

Diversity and Racism in Canada: Competing views deeply divide country along gender, generational lines

One-third say Canada is a 'racist' country; 12 per cent believe some races are superior to others

June 21, 2021 – These are times of deep reckoning over issues of race and identity, hatred, and violence in Canada.

Against the backdrop of [the London, ON, attack](#) that targeted and killed a Muslim family, the deep pain associated with revelations about [the hundreds of children buried](#) on the grounds of former residential schools, and [ongoing reports of discrimination](#) against Canadians of Asian origin, many are attempting to reconcile the realities of the nation's attitudes towards diversity and equality with national mythologizing about multiculturalism.

The second report from a comprehensive research series from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute in partnership with the University of British Columbia dives deeply into the sentiments of those living in this country – to illuminate perceptions and attitudes towards diversity and racism.

For 85 per cent of the population, that Canada is home to people from different races and ethnicities betters the nation. Canadians of all regions of the country, age groups, political ideologies and ethnic backgrounds agree on this point.

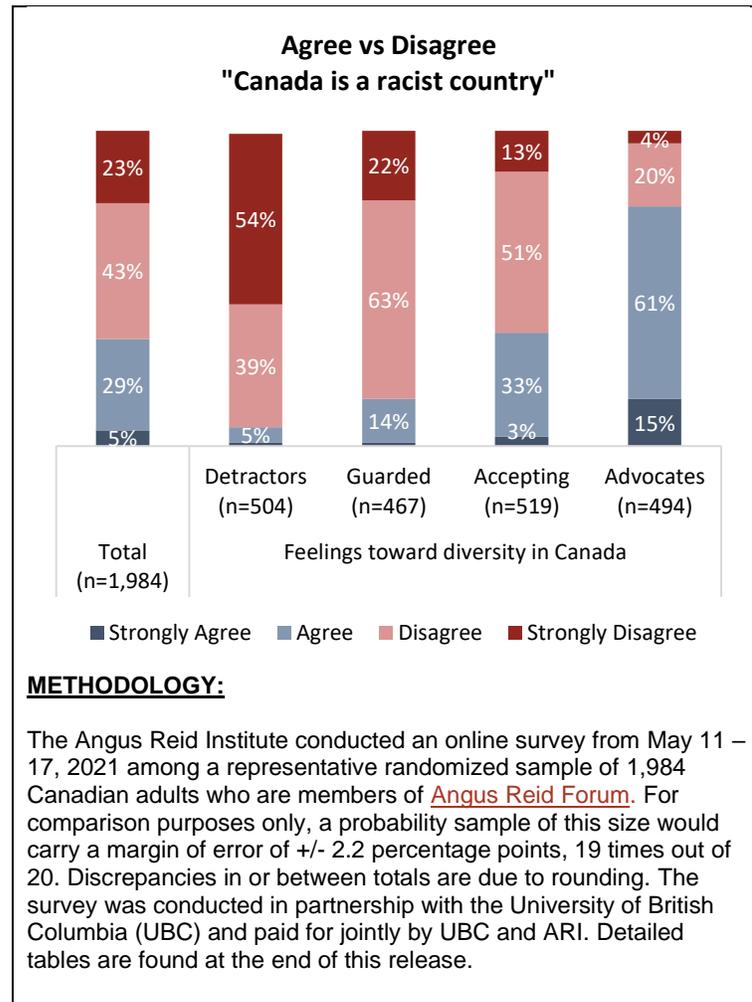
But does everyone feel it? Contradictions abound. Fully one-in-three (34%) say "Canada is a racist country." Among those who believe this most keenly: visible minorities (42 per cent of whom say so) and women, particularly those under the age of 35, who are much more likely than men to hold this view (54%).

On the other hand, however, fewer than one-in-eight (12%) say they believe some races are superior to others. Further, 41 per cent of Canadians say that people seeing discrimination where it does not exist is a bigger problem for the country than people not being able to see where it does.

These perspectives coalesce to form four mindsets with which Canadians view diversity. This report analyzes each – the Detractors, Guarded, Accepting and Advocates – to better understand the expectations of Canadians heading into the second half century of official multiculturalism.

