

## Honour or Insult? Canadians divided over movement to change Indigenous sports team names

*Three-in-ten find 'Edmonton Eskimos' offensive, as CFL team considers future of 70-year-old name*

**June 12, 2019** – Honouring cultural traditions or disrespect through caricature? This is the fundamental debate over use of Indigenous names and imagery in sports in recent years.

For decades North American sports teams have utilized Indigenous and other ethnocultural imagery and nomenclature. In some cases, this has been rather overt - the Washington Redskins, Cleveland Indians, Edmonton Eskimos – while in others the references to these groups have been more indirect, such as the Atlanta Braves, Kansas City Chiefs or Notre Dame's Fighting Irish.

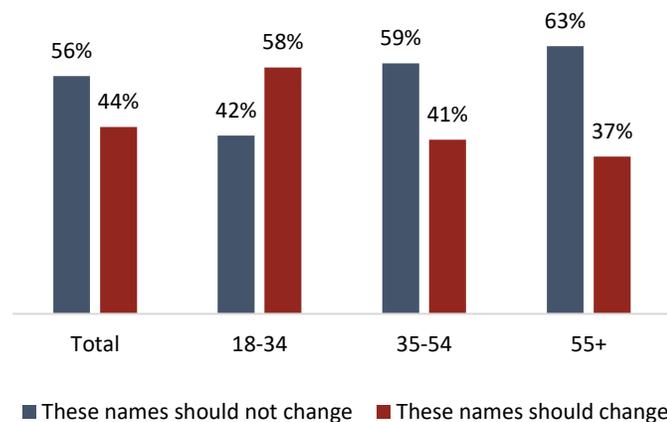
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians divided on whether or not the practice of using such terminology and logos should continue in the face of protests and team name changes [across the country](#).

Slightly more than half (56%), driven by men over the age of 35 and women over the age of 55, say that these teams should not make changes to the names that fans have grown accustomed to over the years.

However, more than four-in-ten (44%), led by majorities of young women and those with university educations, say that these names should, in fact, be changed to ensure that no offence is given to communities that may feel ostracized by their usage.

The CFL's Edmonton Eskimos are a source of concern for a number of Canadians. The team name is seen to be offensive by three-in-ten (29%). The generational aspect of this debate is again highlighted with respect to the term Eskimos. More than two-in-five (44%) 18-to-34-year old's find the name offensive, compared to just 18 per cent over the age of 55. In recent months, the team has been researching the impact of its name and consulting with Inuit communities, and says that [no plans to change the name are imminent](#).

**Generally speaking, should sports team names and/or logos that people find offensive be changed, or left alone?**



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 18 – 23, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 1,544 Canadian adults who are members of [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. 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.

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### More Key Findings:

- For many, this is a discussion with degrees of intensity. For example, more than four-in-ten (43%) express concern about either the name or logo of the Washington Redskins and Cleveland Indians. Many, but far fewer, say that the same problems exist with the Atlanta Braves and Kansas City Chiefs (24% in each case).
- A majority of Canadians (56%) say that McGill University made the correct decision in recently deciding to discontinue its use of the name 'Redmen' for the campus' male sports teams. Though it was initially meant to reference the team's primary red uniform colour, the school incorporated Indigenous imagery over the decades.
- This is also not a discussion that is limited entirely to Indigenous symbols and names. Just as many Canadians say they have an issue with the Notre Dame Fighting Irish name and logo as they do with the aforementioned Braves or Chiefs.

### 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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### Canadians lean toward keeping Indigenous names rather than changing them

Protests and corresponding defences of the use of Indigenous names and imagery in the sports realm have become commonplace in recent years. Perhaps the best example of this in North America is the Washington Redskins. While team owner Daniel Snyder has [vehemently opposed](#) any effort to change the team name, which has been [defined in major English dictionaries](#) as a derogatory way to describe Indigenous peoples, major Native American and civil rights organizations have pushed for the team to move on from the term.

