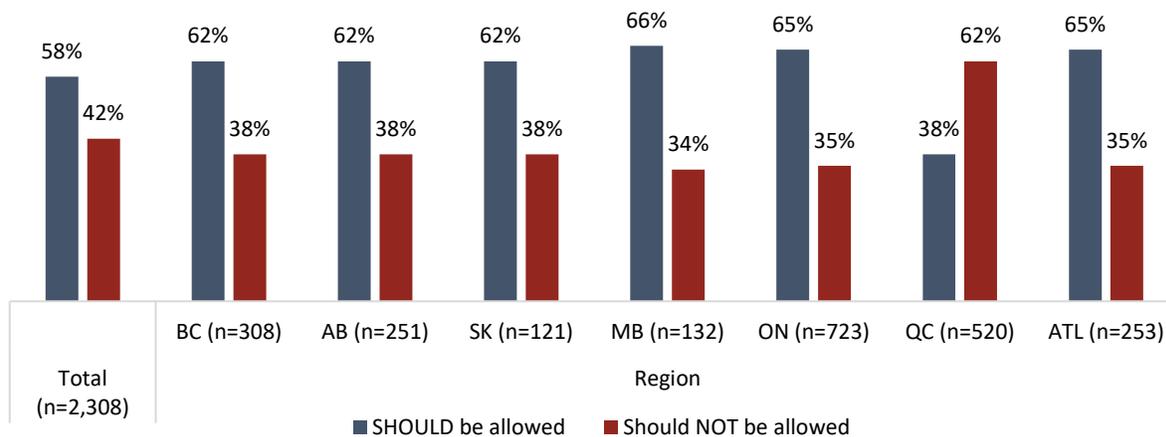
While there is majority agreement on keeping religion out of public life in Canada, religious accommodation evidently does extend to religious symbols for a majority of Canadians. Six-in-ten (58%) say that public sector employees should be allowed to wear religious symbols or clothing while they are on the job. Quebec’s Bill 21 has prohibited this in the province since it was passed last year.

Would you say...



Although views on Bill 21 are close to split in the country overall, it is important to acknowledge regional discrepancies on the issue. The number of Canadians who disagree with the bill rises to at least 62 per cent in all provinces except Quebec:

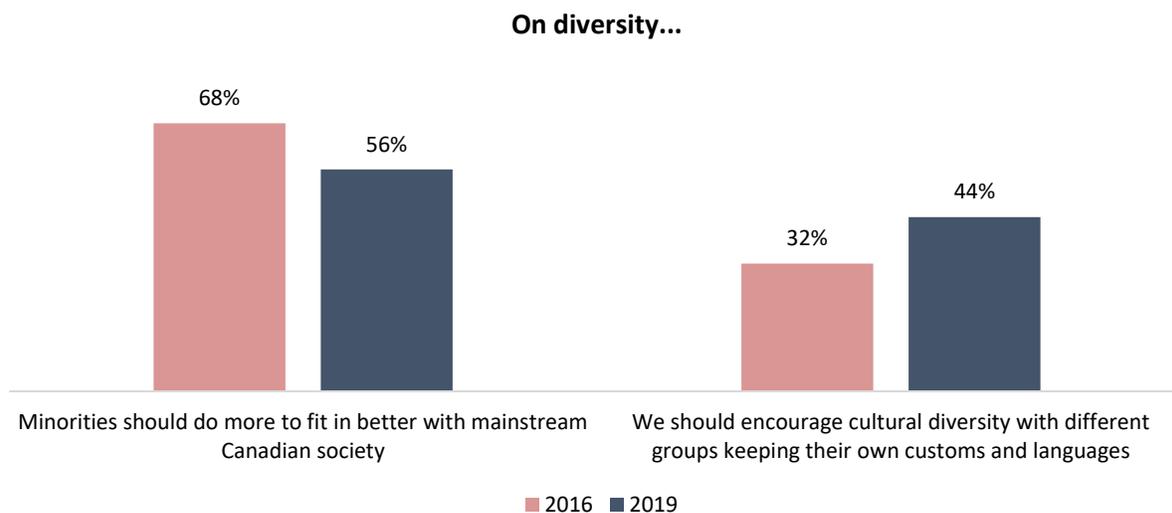
Views on public sector employees wearing religious symbols or clothing while they are on the job



Just how accommodating are we?