More Key Findings:

- Three-quarters of Canadians over the age of 55 disagree that Canada is a racist country, while 54 per cent of women between the ages of 18 and 34 say that it is



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- One-in-five Canadians (21%) say that they feel like they are treated as an outsider in Canada. This proportion is 17 per cent among Caucasians, 30 per cent among Indigenous respondents and 29 per cent among visible minorities.
- The Advocates, one-quarter of Canadians, are very concerned about racism and discrimination, to the point that they are twice as likely as visible minorities themselves to say that police are prejudiced or racist toward the latter demographic (83% vs 42%)
- The Detractors, made up of older and more conservative Canadians, are also one-quarter of the population. This group is distinct in that it is more likely than others to say that immigration levels are way too high, and that racism is not a problem in Canada
- One-quarter of Canadians feel “cold” toward Muslims, more than any other group asked about in the survey. Men over the age of 55 (42%) and Quebecers (37%) are among the most likely to say that.
- Most Albertans (54%) and Saskatchewanians (57%) believe exaggerating racism is a bigger problem in Canada than not seeing racism where it exists.
- Yet residents of Saskatchewan (44%) were the most likely to agree that Canada is a racist country. Residents of Quebec (24%) were the least likely.

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 Three: Racism in Canada

- Is Canada racist? One-in-three say “yes”
- But how many actually think some races are superior?
- Do Canadians perceive too much racism? Or not enough?
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Part One: The State of Diversity in Canada

Most – but not all – say diversity makes Canada better

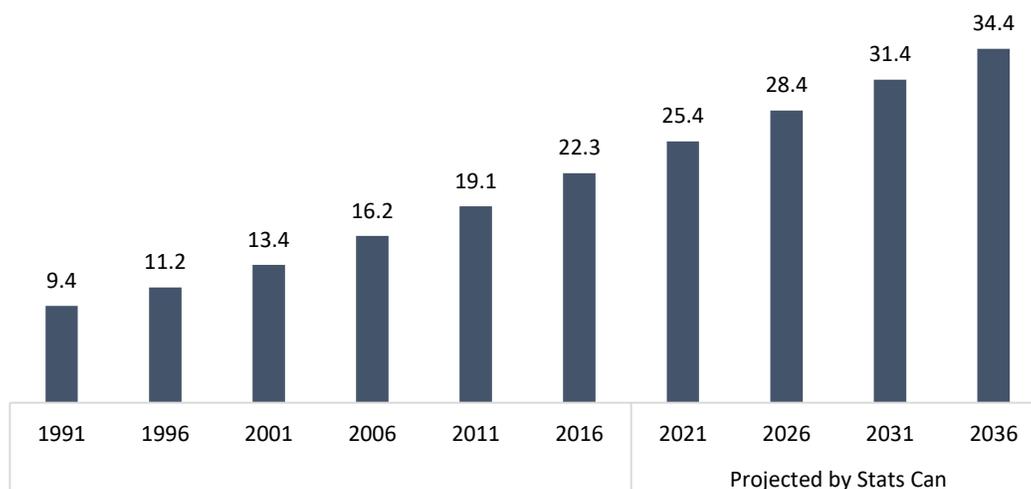
Canada’s diversity has been referred to at times as everything from [experimental](#), to [post-nationalist](#), a [success](#) and a [failure](#). Canadian views on this subject diverge and meet, like the dipping and rising threads pulling together the cultural fabric that Canada has sewn over the 50 years since multiculturalism was instated as a government policy.

For a majority, there is a level of pride that comes with living in a racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse nation. So too, however, are there competing views in public opinion of how far multiculturalism should go, and the extent to which racism and discrimination exist in Canada.

Canada relies on immigration for economic growth. As of 2016, the [top sources](#) of foreign born Canadian citizens are India, China, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom. India is projected to account [for one-quarter](#) of new residents going forward under the Liberal government’s plan.