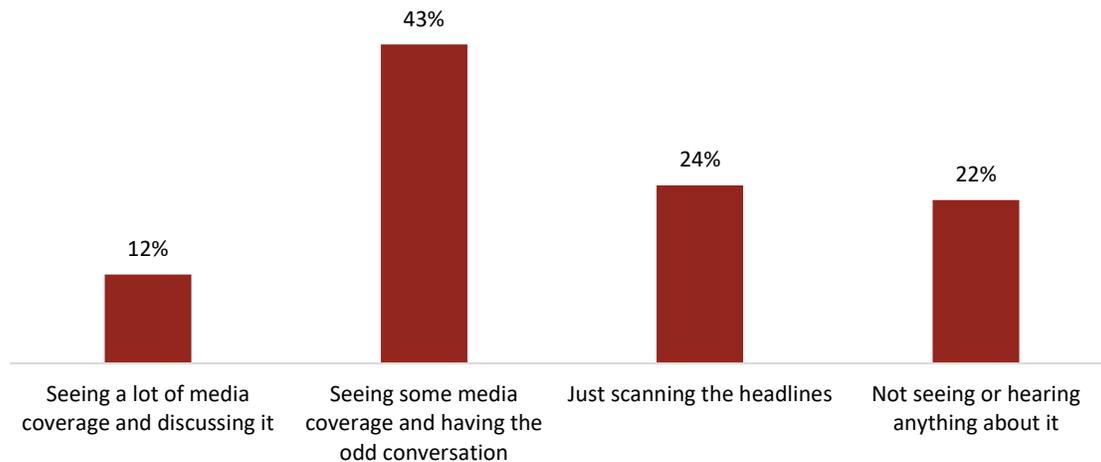
More than three-quarters of Canadians (79%) say these are debates they have been aware of, while one-in-five (22%) say they had not come across this issue at all until this survey:

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**Awareness of discussion about whether some names are considered to be offensive or disrespectful to Indigenous communities or other groups  
(All respondents asked, n=1,544)**



The debate over these team names has largely hinged on an argument over whether the organizations are using the names and symbols to honour Indigenous tradition or whether these groups are being exploited or mocked through their use as community mascots. The Angus Reid Institute summarized this debate as follows for respondents, before asking for their appraisal:

*Some people say that these names are a source of tradition and weren't considered offensive at the time. They argue that we should not change names every time people say old names aren't okay.*

*Others argue that even if team names weren't considered offensive at the time, times change, and the team names should change with them if they are perceived to be offensive.*

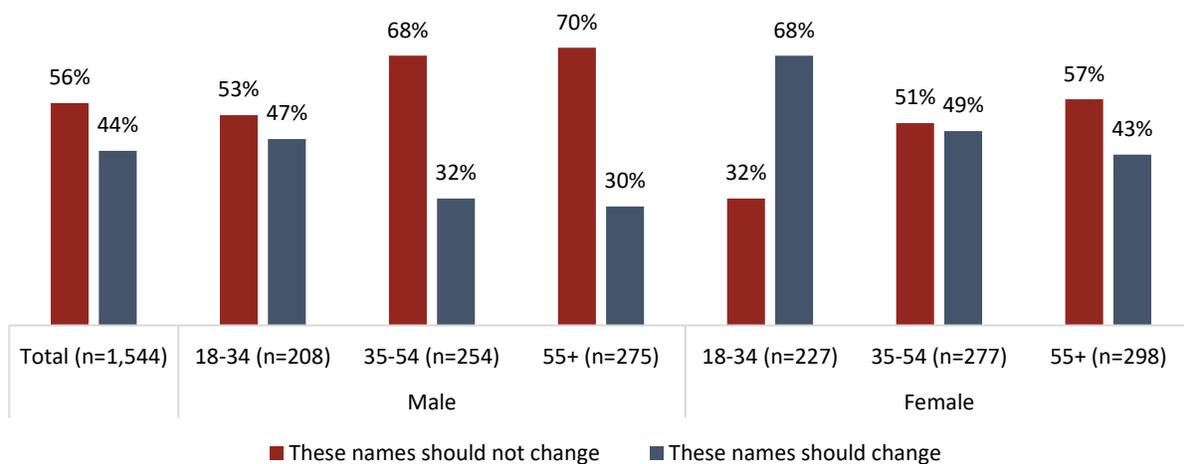
[\(View full questionnaire here\)](#)

Asked which statement they agree with most, Canadians are generally inclined to say these names should remain in place. Young women, those under the age of 35, are the only age and gender cohort who diverge from the majority.

