

In Canada, Christmas traditions change as fewer people see religion as the reason for the season

But four-in-five still prefer 'Christmas' over 'Holiday Season'

December 19, 2019 – It's the most wonderful time of the year.

For most Canadians, Christmas is a time for festivities and fun, where they'll get together with their families for dinner (89%), set up a tree (77%) and hang stockings (57%).

However, a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that some traditions are changing, and for many, some of the true meaning of Christmas has been lost.

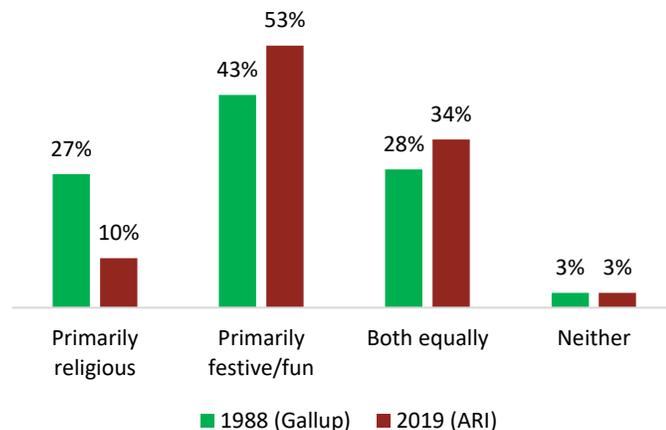
For example, in 1988, 27 per cent of Canadians said this season was primarily a religious celebration. Today, just one-in-ten (10%) say the same. And while more Canadians today say the season is centered around fun and festivities, rather than faith (53%), the number who believe Christmas is equally about secular joy and religious observance has grown as well (from 28% to 34%).

Whatever they may be doing to celebrate this season, Canadians evidently long for the days of old, away from the commercialization that begins earlier and earlier each year. That said, while seven-in-ten (69%) say that Christmas has lost some of its real meaning, nearly the same number (65%) held this view nearly 70 years ago. Evidently, as time goes by, the nostalgia for a more "traditional" Christmas is one thing that doesn't change.

More Key Findings:

- Three-quarters of Canadian adults say they are at least a little excited for the holiday season, while one-quarter are not looking forward to it. Notably, lower-income Canadians are more likely to feel negatively about the season
- Four-in-five Canadians (82%) say that they prefer to call this season "Christmas" while one-in-five (18%) say they would rather it be referred to as the "Holiday Season". Interestingly, there are no generational differences on this preference

When you think about this holiday season, do you consider this occasion primarily a religious celebration or something that is generally more of a festive and fun occasion?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from December 2 – 4, 2019 among a representative randomized sample of 1,655 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 +/- 2.0 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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- The number of Canadians who will attend a religious service for Christmas this year is half of what it was in Angus Reid's 1995 Christmas survey (26% down from 53%)

About ARI

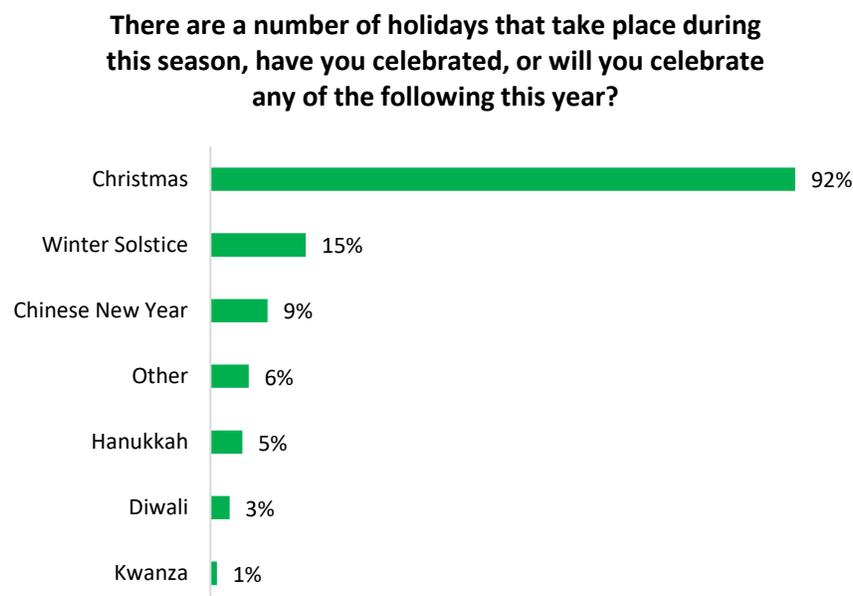
The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial 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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Nine-in-ten will celebrate Christmas this year