Multiple factors including declining birth rates, an aging population and the crippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have led some to suggest this will be the case even more so in coming years. Indeed, the expectation according to Statistics Canada is that this year the percentage of Canada’s visible minority population will surpass one-quarter:

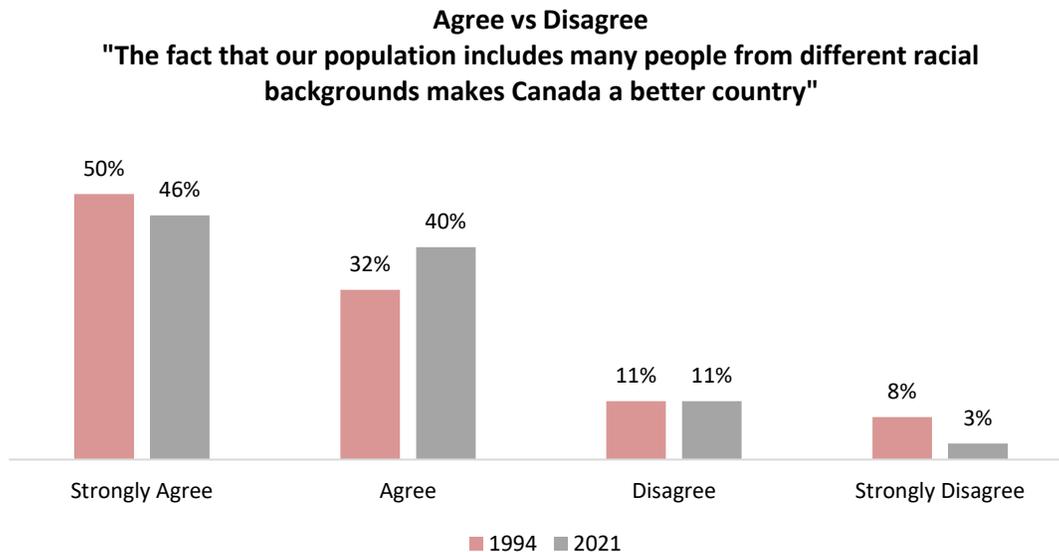
Canada's visible minority population (%)



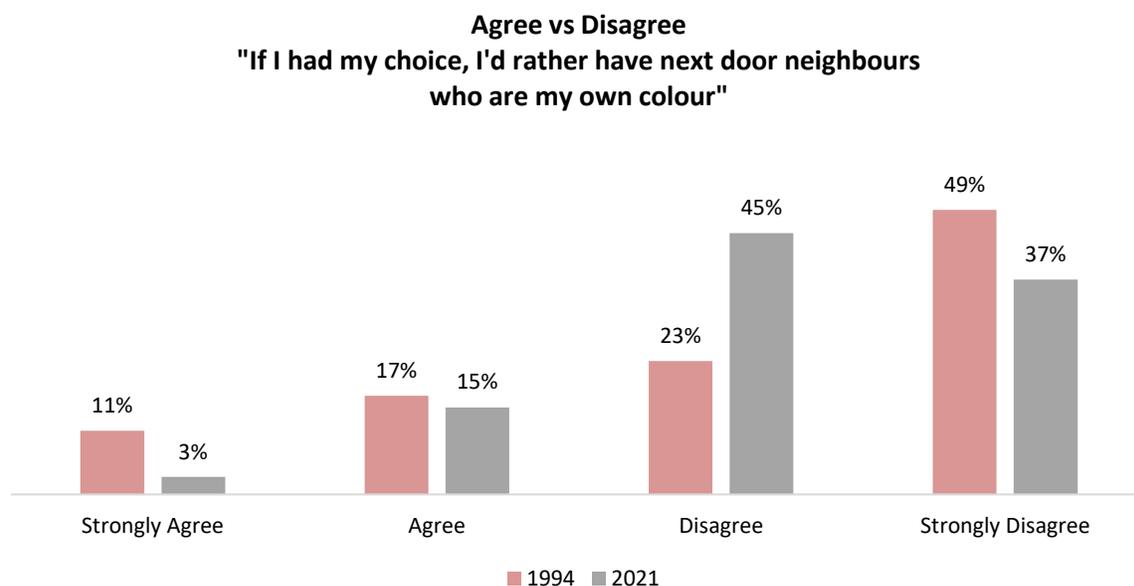
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As the face of Canada has changed substantially over the past three decades, opinions on these two key indicators have remained stable. A slightly higher number of now say diversity makes Canada a better country (86%) than in 1994 (82%):



And what about the question of real, lived proximity to diversity? The number of people who say they prefer to live next door to those who are the same ethnicity has declined from 28 per cent in 1994 to 18 per cent in 2021:



Asked whether having a population that includes many people from different racial backgrounds makes Canada better, 85 per cent say that it does. The question is closer to unanimous among women, though notably one-in-five men between the ages of 18 and 34 (21%) and older than 54 (21%) say that they disagree.