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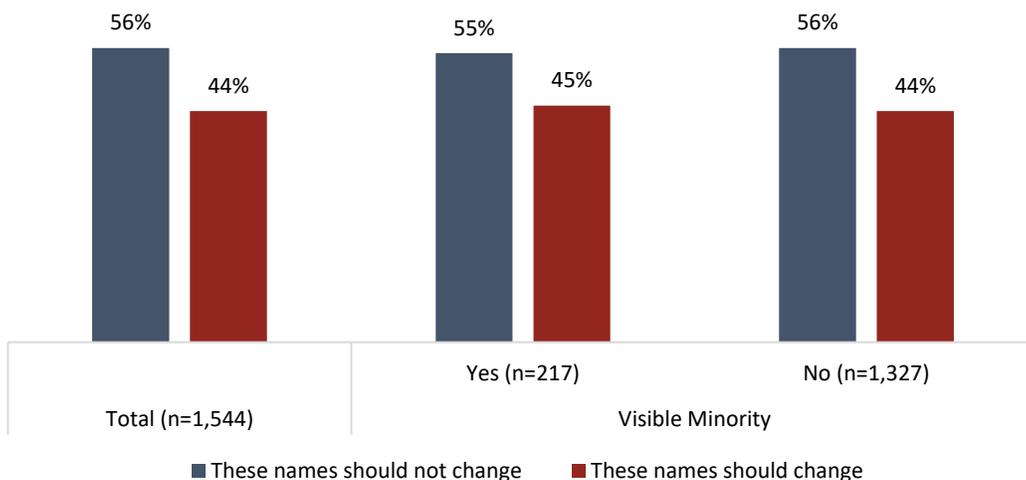
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**Which statement do you agree with most, even if it's not exactly how you feel?  
(All respondents, n=1,544)**



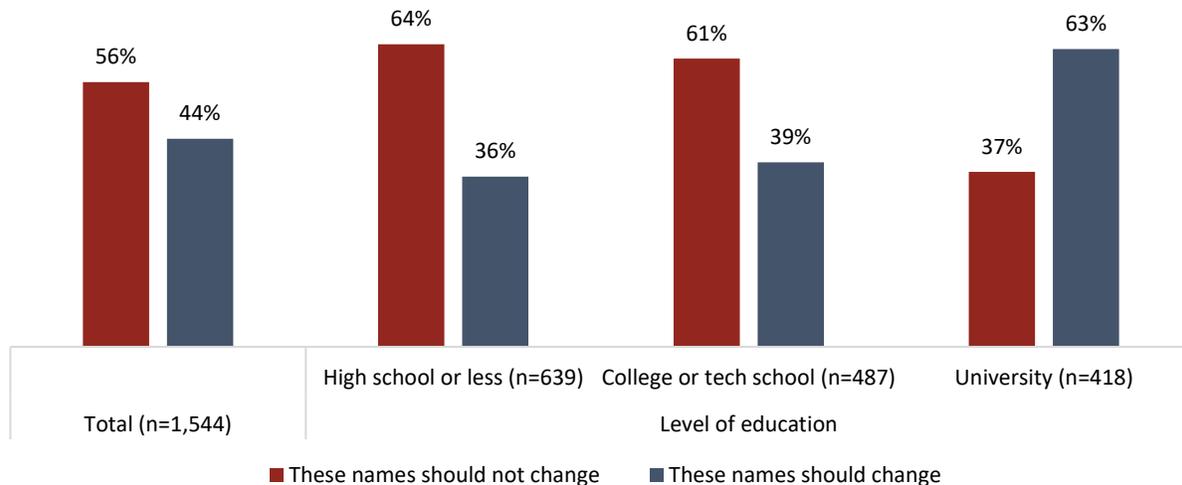
Notably, overall response levels do not vary whether someone identifies as a visible minority or not. 55 per cent of those who identify this way say the names should not change, almost identical to the 56 per cent of non-minorities who hold this view.

**Should sports team names or logos that people find offensive be changed, or left alone?**



There is another population, however, wherein a majority believes these names should change: university educated Canadians. Just over six-in-ten (63%) among this group would like to see teams retire names that some view as problematic. This educational trend persists in this survey and is discussed again later:

**Which statement do you agree with most, even if it's not exactly how you feel?  
(All Respondents)**



**Majority agree with decision to change name of McGill Redmen**

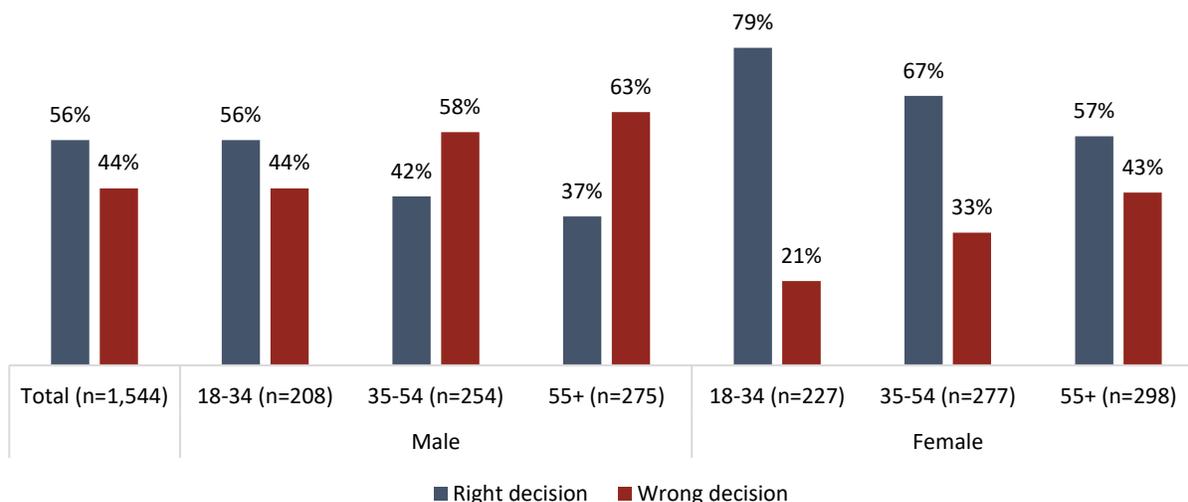
McGill University recently decided to move away from using the term ‘Redmen’ for its men’s athletics teams. The name itself arose in the 1920s as a reference to the teams’ prominent red uniform colourings, as well as the university’s Scottish roots. Over the decades, however, Indigenous imagery has been used on the team’s [football and hockey uniforms](#), and has been prominently featured on the school’s marching band. The female sports teams were also called the Super Squaws from [1971 to 1976](#).

Various calls to change the name have arisen over the decades, and the [most recent movement](#), led by Indigenous student Tomas Jirousek, a member of the Kainai Nation, ultimately resulted in a decision by the university to discontinue the name.

Notably, while a slight majority of Canadians initially said that such names should not be changed in general (56%), 56 per cent say McGill made the right choice in this individual case.

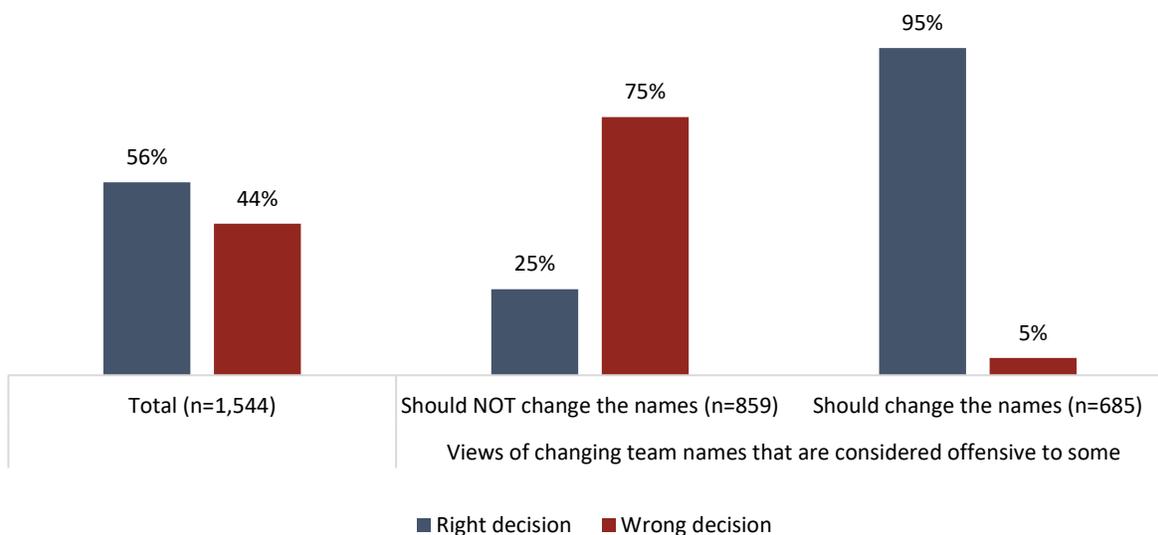
A majority of all female age groups, as well as young men, agree with the decision, whereas men over the 35 and older believe it was the wrong choice.

