

Immigration: Half back current targets, but colossal misperceptions, pushback over refugees, cloud debate

Canadians divided between Scheer, Trudeau and Singh over who's best on immigration file

October 7, 2019 – As all the federal party leaders gather tonight for the first time at a debate in this forty-third election campaign, one wishes to slash the number of refugees Canada accepts in half, one wants to continue a plan to increase them, while another wants to significantly boost the number of refugees who settle in this country.

But where do Canadians stand?

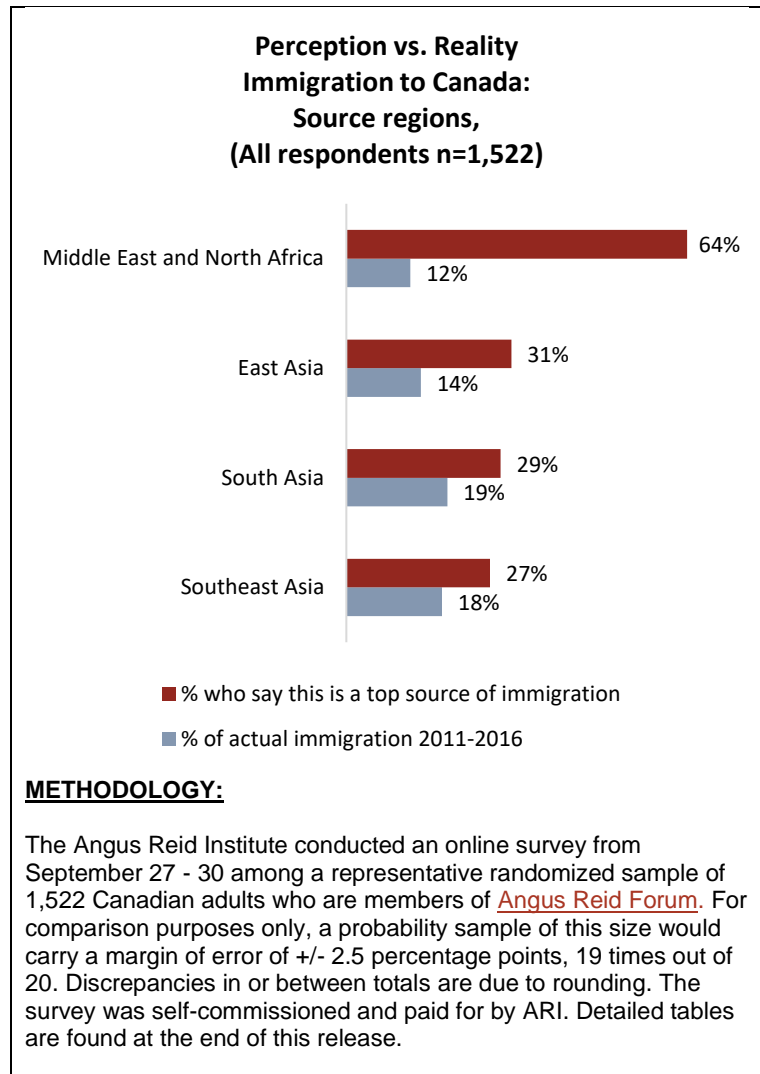
The latest public opinion poll from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute indicates just over half (52%) of Canadians are on side with the immigration targets set out by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Four-in-ten (39%) say that the current level of 331,000 immigrants for 2019 is about right, while another 13 per cent would actually increase the total, as the Liberals plan to do over the coming years if re-elected.

The rest say either these targets are too high (40%) or aren't sure (8%).

This comprehensive survey on immigration policy also finds confusion and significant misperceptions among people in Canada about how many immigrants actually settle in this country year over year, and where in the world they come from. Canadians also overestimate the number who come as refugees and underestimate the number who arrive as of economic class immigrants.

For example, two-thirds of Canadians (64%) say that Canada accepts most of its immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. This region actually represents about 12 per cent of immigration. Canadians also overestimate the percentage of refugees the country accepts by double, while underestimating the number of economic class immigrants significantly.

Against the backdrop of a looming vote, the top three leaders as best to handle the immigration file are Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer (28%) followed by Liberal leader Trudeau (22%) and NDP leader Jagmeet Singh (18%).



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More Key Findings:

- More than half of Canadians (56%) say the Liberal government's handling of border issues, particularly asylum seekers, has been too soft, more than twice the number who say they have handled the issue well (26%)
- A majority (62%) say immigrants should have to be able to speak one of Canada's official languages when coming to the country, while 38 per cent say it is acceptable for them to learn while they settle
- Conservative voters are much more critical of the impact immigrants have on Canadian jobs than those who support the other major federal parties. Four-in-ten (41%) of those who plan to back the CPC in the election say too many Canadian jobs are being lost to newcomers, while fewer than one-in-five Liberal, Green and NDP supporters say the same, respectively

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.*

INDEX:**Part 1: What does immigration in Canada look like? Reality vs. Perception**

- **Half of Canadians underestimate immigration levels**
- **Once informed, more than half onside with immigration targets**
- **Misperceptions about place of origin for immigrants**
- **Overestimating refugees, underestimating economic class**

Part 2: Perceptions & Views of Immigration – what do people want?

- **Where should immigrants come from**
- **Majority support language requirement**

Part 3: Grading the Liberal record on Immigration

- **On refugees and asylum seekers**

Part 4: Looking forward

- **No clear choice on who's best to lead on immigration**
- **What is the ideal level of immigration?**
- **Canadian opinions about economic impact of immigration**
- **Should provinces have more say?**

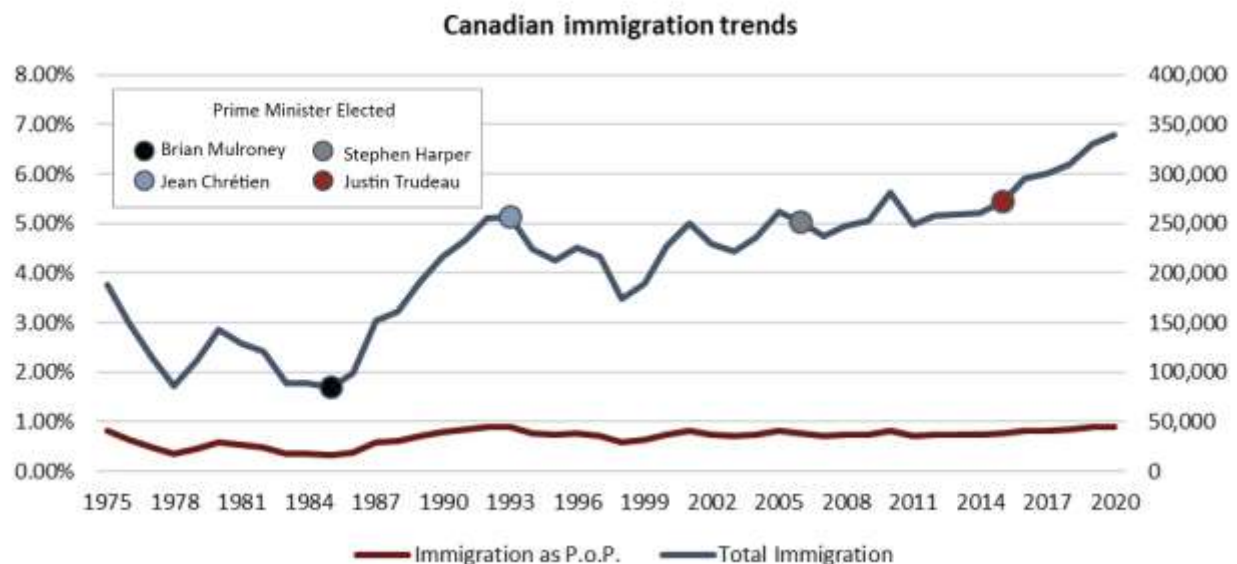
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Part 1: What does immigration in Canada look like? Reality vs. Perception

Notwithstanding her First Peoples, Canada is, and has always been, a nation of immigration. In 2019, this country Canada ranks fifth in the world when it comes to the number of foreign-born residents as a share of the total population, which is 21 per cent. According to the [United Nations](#), this proportion is higher than that of other G7 nations, such as Germany (16%), the United States (15%) and the UK (14%).