The same proportion – one-in-five – among men of all ages say that if they had the option, they would prefer to live in a community with people who are of the same race or colour as themselves, this drops to as low as 12 per cent among women aged 35-54:

<i>Agree vs Disagree</i>								
		Total (n=1,984)	Male			Female		
			18-34 (n=263)	35-54 (n=328)	55+ (n=354)	18-34 (n=292)	35-54 (n=357)	55+ (n=383)
The fact that our population includes many people from different racial backgrounds makes Canada a better country	Agree	85%	80%	86%	79%	91%	90%	86%
	Disagree	15%	20%	14%	21%	9%	10%	14%
If I had my choice, I'd rather have next door neighbours who are my own colour	Agree	18%	21%	22%	23%	16%	12%	15%
	Disagree	82%	79%	78%	77%	84%	88%	85%

Regionally, respondents from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba are more circumspect on these questions of diversity, while those in B.C. and Atlantic Canada profess the highest levels of enthusiasm:

<i>Agree vs Disagree</i>									
		Total (n=1,984)	Region						
			BC (n=284)	AB (n=192)	SK (n=133)	MB (n=154)	ON (n=566)	QC (n=450)	ATL (n=205)
The fact that our population includes many people from different racial backgrounds makes Canada a better country	Agree	85%	90%	85%	81%	78%	86%	83%	87%
	Disagree	15%	10%	15%	19%	22%	14%	17%	13%
If I had my choice, I'd rather have next door neighbours who are my own colour	Agree	18%	14%	25%	21%	17%	17%	19%	15%
	Disagree	82%	86%	75%	79%	83%	83%	81%	85%

The most pronounced divisions on these two statements about diversity appear to be political or ideological. One-quarter of those who supported the Conservative Party or Bloc Quebecois in the 2019 federal election disagree that diversity makes Canada better, and would like to live with neighbours that look like them, compared to far fewer among voters for the other three major federal parties.

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<i>Agree vs Disagree</i>							
		Total (n=1,984)	Federal vote 2019				
			CPC (n=578)	Liberal (n=553)	NDP (n=267)	Bloc Quebecois (n=119)	Green (n=103)
The fact that our population includes many people from different racial backgrounds makes Canada a better country	Agree	85%	76%	95%	95%	76%	89%
	Disagree	15%	24%	5%	5%	24%	11%
If I had my choice, I'd rather have next door neighbours who are my own colour	Agree	18%	27%	11%	7%	27%	12%
	Disagree	82%	73%	89%	93%	73%	88%

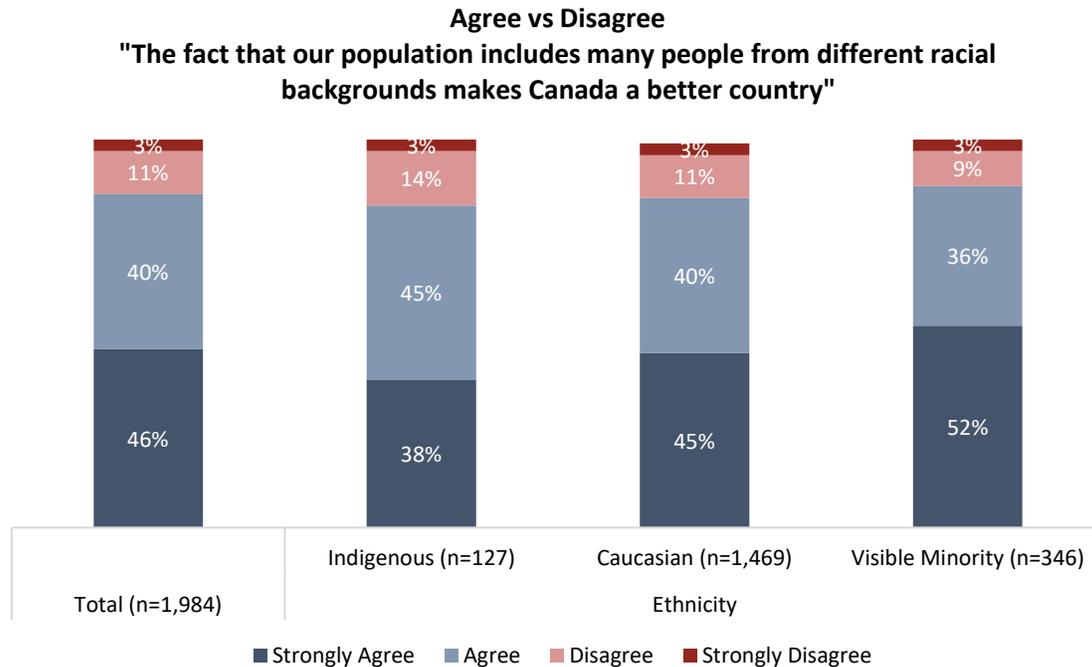
Visible minority and Indigenous perspectives

