

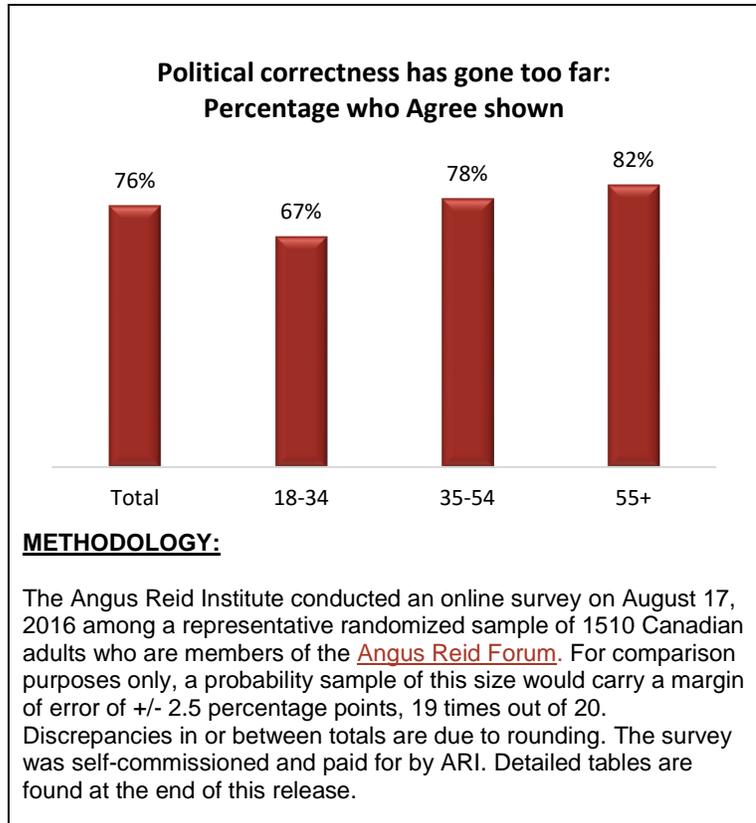
Majority of Canadians say political correctness has “gone too far”

Seven-in-ten say they self-censor to avoid offending others

August 29, 2016 – “The notion of political correctness has ignited controversy across the land. And although the movement arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred, it replaces old prejudice with new ones. It declares certain topics off-limits, certain expressions off-limits.”

Sound familiar? That was [George H.W. Bush in 1991](#), speaking at a commencement ceremony at the University of Michigan. Now, 25 years later, with Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump at the helm of the latest anti-‘PC’ movement, many, including a majority of Canadians, agree political correctness has “gone too far”.

A new Angus Reid Institute public opinion poll finds that while Canadians are sympathetic to the value of following certain PC values – indeed, most say there are certain things you just shouldn’t say in unfamiliar company – they are also wary of the movement encroaching on their freedom of expression.



Key Findings:

- Four-in-five (78%) say that there are certain things you “just shouldn’t express in front of people you don’t know”, and at the same time, the same number (80%) also say it “seems like you can’t say anything” without offending someone these days.
- Two-in-three (67%) Canadians say too many people are easily offended over the language of others, including 71 per cent of men and 62 per cent of women
- Men and women are equally as likely to self-censor, and when they do, nine-in-ten (87%) say they’re being polite, rather than trying to avoid judgement

Part 1 – Are Canadians too easily offended?
Part 2 – Has political correctness gone too far?
Part 3 – Most Canadians self-censor ... to be polite

Most Canadians say people are too easily offended

While Trump's campaign has, in many ways, been the culmination of [years of frustration](#) for those concerned over what they perceive as 'political correctness gone too far' (other concerns and views will be canvassed when the Angus Reid Institute profile the U.S. voter in the coming weeks), the Republican nominee has certainly dealt with [backlash](#) over his statements. That said, many of his supporters will passionately express that he simply "[says what others are afraid to say](#)".

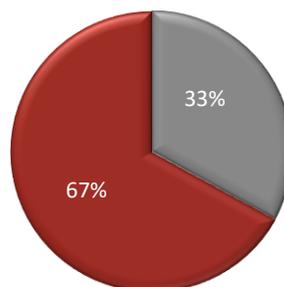
In this way, Trump acts in opposition to what some call a 'social justice movement,' which proponents say seeks to minimize exclusionary language and create comfort for marginalised populations by altering the language used and often tacitly accepted by many in every day life.

Examples of this include the CBC de-gendering terms in its [1993 style guide](#), while the Globe and Mail addressed controversy over the term fisher versus fishermen in its [1998 handbook](#), to the likely delight of women who work in the industry on Canada's coasts, who largely prefer the traditional term.

More recently, an amendment was made to the English version of the Canadian national anthem to make it gender neutral, something [most Canadians were against](#) when Angus Reid asked some years ago. It's worth noting the original English version [began gender neutral](#).