Current Canadian immigration targets that hover around 300,000 immigrants per year equate to roughly 0.8 per cent of this country's total population, rising closer to 0.9 per cent in 2020. These are generally in line with the proportion that Canada has accepted since 1990 when Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney significantly increased yearly totals.



Half of Canadians underestimate immigration levels

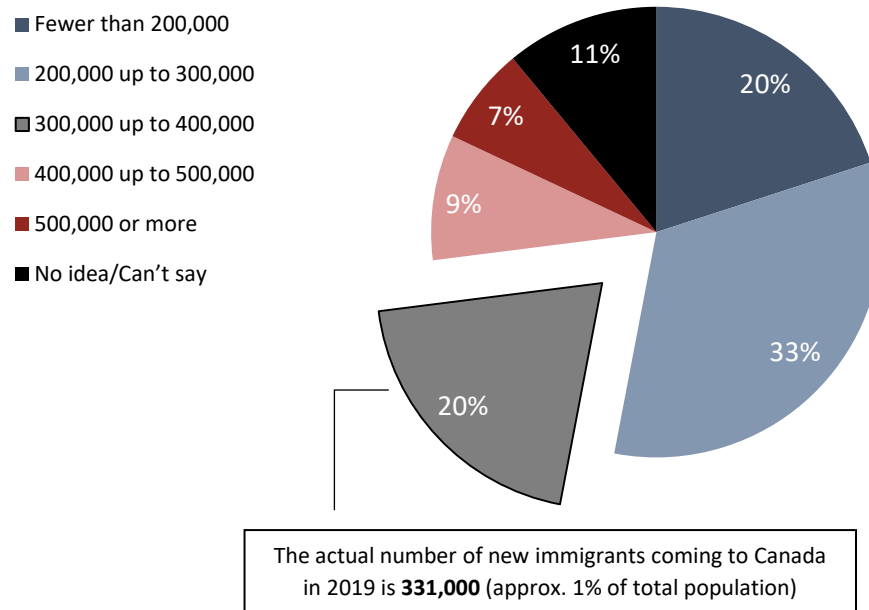
With this in mind, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians for their *own* assessments of the picture of immigration in their country. Among the questions canvassed: how many new immigrants have arrived in Canada over the last year. While the government target is 331,000, only 20 per cent of Canadians estimated the number correctly.

And while residents of many European countries often over-estimate the proportion of their populations made up by foreign-born nationals, a slight majority of Canadians (53%) actually *under-estimate* the number of immigrants new to the country. One-in-five (20%) said the country accepted fewer than 200,000 immigrants within the last year, while one-in-three (33%) estimated the number between 200,000 and 300,000.

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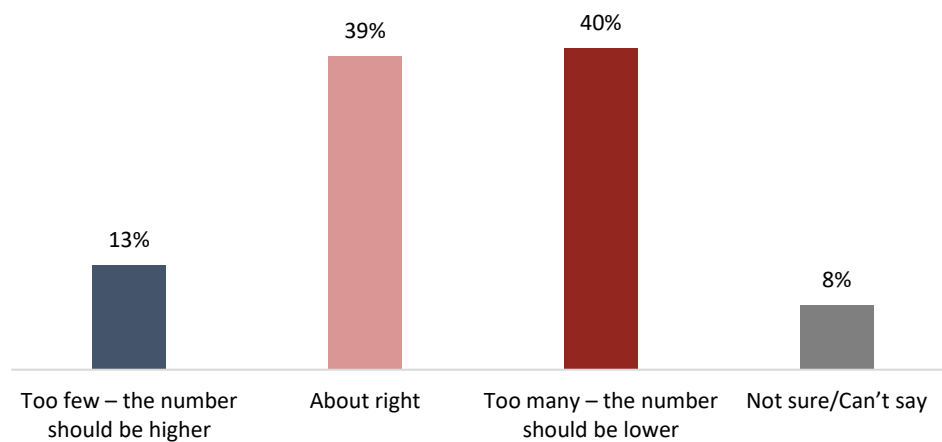
Canada's total current population is 37 million. How many new immigrants do you think arrived in Canada last year?



Once informed, more than half onside with immigration targets

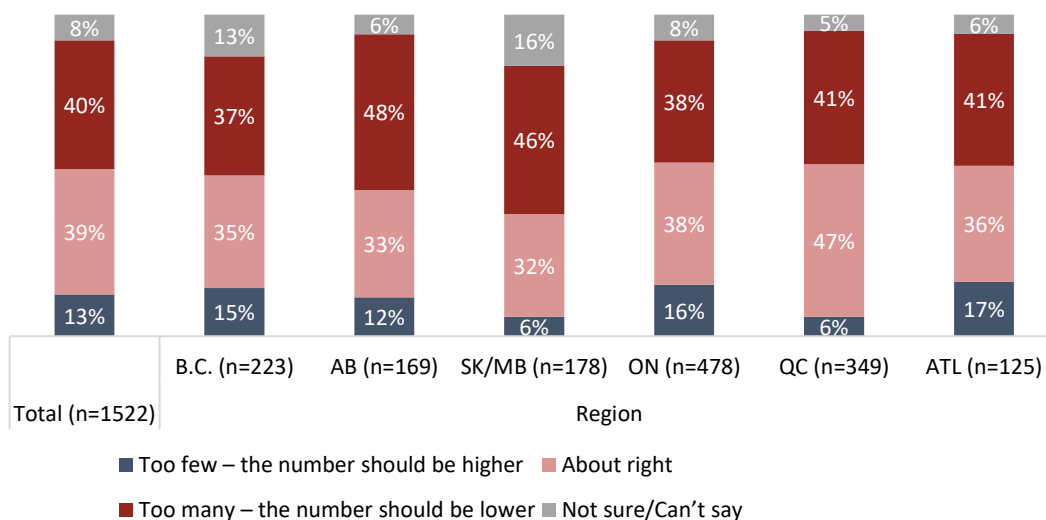
Having offered their own estimates, respondents were then informed of the actual current targets (331,000 new permanent residents in 2019). An equal number say that they are as the right level (39%) or too high (40%), while approximately one-in-eight (13%) say the country should accept more:

**Would you say 331,000 new permanent residents in 2019 is ...
(All respondents, n=1522)**



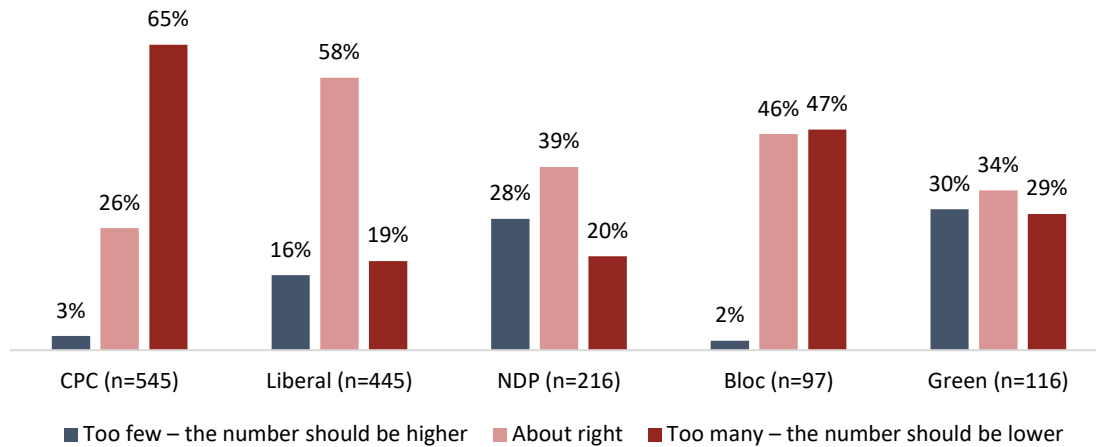
There are considerable regional divisions on the question of what the ideal target would be. Close to half of residents in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba say the number is too high, while Atlantic Canadians, alongside B.C. Ontario and Quebec residents, are most likely to say the number is too low.

**Would you say 331,000 new permanent residents in 2019 is ...
(By Region)**



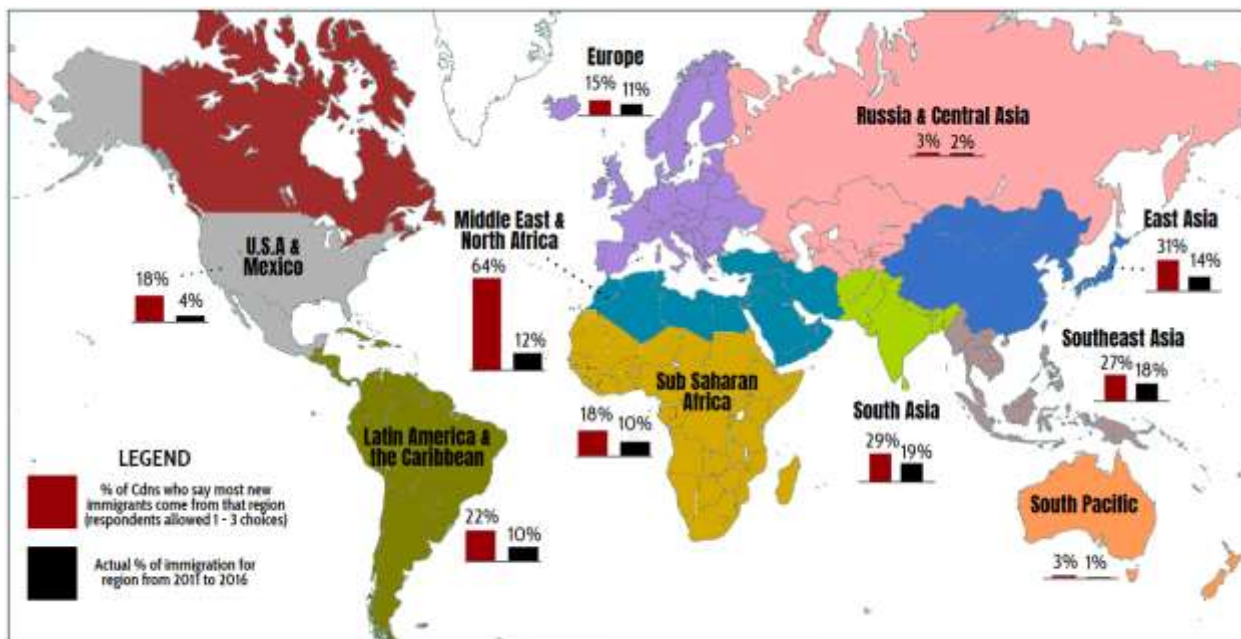
These findings also vary by vote intention. A majority of both CPC voters (65%) and PPC voters (62%) say the current target is too much, as do nearly half of Bloc voters in Quebec. A majority of Liberal voters say they are satisfied with the target. NDP and Green voters are most likely to say the number is too low:

Would you say 331,000 new permanent residents in 2019 is ...

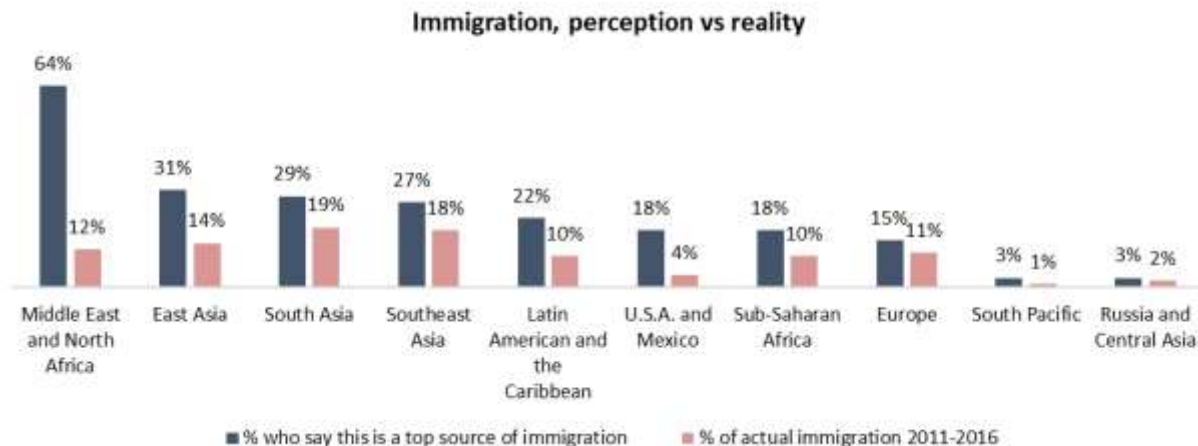


Misperceptions about place of origin for immigrants

When it comes to knowledge about the origin of new permanent residents, Canadians appear in some cases to get it right, and in other, spectacularly wrong. The most startling data surrounds emigration from Middle East and North Africa. Asked to choose which region from ten shown on a map they believe is responsible for most new immigrants in recent years, two-thirds (64%) picked the area labeled as the Middle East and North Africa, which includes countries like Turkey, Syria, Iraq and others. This region is chosen at more than twice the rate of the two largest actual sources of immigration – South Asia and Southeast Asia. The chart below shows the percentage of Canadians who said each region is a top source of immigration (respondents were able to choose between one and three regions) versus their actual total of immigration in recent years:



Three-in-ten Canadians say that East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia are the top sources of immigration, all of which are within the top three sources. One-in-five (18%) believe the U.S.A. and Mexico are a largest source, though a relatively small portion of new Canadians come from these areas:



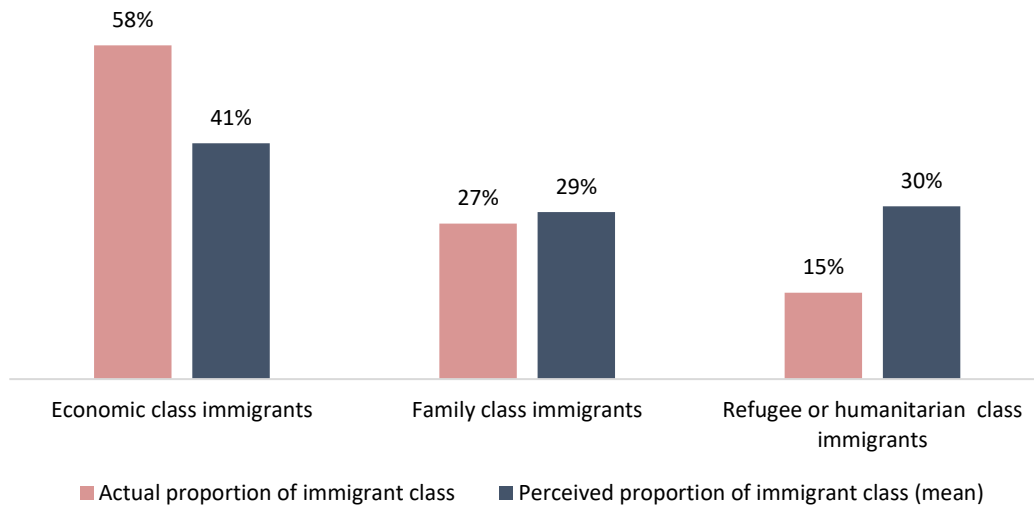
Overestimating refugees, underestimating economic class

Canada’s emphasis on attracting economic class immigrants – that is, people who come to work, including caregivers, skilled labourers and professionals – is often **championed** by politicians of many political stripes as a way to maintain and boost economic output. Prime Minister Trudeau, in particular has credited immigration for **helping boost Canada’s growing tech sector**. In recent election campaigning, the Liberals have pledged to focus on **welcoming highly skilled immigrants**, if re-elected.

But Trudeau’s other legacy, on championing the re-settlement of Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016 – and, arguably, his now unforgettable “#WelcometoCanada” tweet in response to the irregular border crossers in 2017 – appear to have left a stronger impression on Canadians.

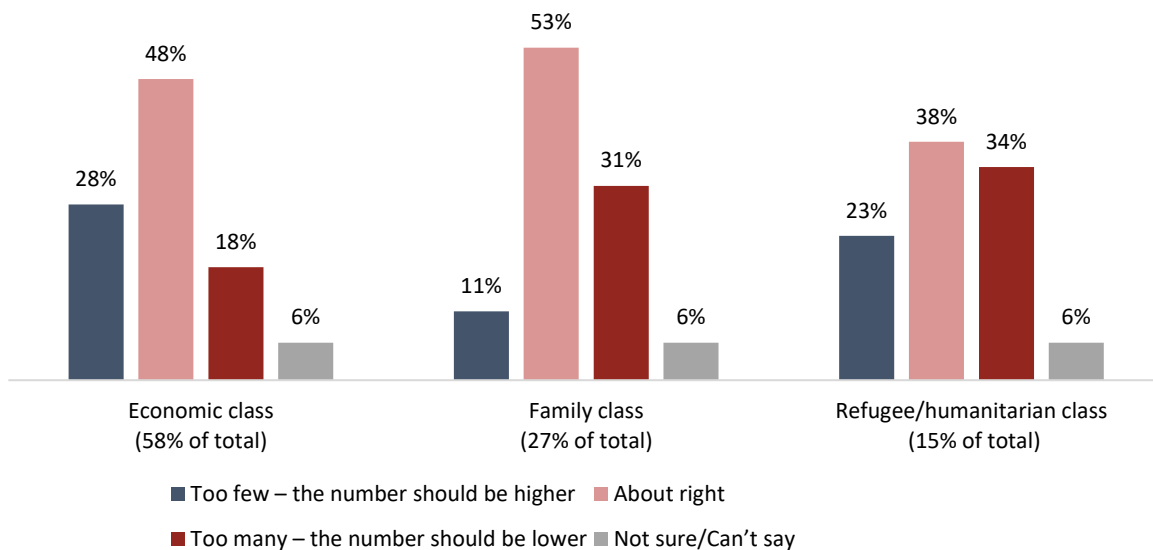
On average, Canadians doubly over-estimate the proportion of immigrants accepted by claiming asylum – refugee or humanitarian class immigrants – while under-estimating the percentage of immigrants of economic class significantly:

**Actual versus perceived proportion of each immigrant class in Canada
(All respondents, n=1522)**



Asked their views on *actual* proportions of each immigrant class, three-quarters of Canadians (76%) say they are satisfied with current levels or want more economic class immigrants. Refugee or humanitarian class immigrants generate the greatest amount of pushback, with one-in-three (34%) saying their proportion of immigration should be lower:

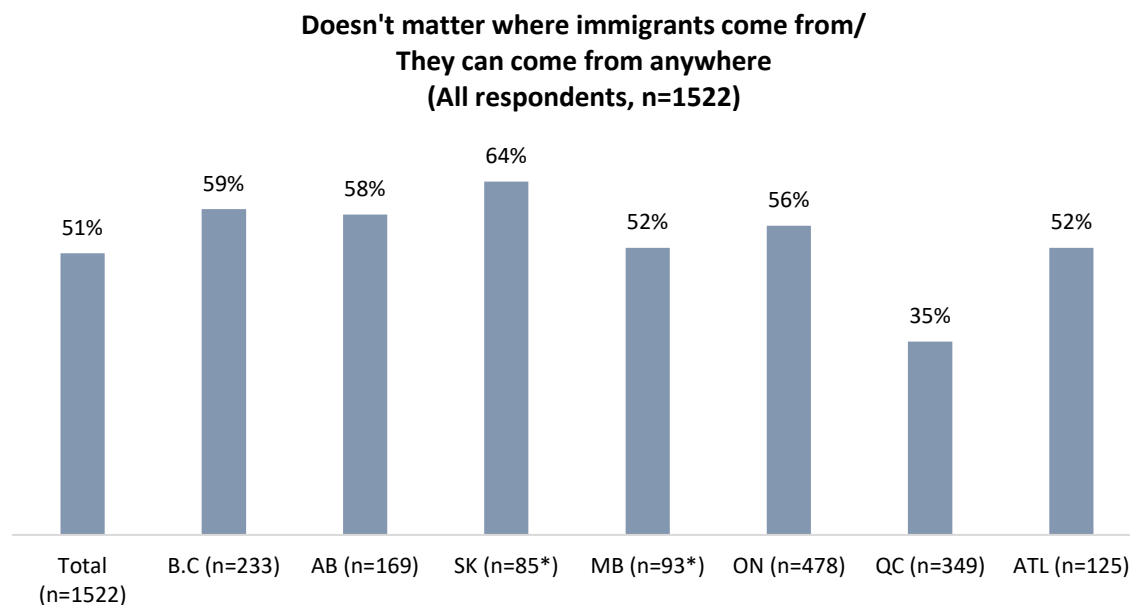
**Views on proportions of each immigrant class
(All respondents, n=1522)**



Part 2: Perceptions & Views of Immigration – what do people want?

Where should immigrants come from?