In a year where political divisions driven by a contentious federal election were the top story for media outlets, the holidays offer an opportunity for Canadians to enjoy a time of celebration and unity. For most, that holiday is Christmas. In fact, nine-in-ten Canadians (92%) say they will celebrate that holiday this year, while a number of other holidays like Chinese New Year, Hanukkah and Diwali have been or will be observed:

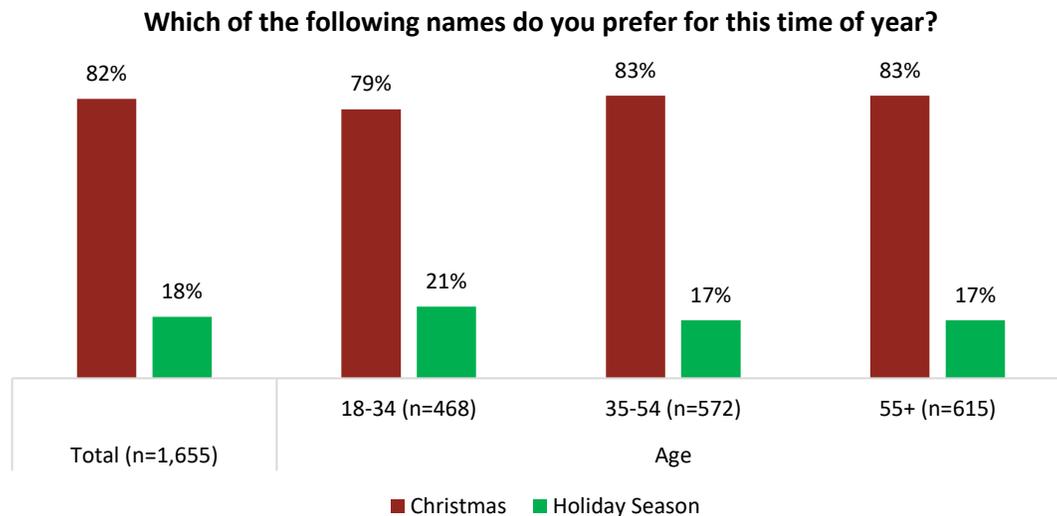


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But against the backdrop of celebration is intense discussion: Each year, businesses and individuals alike grapple with which terminology to use; should they be wishing others a ‘Merry Christmas’ or offer best regards for the ‘Holiday Season’?

For most, referring to this time of year as “Christmas” is preferred, though one-in-five choose “Holiday Season”. This finding is relatively consistent, regardless of the age of respondents:



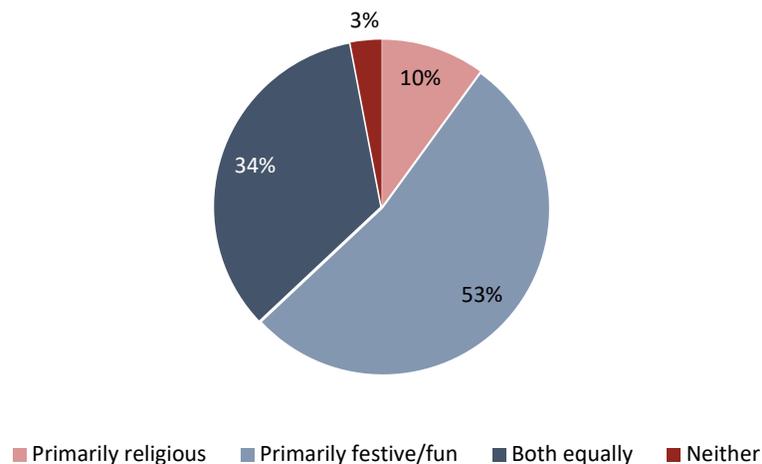
A festive time, a religious time, or both?