But on which side of the current debate are Canadians? They overwhelmingly say that, in general, people need to get thicker skin rather than curtail language. In fact, fully two-thirds (67%) lean this way:

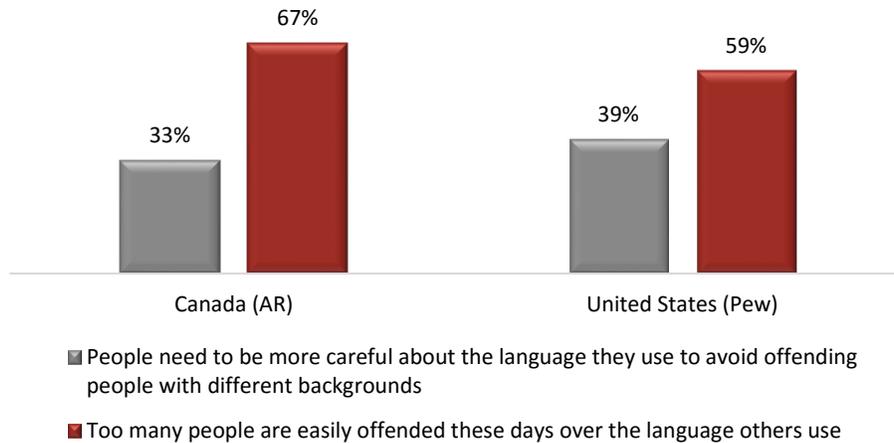
Which comes closer to your own views - even if neither is exactly right?



- People need to be more careful about the language they use to avoid offending people with different backgrounds
- Too many people are easily offended these days over the language others use

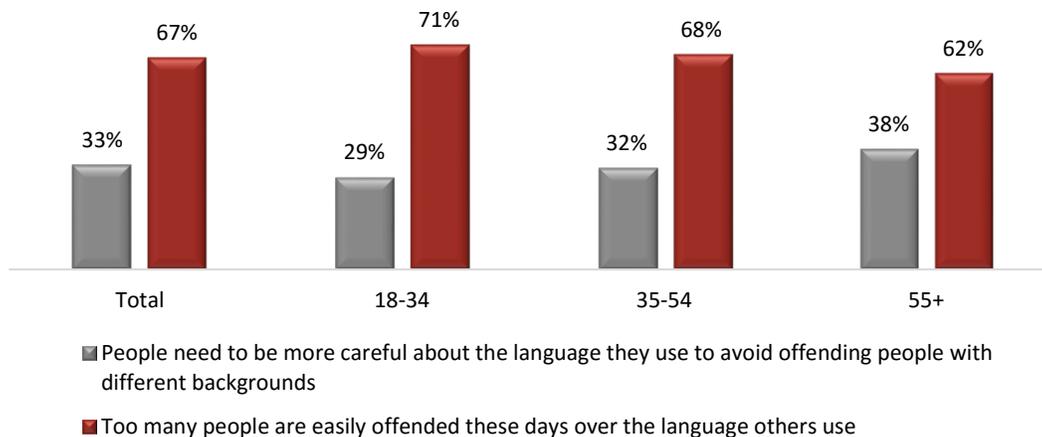
Comparing this to [responses from the United States](#), Canadians are slightly more likely to say that too many people are easily offended than Americans.

Which comes closer to your own views - even if neither is exactly right?



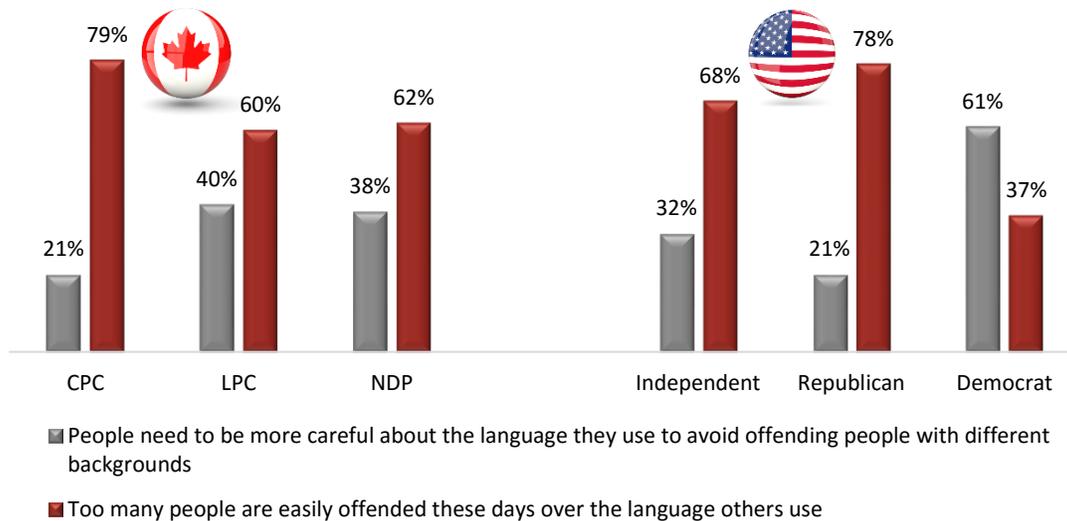
Notably, Canadians in the age range 18 to 34, so-called Millennials – often thought to be the most sensitive to concerns over language in well-publicized university protests on this issue – are the most likely to say people are too easily offended, with older Canadians more sympathetic to language sensitivities.