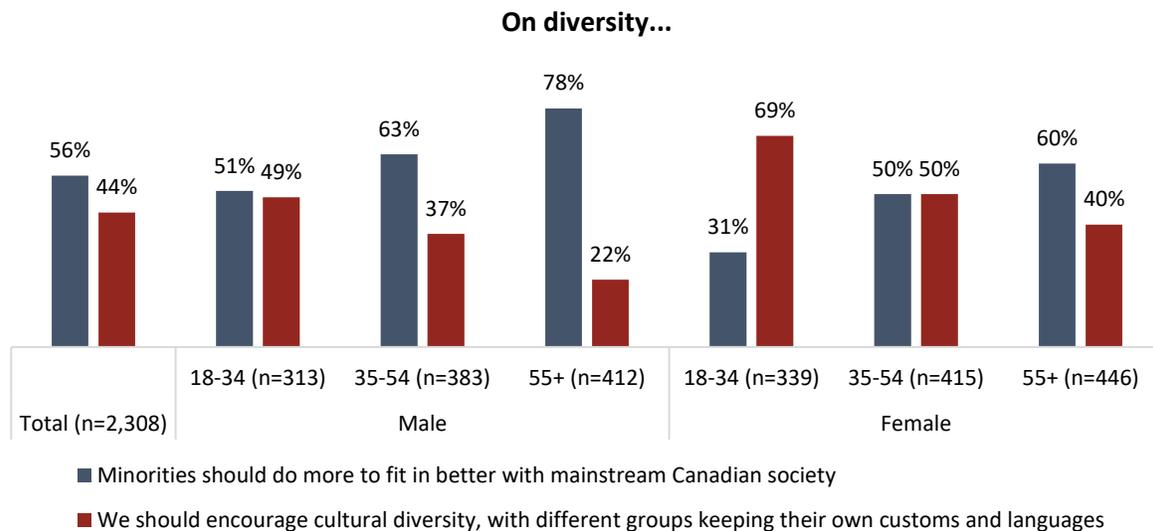
Canada was the first country in the world to adopt an official multiculturalism policy, doing so in 1971. Since then, this policy has often been lauded as one of the things that makes Canada what it is. In 2016, when Canadians were asked whether minorities should do more to fit in with mainstream Canadian society or whether we, as a country, should encourage cultural diversity and a focus on allowing new Canadians to keep their own customs and languages, 68 per cent chose the former.

Now, Canadians have shifted towards promoting cultural diversity. Just over two-in-five (44%) Canadians now choose that side of the faceoff, but a slight majority maintain the view that new Canadians need to do more to fit in:

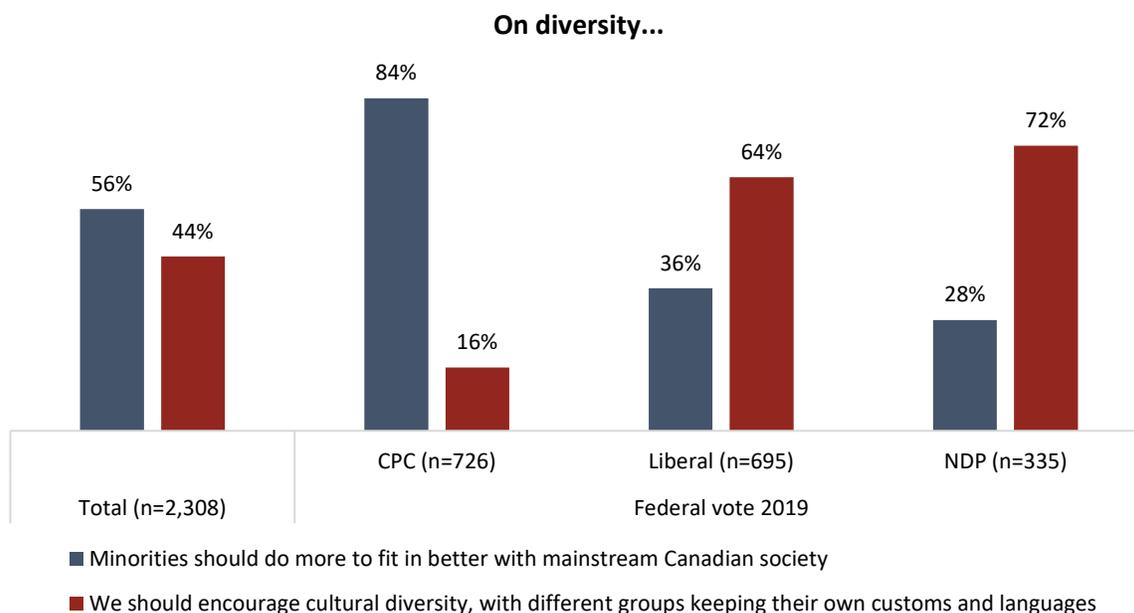


Age and gender drive divergent views of cultural diversity

Opinions on this faceoff are varied based on age and gender. For example, seven-in-ten young women (69%), those ages 18 to 34, say that cultural diversity should be paramount. Conversely, men ages 55 and older lean most heavily the other way:



Conservative Party supporters are close to unanimous that new Canadians should do more to fit in with mainstream society (84%), whereas two-thirds of Liberals (64%) and seven-in-ten NDP supporters (72%) prefer cultural diversity:

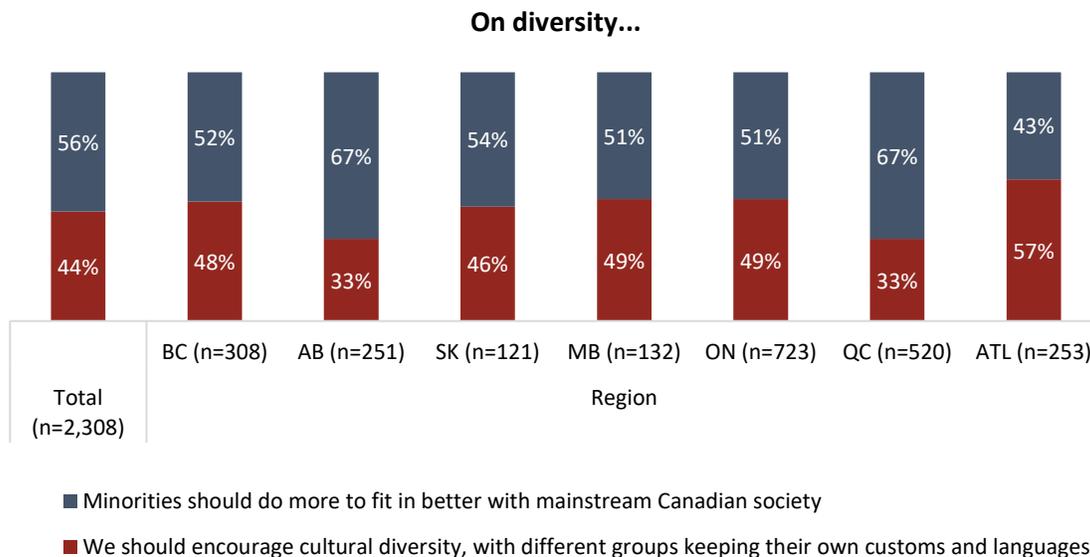


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Alberta in step with Quebec

When it comes to public opinion, there are few issues that generate agreement between residents of Alberta and Quebec. This, however, is one of those rare issues. In each province, two-thirds of residents, the highest levels in the country, want minorities to do more to fit in with mainstream Canadian society. The rest of the country is divided close to evenly between each perspective:



Regulation of economic affairs is divisive

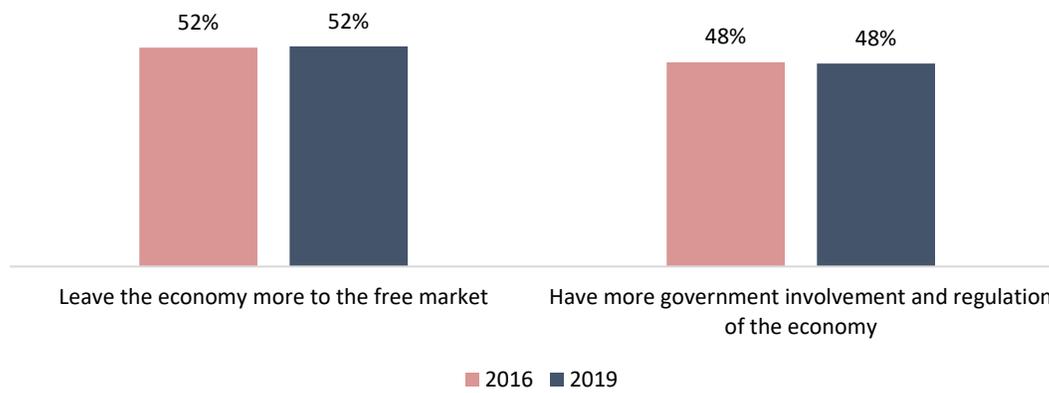
Government involvement in the market

Canadians have fundamentally different views when it comes to economic philosophy. For half, Adam Smith's invisible hand should largely be left to guide the free market and people's interactions within it. For an equal number, the government should be more involved to ensure that proper regulations are in place. This is a split that has not changed since Canadians were asked in 2016, as seen in the graph below:

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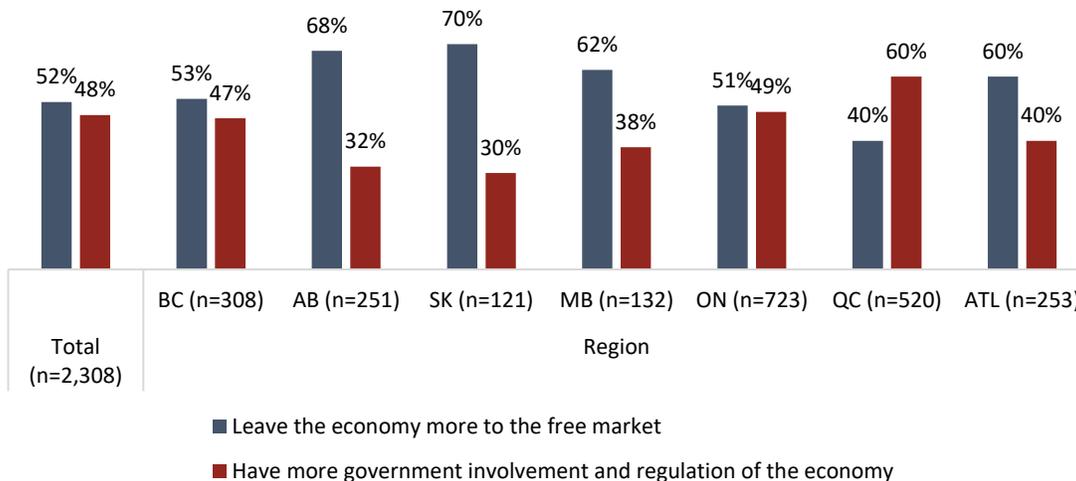
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Overall, it would be better to...

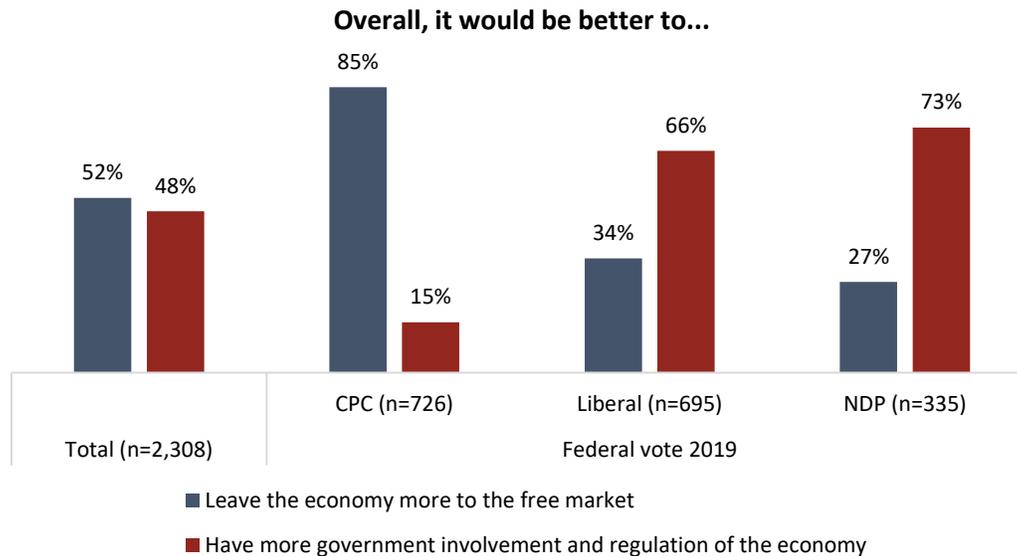


Free market principles are perhaps unsurprisingly, held in higher regard among Conservative voters, and within provinces that are most likely to elect Conservative representatives. Seven-in-ten in Alberta and Saskatchewan prefer a hands-off approach, while Quebecers are most likely to support economic regulation:

Overall, it would be better to...