**Do you believe that McGill made the right or wrong decision to change the name?  
(All respondents)**



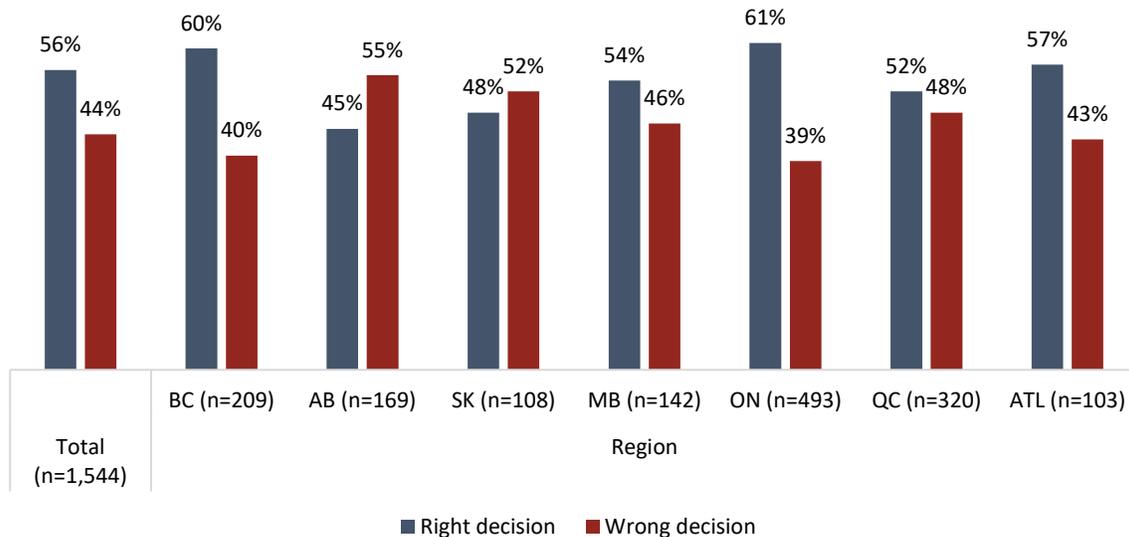
This swap in majority sentiment, from keeping names to switching this one, is driven by the one-quarter of those who oppose changing names in general, believing that it is appropriate in this case:

**Do you believe that McGill made the right or wrong decision to change the name?**



Regionally, support for the McGill decision reaches six-in-ten in British Columbia and Ontario, and is notably divided within Quebec with half of residents taking each side of the debate:

**Do you believe that McGill made the right or wrong decision to change the name?**



**Nicknames, logos, still viewed as problematic by many**

In order to understand more clearly the types of logos Canadians may object to, and how many people would do so, the Angus Reid Institute collected 12 logos from professional or college sports. Each was presented to respondents in a randomized order with the question of whether or not the respondent felt the name, logo, both name and logo, or neither name nor logo was offensive.

Seven of the logos had either an Indigenous-related name or logo design, such as Redskins, Indians and Eskimos, while the other five were teams named after terms for groups of people (e.g. Yankees, Canadiens and Vikings) that do not have links to Indigenous peoples. The name and logo combinations are shown below:

## Sports Names and Logos Offensive or Not?

The Angus Reid Institute showed the names and logos of 12 sports teams to 1,544 Canadians and asked a simple question...

"We would like to know if you believe each name and logo is offensive or not"

<p>Montreal Canadiens</p> 	<p>New York Yankees</p> 	<p>Vancouver Canucks</p> 	<p>Minnesota Vikings</p> 
<p>New England Patriots</p> 	<p>Kansas City Chiefs</p> 	<p>Atlanta Braves</p> 	<p>Notre Dame Fighting Irish</p> 
<p>Edmonton Eskimos</p> 	<p>Chicago Blackhawks</p> 	<p>Washington Redskins</p> 	<p>Cleveland Indians (recently retired logo)</p> 

For a significant portion of the population, none of these logos or nicknames are an issue. The elements of a team's name and logo that Canadians may or may not find offensive are summarized in the table below. The right-most column shows the total number who find *anything* about the combination offensive.