Which comes closer to your own views - even if neither is exactly right?



Looking at the issue through a political lens, just one-in-five (21%) past Conservative Party supporters say people need to be more careful with their choice of words these days, while roughly double the number of Liberals (40%) and New Democrats (38%) agree. In the United States, Republicans and Independents follow a similar trend, while Democrats, perhaps owing to their opposition to the current Republican presidential candidate, swing widely in the other direction:

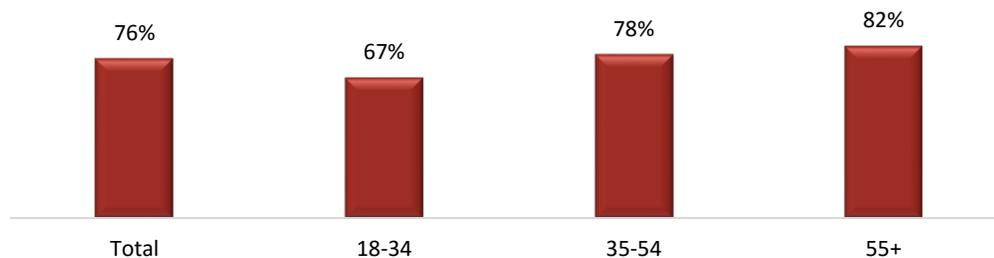
Which comes closer to your own views - even if neither is exactly right?



Why all the fuss over political correctness?

Most, about three-quarters (76%) say that the current climate of outrage over political correctness has just gone too far. And while all age demographics agree, this opinion is strongest among older Canadians:

Political correctness has gone too far: Percentage who Agree shown

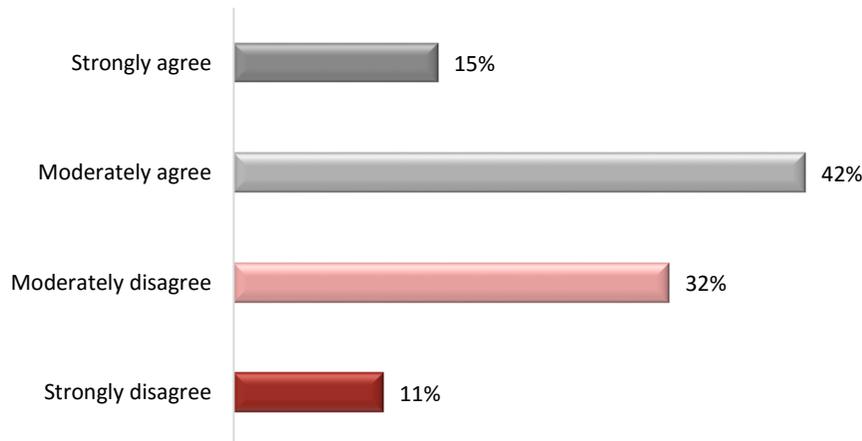


Part and parcel of this feeling that language and culture policing has gone too far is the feeling that people are simply too sensitive. Asked about this trend in society, eight-in-ten Canadians (80%) agree with the statement “these days, it seems like you can’t say anything without someone feeling offended.”

And yet in spite of a high level of agreement - many have pointed out that those who cry political correctness often do so to avoid accusations of racism or bullying. Canadians are mostly sympathetic to this line of reasoning.

Indeed, more than half (57%) say that people who complain about political correctness are just resentful that they are unable to say whatever they want anymore.

People who complain about political correctness just resent that they can't say everything they want to anymore

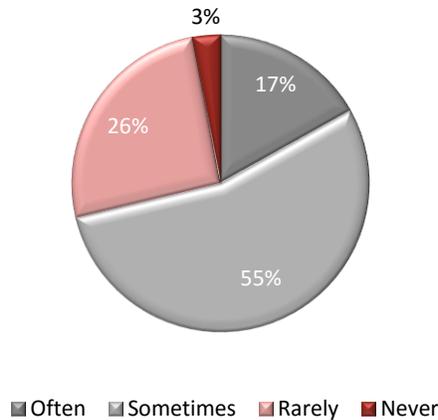


Canadians watch what they say... to be polite

Awareness of the minefields regarding what's okay and what isn't is also something most Canadians say they are dealing with in their day-to-day lives.