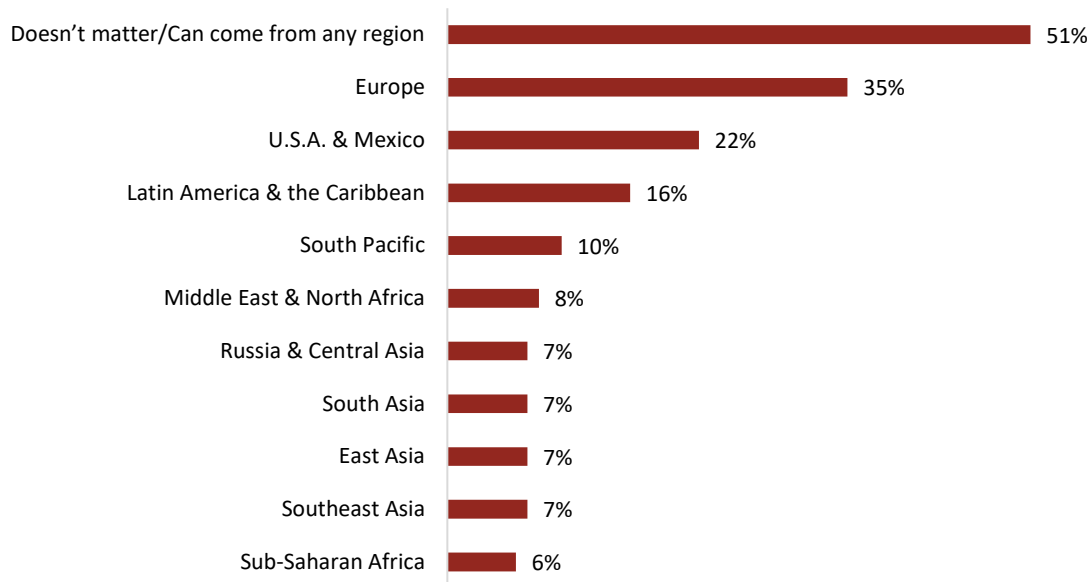
People from all over the world make Canada their home and for half of Canadians, that's just fine. When asked where they would prefer immigrants come from, half (51%) say that it does not matter, welcoming whomever decides to make their life in Canada. This includes more than half of Canadians in all regions except Quebec (35%).



***small sample size**

The top choice for those expressing a preference for place of origin is Europe, with one-in-three saying Canada should accept immigrants from that region (35%). One-in-five (22%) say they prefer the U.S.A. and Mexico, while Canada's main sources of immigration, South Asia and Southeast Asia, are chosen by just seven per cent:

**Which parts of the world should Canada’s immigrants be coming from?
(All respondents, n=1522, allowed up to three choices)**



Politically, Conservative and Bloc voters have a clear preference for European immigration. Half (51%) of those who identify as planning to support those parties in the election say immigrants to Canada should be European, at least twice as many as who say the same among Liberal, NDP or Green supporters. Note that the pool of People’s Party voters is too small to analyze:

Where do Canadians say immigrants should come from?

	Total (1,522)	Current Vote Intention				
		CPC (n=545)	Liberal (n=445)	NDP (n=216)	Green (n=116)	Bloc (n=97)
Europe	35%	51%	24%	18%	16%	51%
U.S.A. & Mexico	22%	29%	18%	13%	10%	29%
Latin America & the Caribbean	16%	16%	15%	12%	12%	29%
South Pacific	10%	16%	8%	7%	2%	8%
Middle East & North Africa	8%	4%	12%	5%	5%	13%
Southeast Asia	7%	8%	7%	3%	8%	18%
East Asia	7%	9%	6%	5%	8%	9%
South Asia	7%	7%	6%	8%	4%	12%
Russia & Central Asia	7%	11%	4%	3%	2%	7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	6%	4%	8%	8%	2%	7%
Any region	51%	38%	59%	66%	73%	28%

Generationally, younger Canadians, those between the ages of 18 and 34, are most likely to say that immigrants should come from anywhere in the world, though notably, a majority of women of all ages say this. Men 35 and over are most likely to prefer European, North American, Latin American and South Pacific immigration:

Where do Canadians think immigrants should come from?

	Total (1,522)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=208)	35-54 (n=262)	55+ (n=279)	18-34 (n=193)	35-54 (n=273)	55+ (n=304)
Europe	35%	35%	41%	50%	18%	21%	37%
U.S.A. & Mexico	22%	22%	25%	32%	10%	19%	21%
Latin America & the Caribbean	16%	12%	18%	22%	10%	14%	16%
South Pacific	10%	9%	16%	12%	8%	7%	10%
Middle East & North Africa	8%	7%	4%	13%	11%	7%	6%
Southeast Asia	7%	3%	8%	14%	7%	4%	8%
East Asia	7%	9%	9%	11%	5%	6%	4%
South Asia	7%	4%	9%	10%	7%	5%	5%
Russia & Central Asia	7%	6%	11%	12%	4%	4%	4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	6%	4%	7%	5%	8%	6%	6%
Any region	51%	58%	44%	31%	64%	62%	53%

Notably, fewer respondents (45%) who identified as visible minorities said immigrants should come from any part of the world, than those who do not (52%). (see comprehensive tables).

Majority support language requirement

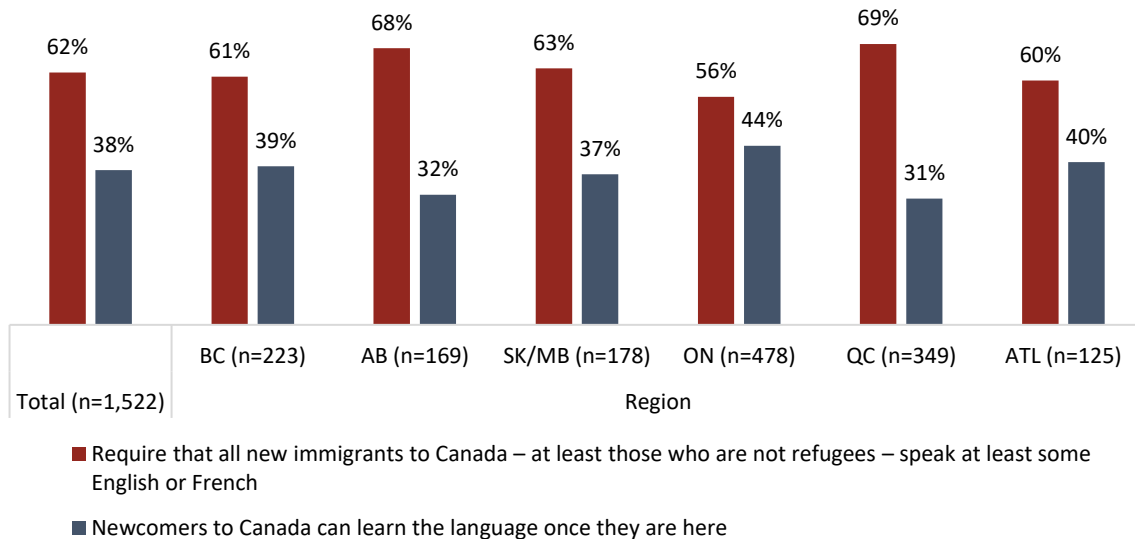
While half of Canadians say that immigrants should be drawn from all over the world, irrespective of which region they are from, there is one criterion that most also agree upon: they should be able to speak at least one of the country's official languages.