The views of Canadians who self-identify as a visible minority or as Indigenous are equally as likely as Caucasian respondents to say that they feel Canada's diversity is a strength.

Notably, half of those who identify as a visible minority 'strongly agree' that diversity makes Canada a better country, illuminating just how important this aspect of Canadian society is to some:

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One-in-four feel 'cold' toward Muslim Canadians

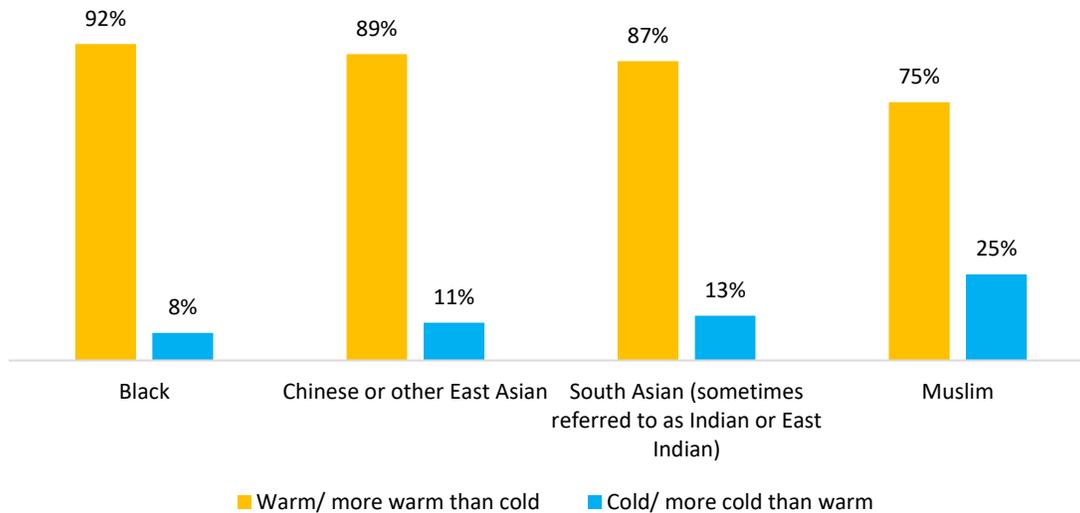
Sentiment toward the Muslim Canadian community takes on a heightened importance in the wake of the tragedy in London, ON. Four members of a Muslim Canadian family were killed on June 6 when a man ran them down with a vehicle. The attack has been classified as a **premeditated** hate crime and is being treated as a terrorist act. All leaders of major federal political parties stood in solidarity with Canada's Muslim community in the following days.

As part of this comprehensive study – in the weeks prior to the tragedy – the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians their feelings towards people who comprise some of this country's more visible minority communities. Canvassed on whether they felt "warm" or "cold" to Canadians who are Black, Chinese or East Asian, South Asian or Muslim, majorities do express warmth towards each. It is significant, however, that fully one-in-four (25%) say they feel "more cold than warm" or "cold" towards Canadians who are Muslim.