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Percentage of Canadians who say each name and/or logo is offensive (All Respondents)					
	What is offensive, if anything?				
	Neither	Name but not logo	Logo but not name	Both	Total Offensive (Name+Logo+Both)
Washington Redskins	57%	8%	3%	32%	43%
Cleveland Indians	57%	2%	10%	31%	43%
Chicago Blackhawks	69%	1%	10%	19%	31%
Edmonton Eskimos	71%	20%	1%	8%	29%
Notre Dame Fighting Irish	75%	2%	9%	14%	25%
Atlanta Braves	76%	2%	9%	13%	24%
Kansas City Chiefs	76%	6%	5%	13%	24%
New England Patriots	93%	1%	3%	4%	7%
NY Yankees	94%	2%	1%	3%	6%
Minnesota Vikings	94%	1%	2%	3%	6%
Vancouver Canucks	95%	1%	3%	1%	5%
Montreal Canadiens	97%	1%	1%	1%	3%

A number of the logos are received as innocuous. The Montreal Canadiens, New York Yankees, Minnesota Vikings, and Vancouver Canucks all have just a handful of Canadians saying any part of their presentation is offensive.

For others, the depiction of Indigenous faces appears to be viewed as disrespectful. Four-in-ten (41%) say that they find the [recently retired](#) Cleveland Indians logo offensive (combining those who say ‘both’ with those who choose ‘logo’ only) while 35 per cent say the same of the Washington Redskins logo and 29 per cent of the Chicago Blackhawks.

The Vancouver Canucks are an interesting case, as their logo was designed with an Indigenous inspiration. That said, the design is a representation of an [Orca whale in the Haida style](#), common to the Pacific Northwest, rather than an Indigenous person (which appears to cause Canadians most displeasure). Just four per cent of Canadians have an issue with the Canuck orca.

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The names on the list most offensive to respondents are the Redskins (40%), (the word is classified in a number of dictionaries **as a racial slur**), the Cleveland Indians (33%) and the Edmonton Eskimos (28%). Again, these totals are derived by adding the number who say 'both' logo and name are offensive and the number who say just the 'name' is. It is not only Indigenous representation that draws negative reactions. One-quarter of Canadians (25%) say they are offended by either the name or logo of the Notre Dame Fighting Irish.

### **Generational disagreement**

Views on these issues appear to be largely dependent on generational differences. For example, when considering both the Cleveland Indians and Washington Redskins, six-in-ten under the age of 35 say they find something about each offensive, while fewer than four-in-ten among their elders agree.

On several name and logo pairings seen as offensive by respondents, younger people are much more likely to voice objection, as seen in the table below:

<b>Percentage of Canadians who say each name and/or logo is offensive by AGE</b>												
	<b>What is offensive, if anything?</b>											
	<b>Total Offensive (Name+Logo+Both)</b>			<b>Name is Offensive</b>			<b>Logo is Offensive</b>			<b>Both are Offensive</b>		
	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
<b>Washington Redskins</b>	<b>59%</b>	41%	33%	13%	6%	6%	3%	3%	3%	43%	33%	24%
<b>Cleveland Indians</b>	<b>57%</b>	39%	36%	3%	1%	2%	14%	7%	11%	41%	32%	24%
<b>Edmonton Eskimos</b>	<b>45%</b>	27%	18%	34%	18%	12%	1%	0%	0%	10%	8%	5%
<b>Chicago Blackhawks</b>	<b>44%</b>	27%	24%	3%	0%	1%	16%	7%	8%	25%	19%	15%
<b>Notre Dame Fighting Irish</b>	<b>32%</b>	22%	22%	3%	1%	1%	13%	8%	8%	16%	13%	13%
<b>Kansas City Chiefs</b>	<b>29%</b>	24%	20%	11%	6%	3%	4%	4%	7%	14%	14%	11%
<b>Atlanta Braves</b>	24%	25%	22%	3%	1%	1%	11%	8%	7%	11%	16%	13%

### **Educational divergence**

Another driver of disagreement in this discussion is one's level of educational attainment. Those who possess any level of university education are vastly more likely to say they take offense to these teams' names or logos.