Six-in-ten (62%) Canadians believe that immigrants who are not refugees should speak at least one official language if they are going to live in Canada. That said, a considerable number of Canadians (38%) say that newcomers to Canada should be allowed to learn a language once they arrive. These ratios are similar across the country, with Ontario residents most willing to allow immigrants to train while they settle in:

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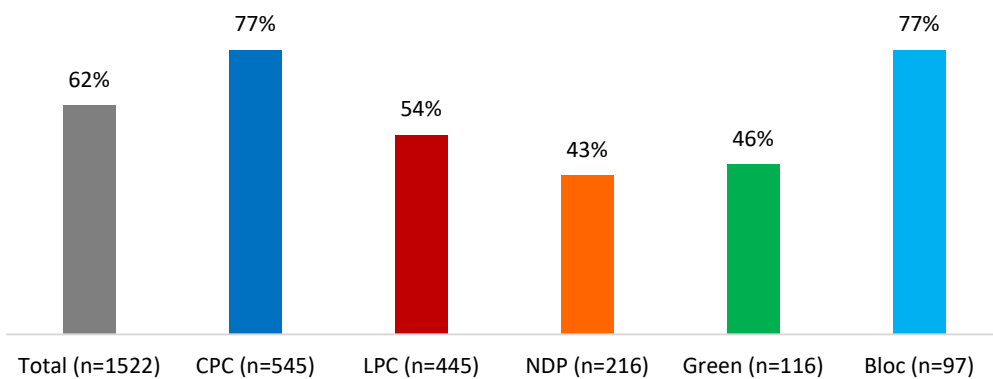
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When it comes to immigrants being able to speak our official languages, would you say we should:



CPC and Bloc Quebecois supporters are most likely to say immigrants should arrive with language skills, while NDP and Green party supporters are most likely to favour learning after arriving in Canada. Liberal voters are more evenly divided:

All new immigrants to Canada – at least those who are not refugees – should speak at least some English or French (All Respondents, n=1522)

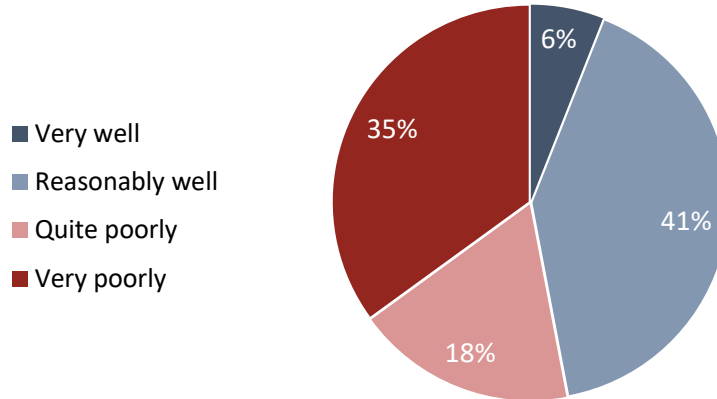


Part 3: Grading the Liberal record on Immigration

Looking back over the four-year term of the Trudeau Liberals, Canadians are split on the federal government’s handling of immigration policy. Nearly half believe the federal government has done well

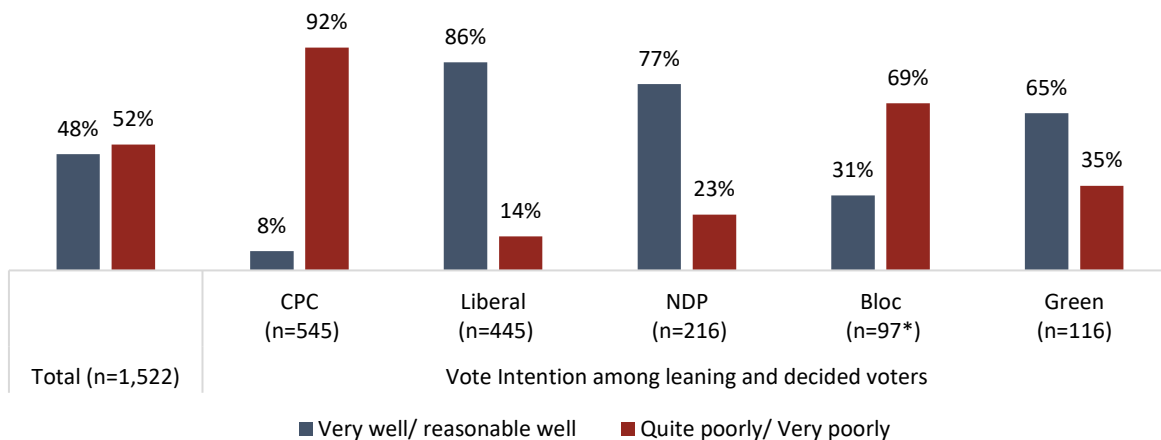
with immigration file (48%), while roughly the same number disagree (52%). Those who feel very negative, however, well outweigh those who feel very positive (35% vs 6%):

**Overall, how well or poorly would you say the Trudeau Liberal government has handled the immigration file over these past four years in office?
(All respondents, n=1522)**



The Liberal Party record is positively reviewed by at least two-thirds of those who plan to support the Green, NDP and Liberal Party, while universally panned by those who will support the Conservatives.

**Overall, how well or poorly would you say the Trudeau Liberal government has handled the immigration file over these past four years in office?
(All respondents, n=1522)**

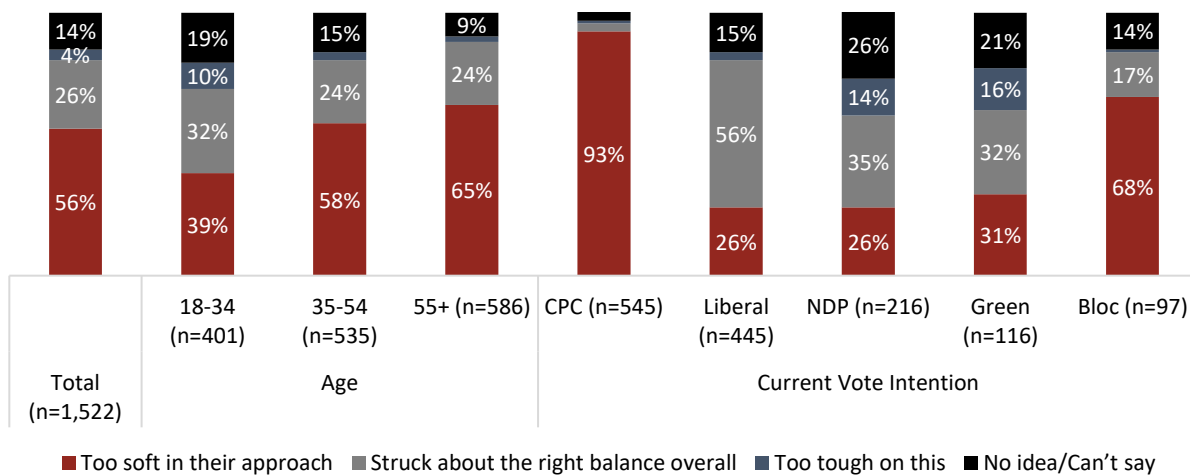


On refugees and asylum seekers

Inextricable from the immigration file is the movement of asylum seekers who have crossed the Canadian border outside of official border crossing areas over the past number of years. In August of 2018 two-thirds of Canadians called the border crossings a ‘crisis’, but these irregular crossings have decreased by close to 50 per cent in 2019. Some have criticized the federal government for its handling of asylum seekers, chief among them, Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who has barred legal aid organizations from using provincial funding for refugee cases.