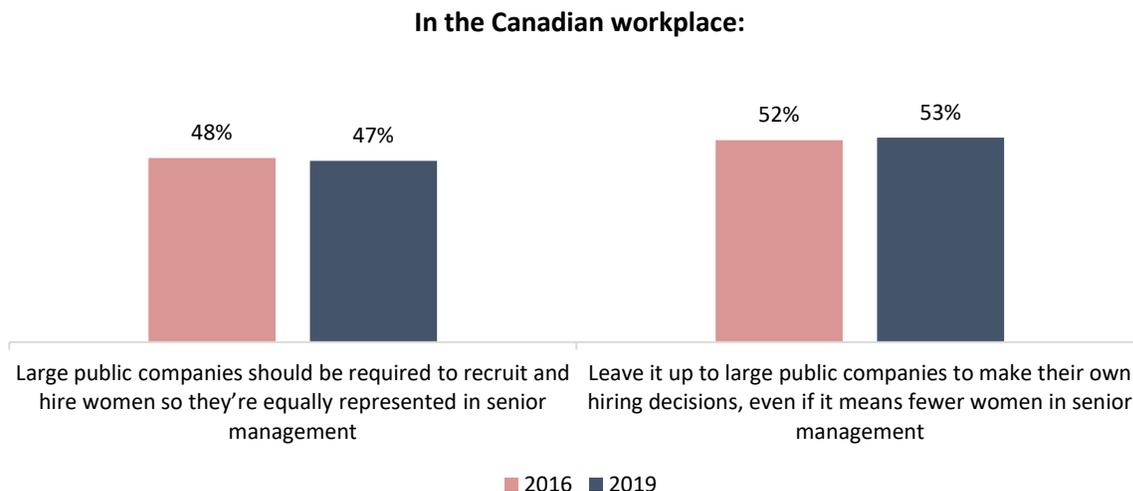


Political views are a key indicator of where Canadians stand on this divide over economic philosophy and policy:



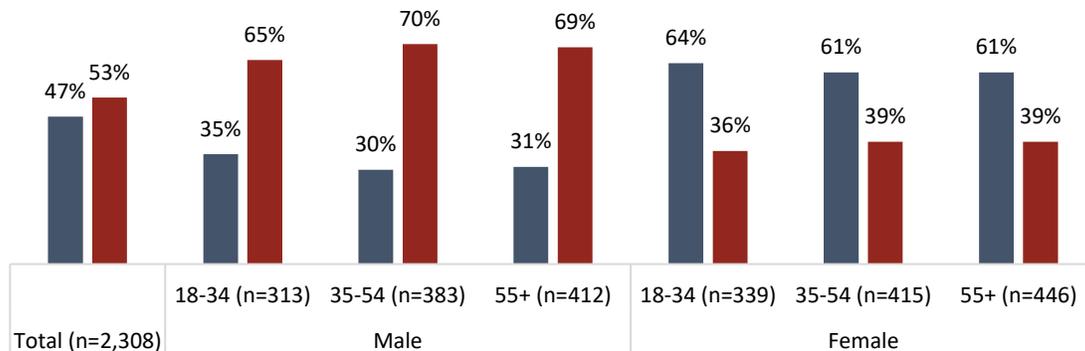
Requirements for more women in senior management?

The same, near-50-50 split, is evident when it comes to increasing requirements to ensure that more women are offered positions in senior management. In 2018, just 23 companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange had a female CEO. This represents approximately 3 per cent of companies listed. Overall, about one-quarter of senior managers in the private sector in Canada were women as of July 2018. Asked if companies should be required to make efforts to change this, Canadians are divided:



Men and women of all ages diverge on the value of regulating these types of hiring decisions. Three-in-ten men across all ages are supportive of such measures, which makes them approximately half as likely as women to hold this view:

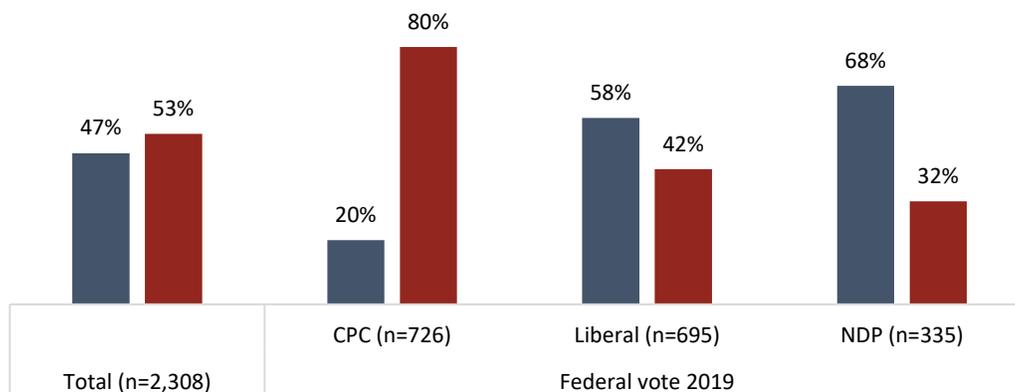
In the Canadian workplace:



- Large public companies should be required to recruit and hire women so they're equally represented in senior management
- Leave it up to large public companies to make their own hiring decisions, even if it means fewer women in senior management

Liberal Party voters are divided, though they lean slightly toward hiring requirements. Meanwhile NDP supporters are most favourable to this idea and Conservatives most opposed:

In the Canadian workplace:



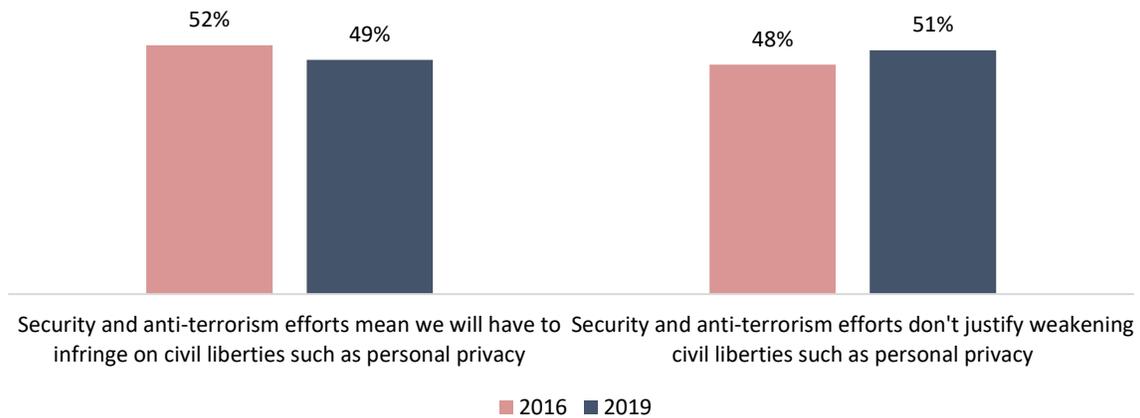
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[Related: Gender Pay Gap: men, women differ over seriousness of issue, but back legislative measures for equal pay](#)

Security vs Civil Liberty

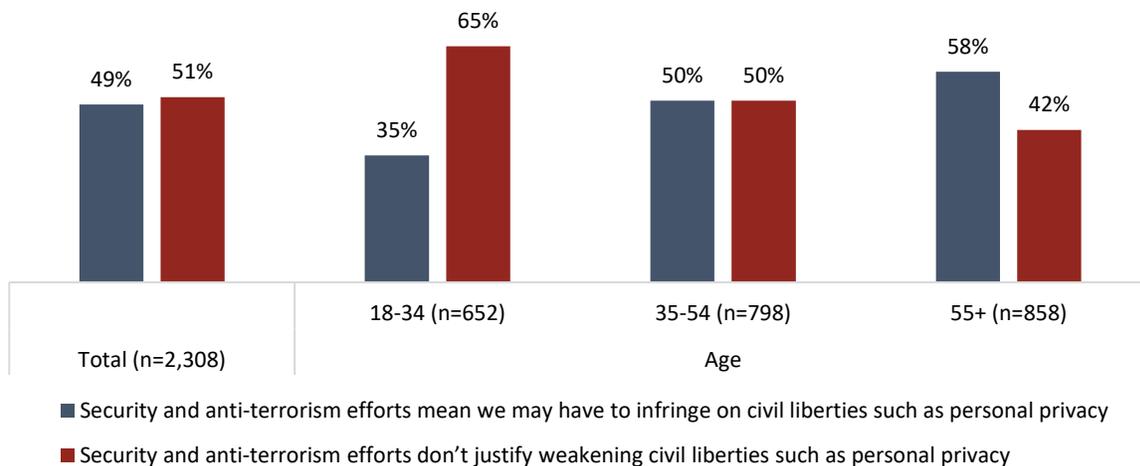
Half of Canadians say that security and anti-terrorism efforts do not justify the weakening of civil liberties, or the infringement on a person's privacy. Interestingly, half also disagree and say that given the current environment, some civil liberties may need to be infringed upon in order to ensure Canadians' security:

When you think about national security vs. personal privacy, would you say:



The generational gap is again apparent when it comes to the issue of privacy and infringement of civil liberties. Younger Canadians are less likely to feel comfortable with infringements on civil liberties, while older Canadians are most likely to say it may be necessary:

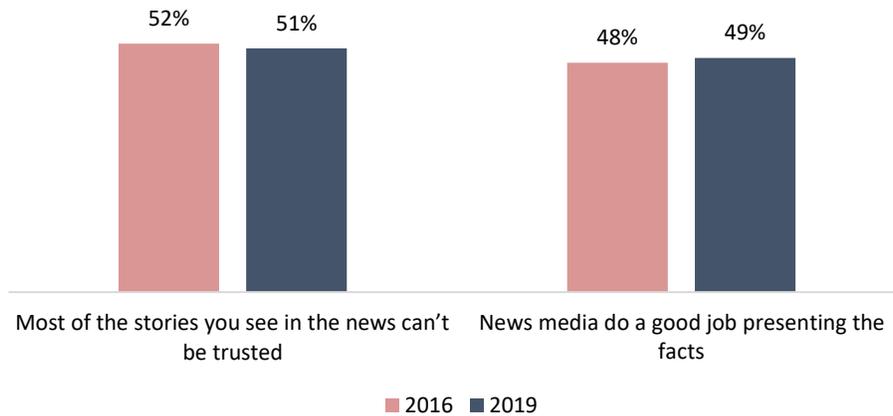
When you think about national security vs. personal privacy, would you say:



Trust in Media

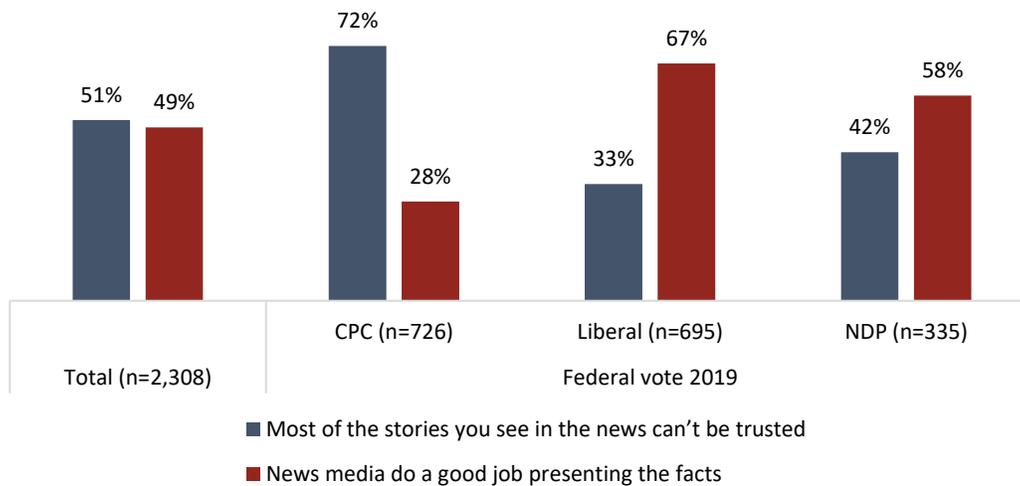
The percentage of Canadians saying they generally trust the media coverage that they see is unchanged from 2016 but that is hardly good news for mainstream news organizations. Just half of respondents say that they feel the news media does a good job of presenting the facts:

In your view:



While age and gender play less of a role on this question than they do on others, political affiliation is significant. Seven-in-ten CPC voters (72%) do not trust most of the stories they see in the media, while Liberals and New Democrats lean towards trusting them, but are by no means unified in this view:

In your view:



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