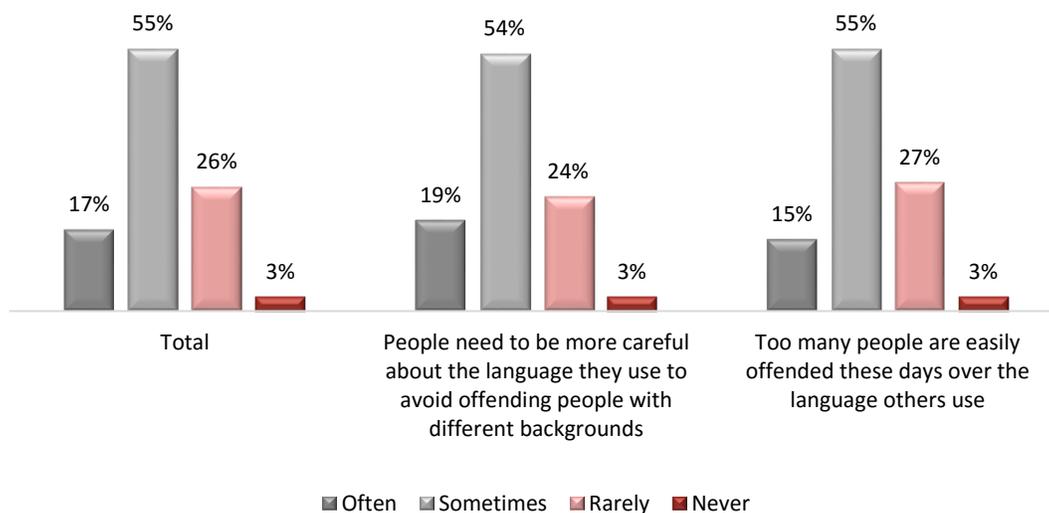
And while some may push the bounds of political correctness to make a point or in the name of their profession - such as Quebec comedian Mike Ward, ordered to pay \$35,000 to [Jeremy Gabriel, and his mother](#), after mocking the then-12-year-old boy for his physical deformity in his act - nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents go the other way - holding their tongue at least sometimes in conversation because of the other people who are present. Just under one-in-five (17%) say they often take this action.

Thinking about your day-to-day life, how often, if at all, would you say you 'hold your tongue' -that is, choose not to say something you might otherwise have said - because of the other people who are present?



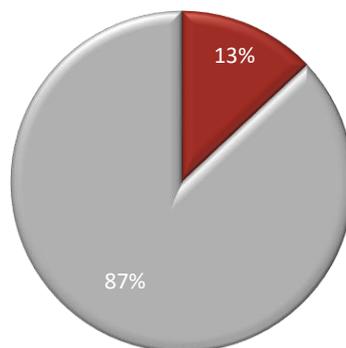
Interestingly, even among those two-thirds of Canadians who say people are too easily offended over the language of others, the likelihood of altering language or withholding comments is just as high. Canadians – apparently regardless of whether they feel political correctness has gone too far or not – are nonetheless acting in a way they might not wish, in order to be polite.

Thinking about your day-to-day life, how often, if at all, would you say you 'hold your tongue' -that is, choose not to say something you might otherwise have said - because of the other people who are present?



Digging deeper into the motivations for self-censorship, most Canadians – in fact nearly nine-in-ten (87%) who do hold their tongues – do so because they want to be polite. The rest say most of the time they're seeking to avoid judgement from others:

And, when you 'hold your tongue' in these situations, which of the following is closer to your most frequent reason for doing so? Would you say you:



■ Don't want to be judged ■ Want to be polite

This opinion tends to hold across most demographics. Men and women are equally as likely to say they want to be polite when they self-censor, and the same is true for each generational age grouping ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Ultimately, when it comes to public conversations, four-in-five Canadians (78%) say there are certain opinions that you just shouldn't express in front of people you don't know.

*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 organization 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.*

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

Which comes closer to your opinion – even if neither is exactly right?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1510)	2015 federal election vote		
		CPC (400)	LPC (476)	NDP (267)
People need to be more careful about the language they use to avoid offending people with different backgrounds	33%	21%	40%	38%
Too many people are easily offended these days over the language others use	67%	79%	60%	62%

Which comes closer to your opinion – even if neither is exactly right?			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1510)	Views on political correctness	
		People need to be more careful about the language they use (505)	Too many people are easily offended by the language others use (1005)
Often	17%	19%	15%
Sometimes	55%	54%	55%
Rarely	26%	24%	27%
Never	3%	3%	3%