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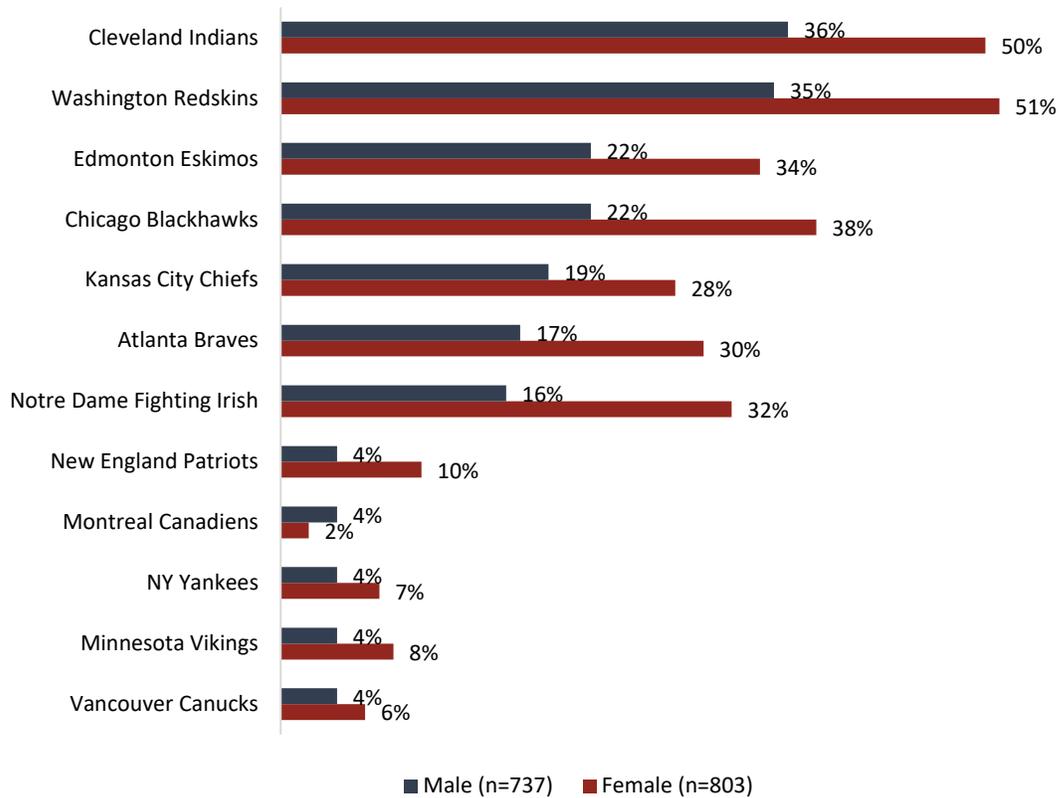
On each of the seven most controversially named or logoed teams according to the survey findings, university-educated Canadians are at least twice as likely to say they find both offensive, compared to those with a high school education or less:

Percentage of Canadians who say each name and/or logo is offensive by EDUCATION												
	What is offensive, if anything?											
	Total Offensive (Name+Logo+Both)			Name is Offensive			Logo is Offensive			Both are Offensive		
	HS or less	College /Tech School	Univ.	HS or less	College/ Tech School	Univ.	HS or less	College/ Tech School	Univ.	HS or less	College /Tech School	Univ.
<b>Cleveland Indians</b>	34%	37%	65%	2%	2%	1%	10%	8%	13%	21%	28%	51%
<b>Washington Redskins</b>	33%	39%	64%	5%	8%	12%	3%	2%	3%	24%	29%	49%
<b>Chicago Blackhawks</b>	23%	26%	49%	2%	1%	2%	9%	8%	14%	12%	17%	33%
<b>Edmonton Eskimos</b>	21%	23%	47%	14%	17%	34%	1%	0%	0%	6%	6%	12%
<b>Atlanta Braves</b>	17%	20%	38%	1%	1%	3%	7%	8%	13%	9%	12%	22%
<b>Kansas City Chiefs</b>	19%	19%	37%	4%	7%	8%	4%	3%	7%	10%	9%	22%
<b>Notre Dame Fighting Irish</b>	21%	21%	36%	2%	2%	1%	10%	7%	11%	9%	12%	23%

### Gender divisions

As noted earlier, women are more likely to be receptive to the calls for change over some of these names. It is perhaps unsurprising then that, considering each name and logo pairing offered, they are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to say each is offensive:

**Total number who find something (either name, logo, or both) offensive**



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

*For detailed results by indigenous identity and visible minorities, click [here](#).*