The majority of Canadians (56%) say that the Trudeau government has been too soft in their approach to these asylum claims, while one-quarter (26%) are satisfied with their response. Conservatives and older Canadians are the most critical. Just over half (56%) of those who plan to support Trudeau on October 21 say that his government has struck the right balance:

Regarding asylum seekers crossing into Canada outside official border crossings, would you say the Trudeau Liberal government has been:



Part 4: Looking Forward

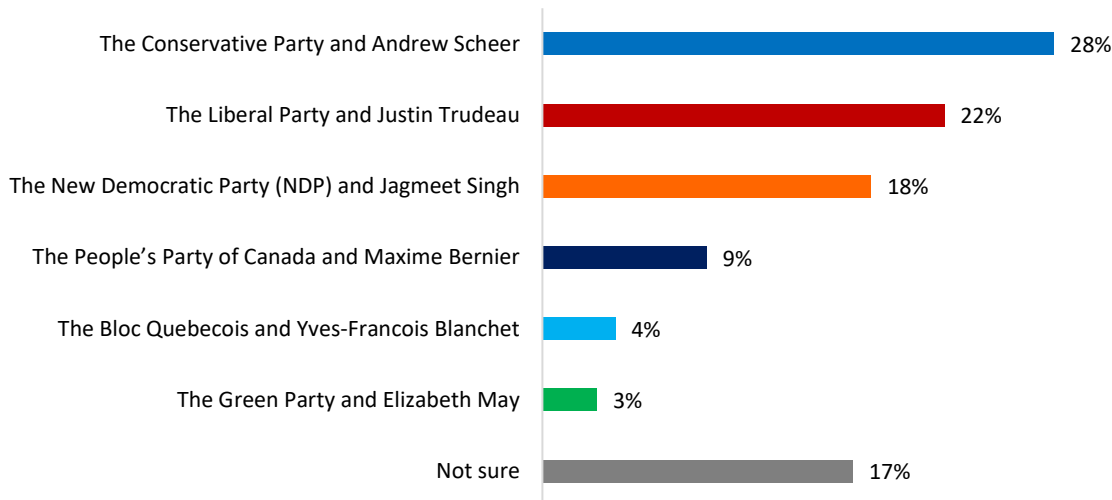
No clear choice on who's best to lead on immigration

Given that half of Canadians are dissatisfied with the way Trudeau and the Liberal government have handled immigration, it is worth considering who would be most trusted on the issue going forward. CPC leader Andrew Scheer is chosen by 28 per cent of respondents, a slight advantage over Trudeau and Singh, who also generate support from approximately one-in-five Canadians. A significant portion remain unsure (17%):

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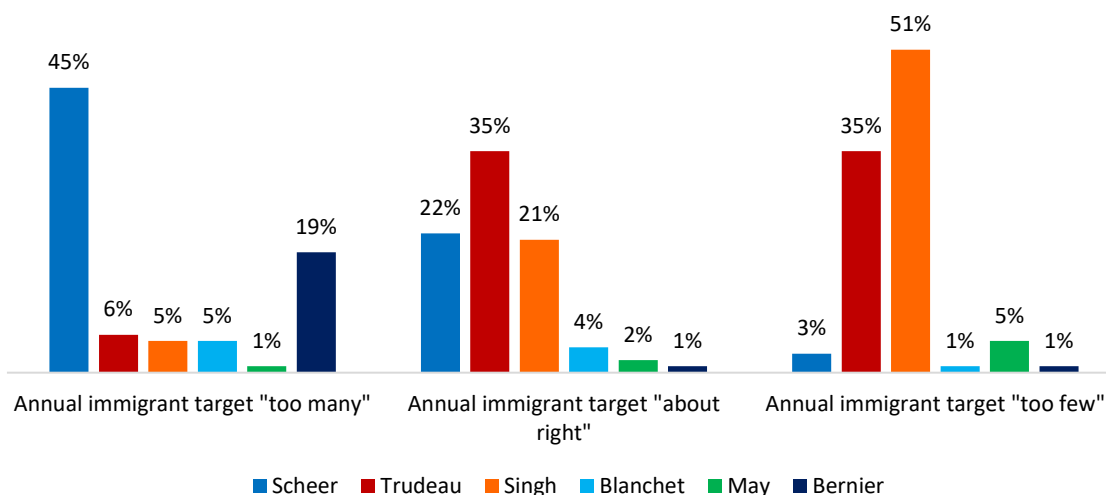
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**Who do you think would do the best job managing the immigration file?
(All respondents, n=1522)**



Scheer garners the most support from Canadians who say that immigration targets under the Liberals are too high. Within this group, 45 per cent say Scheer would be best, while 19 per cent would choose Maxime Bernier, whose PPC has said it would reduce immigration levels to between 100 and 150 thousand per year. Those who believe immigration targets are too low show a preference for Jagmeet Singh on the issue:

**Who do you think would do the best job managing the immigration file? -
by views on annual immigration target
(All respondents, n=1522)**

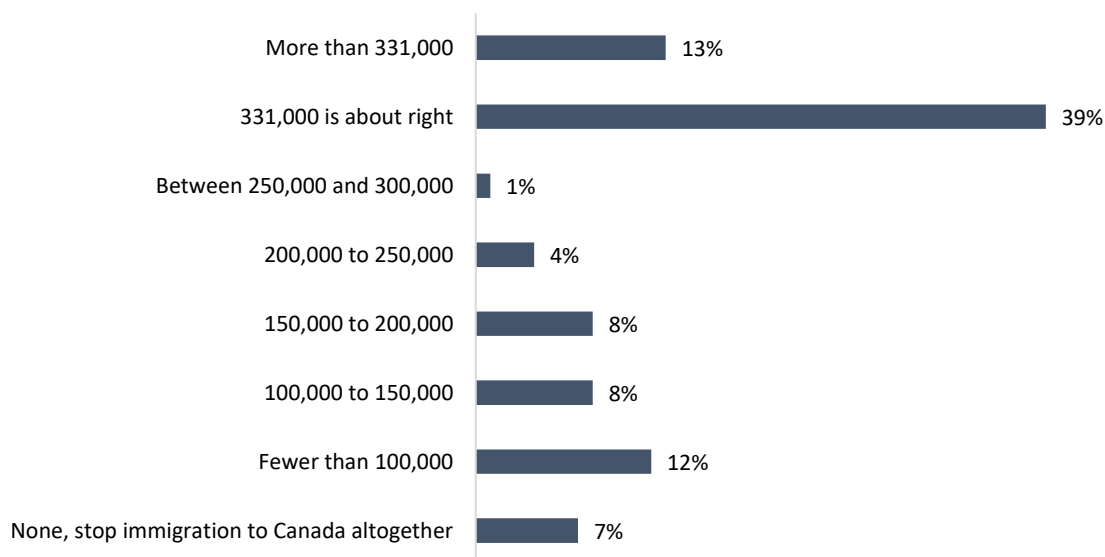


What should the immigration target be?

Immigration targets from the federal parties range widely, and some are clearer than others. The Liberal Party plan is to increase immigration to 350,000 by 2021, while the PPC plan, as mentioned, would be to reduce immigration to the 100-150 thousand range. The CPC and NDP plans have yet to announce immigration targets.

As mentioned previously, 39 per cent of Canadians feel the current target is about right, while 13 per cent say they would increase the amount. Meanwhile, one-in-ten would take fewer than 100 thousand, while a handful say they would stop immigration altogether (7%). Experts say the economic consequences of this would be disastrous:

How many immigrants do you think Canada should be taking?