While most call it Christmas, the holiday season means different things to different people. For some, it is mostly a religious and holy time. For others, it is a period of celebration and fun during the shortest, darkest days of the year. For half of Canadians (53%) it is an interval of non-denominational festivities with friends and family. Fewer, one-in-ten, (10%) say they consider this to be primarily a religious celebration, while one-in-three say that it is both, equally:

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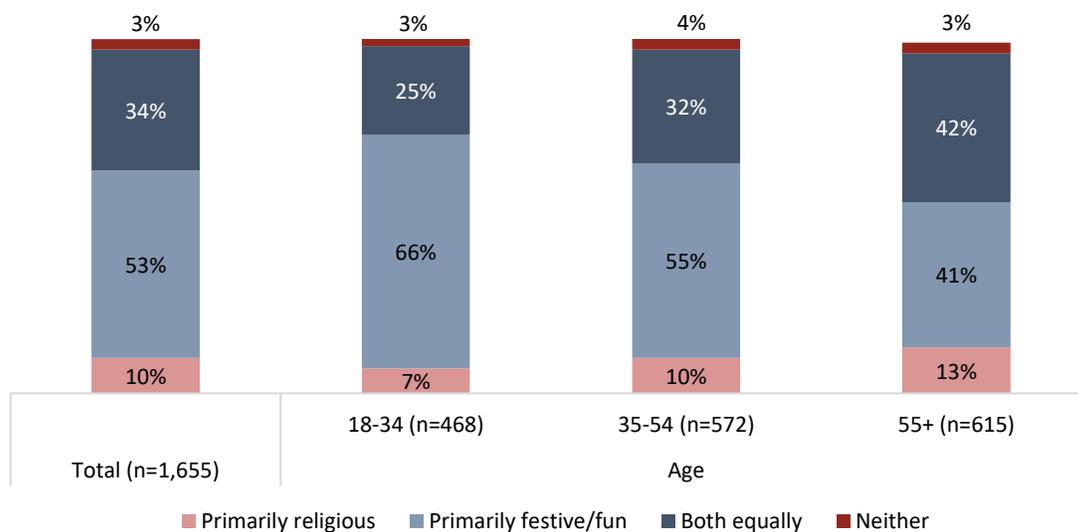
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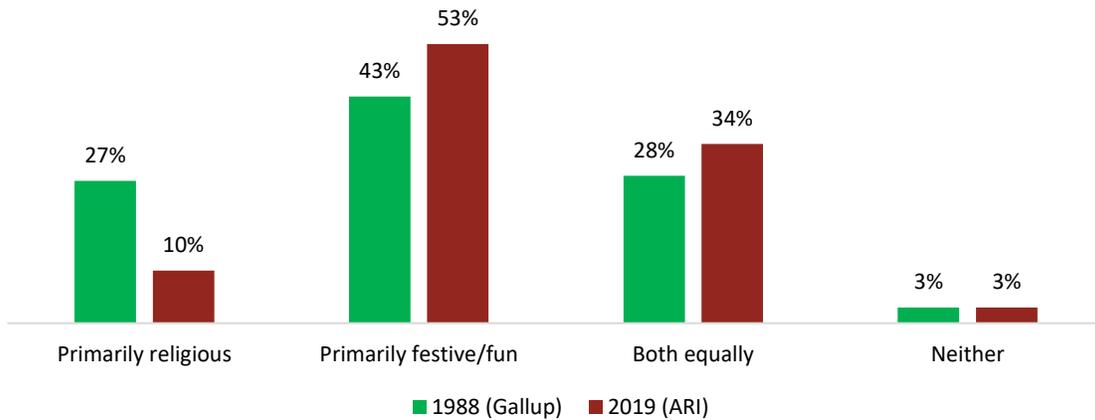
A generational split is evident here in terms of religiosity and the holidays. More than half (55%) of older Canadians say the season is at least partially a religious one, compared to 42 per cent among 35 to 54-year olds and just one-in-three (32%) among 18 to 34-year-olds:

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Comparing these data with opinions from three decades ago, the trend away from a more religiously focused holiday season becomes clear. The number of Canadians saying the holiday season is primarily a religious occasion has dropped from nearly three-in-ten in 1988 (27%) to one-in-ten now:

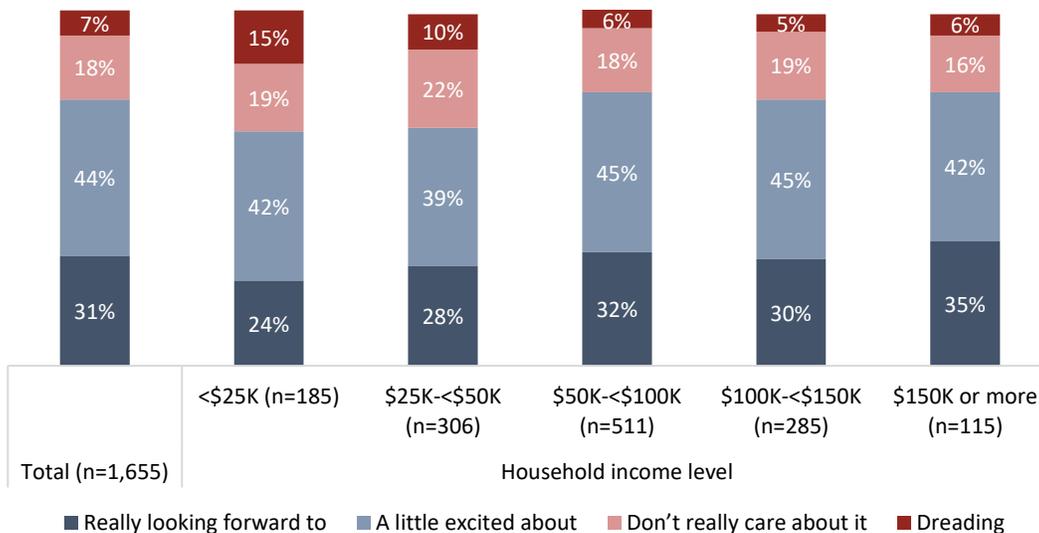
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Most excited, few 'dreading' the holidays

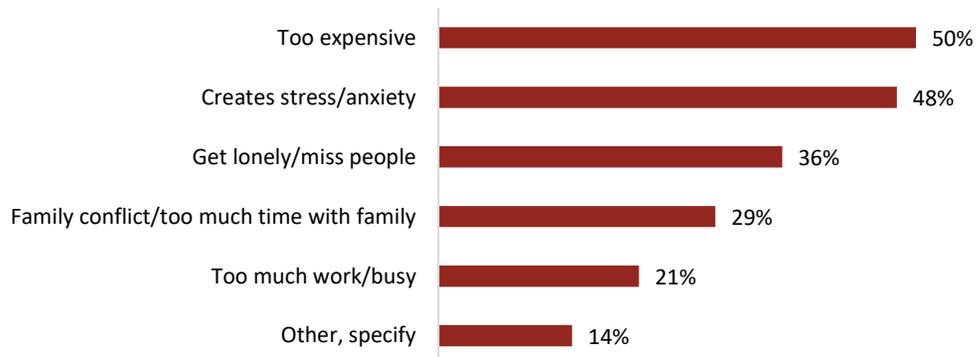
As the carol goes, "Christmas is for children". But for adults, the excitement is tempered by anxiety. Three-in-ten adults (31%) say they are "really looking forward" to this time of year, while the largest number are only "a little excited" (44%). For almost one-in-ten, this time of year is a source of dread. Notably, that sentiment is more common among lower income individuals:

And as the holidays approach, would you say this time of year is something that you are...



The data suggesting lower-income Canadians are less likely to look forward to this time of year is informed further by the reasoning for their worry: money. Half say Christmas is too expensive (50%) while the same number find that it brings about extra stress or anxiety (48%):