Canadian opinions about economic impact of immigration

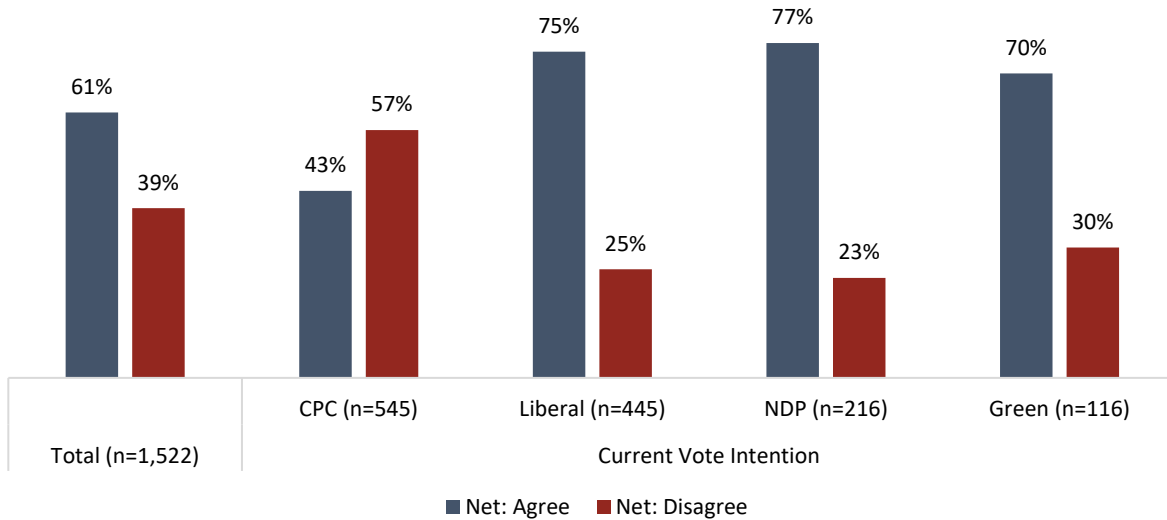
The arguments from economists about the value of immigration to the Canadian economy are more well-received from those on the centre-left of the Canadians political spectrum. Respondents were asked whether Canada's economic growth is in peril without immigration and at least seven-in-ten Green, NDP and Liberal supporters agreed. Those who intend to support the CPC meanwhile, disagree at more than twice the rate of other party supporters.

Importantly, Canada has not had a "replacement fertility rate", a rate of domestic fertility high enough to sustain the population, since 1971, and the population continues to age. Economists predict that GDP would drop precipitously in a no-immigration scenario:

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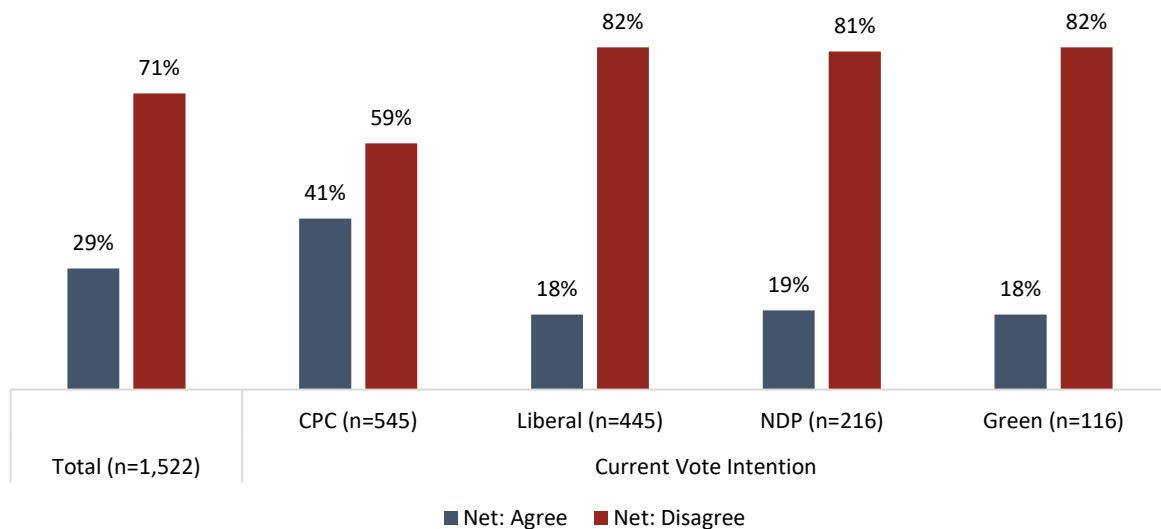
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Agree vs Disagree: Canada's economic growth is in peril without immigration



The same dynamic arises when Canadians are asked if new immigrants are taking too many jobs away from Canadians who already live here. Conservatives are twice as likely to say that they are:

Agree vs Disagree: New immigrants take too many jobs away from Canadians

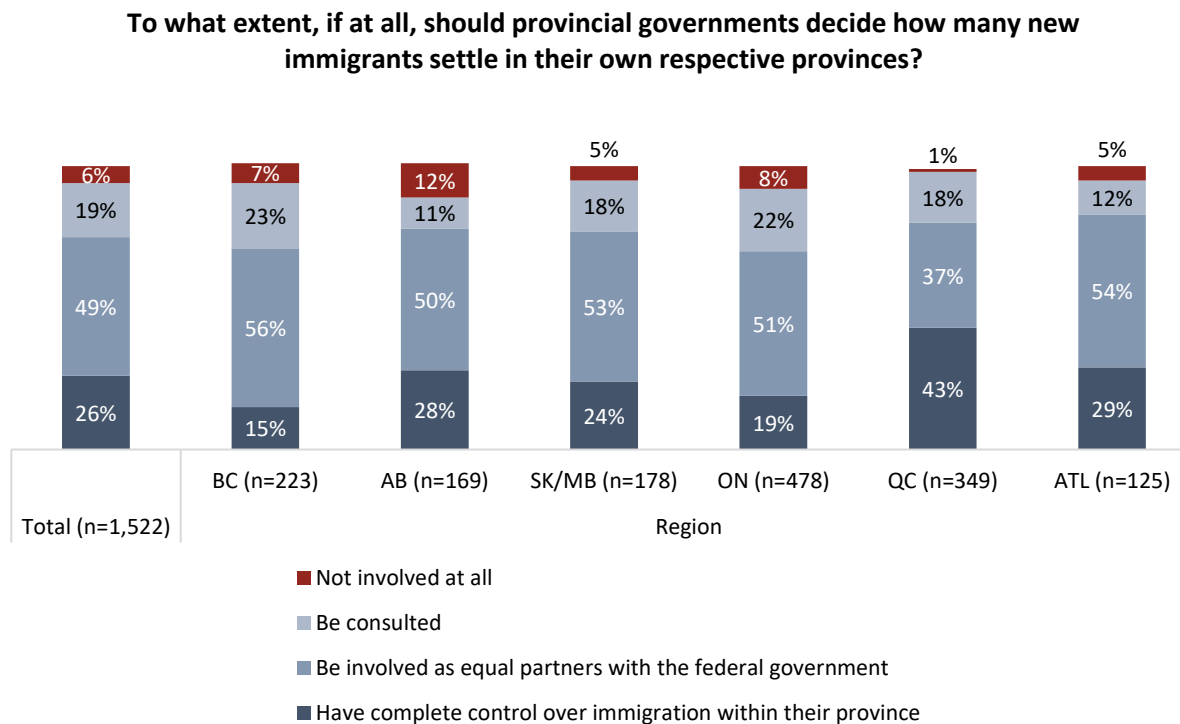


Should provinces have more say?

Based on the Canadian Constitution, immigration is a shared responsibility between provincial and territorial governments and the federal government. Agreements are negotiated by the federal government with each jurisdiction based on the needs of both that region and the federal government.

That said, Quebec has traditionally pushed for more control over immigration, and in some cases, [maintained it](#).

Other provinces have also requested more control over immigration in recent years, but the current arrangement appears to be largely acceptable outside of Quebec. Four-in-ten Quebec residents say they should have sole responsibility within the province to control immigration, while three-in-ten Albertans and Atlantic Canadians agree. Meanwhile, half of residents in every province say that a shared responsibility is ideal:



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

For detailed results by views on annual immigration target, immigration's effect on the country and how the government has handled the immigration file, [click here](#).

[Click here to read the full questionnaire used in this report.](#)