**And what is it that makes you dread the holiday season?
(Those who dread this time of year, n=122)**

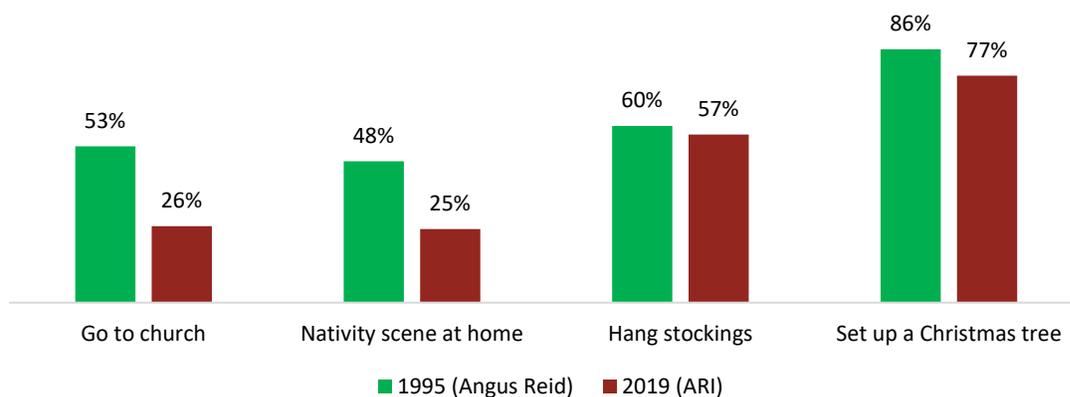


How Canadians will celebrate

Anxiety-ridden or not, many Christmas traditions endure, while others have deteriorated with time. While customs related to the arrival of Santa Claus and the decoration of homes remain constant, it is the more religious aspects of Christmas observance that no longer command the level of participation they did even a couple of generations ago. The number of Canadians going to church on or around December 25th has declined by half, as have the number who arrange a nativity scene at home. These religious trends tend to follow the overall trend in religious service attendance, which has been falling consistently since the end of the Second World War.

Related: The role of faith in modern society still a source of debate

**People follow all sorts of different traditions at Christmas time. We'd like to get an idea of the kinds of things people do.
This Christmas, will you:**



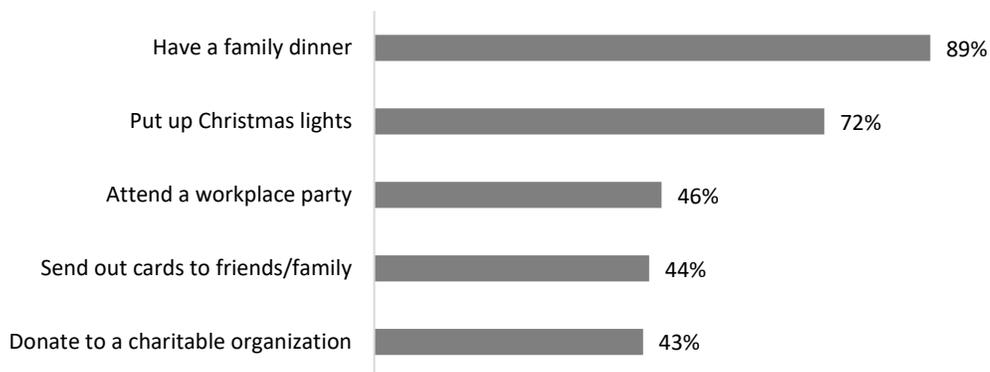
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The most common activity that Canadians will enjoy is a family dinner.

Related: What stops Canadians from donating more to charitable organizations?

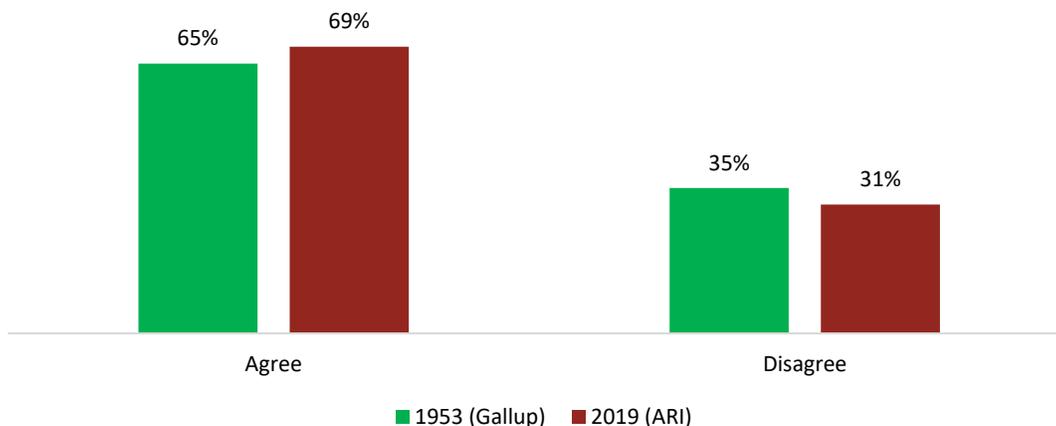
People follow all sorts of different traditions at Christmas time.
We'd like to get an idea of the kinds of things people do.
This Christmas, will you:



Has Christmas lost its meaning?

It is a common lament: Christmas has lost its real meaning. For some, this means a loss of focus on the birth of Jesus Christ, for others, it is the increased commercialization of the season rather than family and reflection. Among Canadians, the sense that Christmas has indeed lost some significance is pervasive, but it isn't new. While seven-in-ten (69%) say this now, nearly the same number (65%) held this view nearly 70 years ago.

Some people say Christmas is losing its real meaning.
Do you agree with this or not?



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