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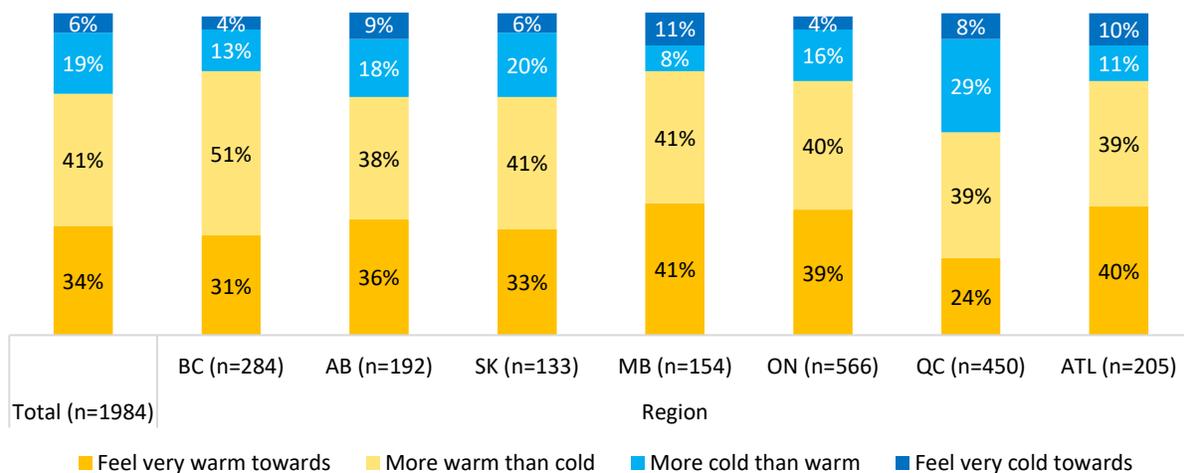
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Please indicate your own personal feelings towards Canadians who are:



Those most inclined to feel this way include men over the age of 55 (42%) and respondents living in Quebec (37%). Indeed, fully half of past Bloc Quebecois voters (51%) and a near-plurality of past CPC in the last federal election (38%) also express this feeling ([see detailed tables](#)).

Please indicate your own personal feelings towards Canadians who are: Muslim



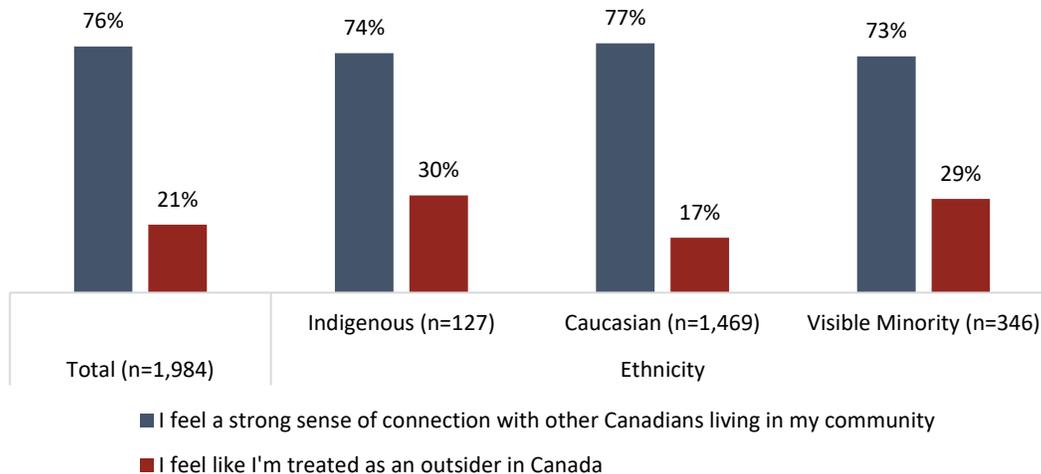
Not everyone feels they fit in, regardless of ethnicity

Despite more Canadians than fewer expressing value in a diverse population, many people – regardless of their background – say they feel like they are out of place in this country. One-in-five (21%), including three-in-ten visible minorities and Indigenous respondents, say that they feel they're treated like an outsider in Canada, while one-quarter of all groups do not feel a strong sense of connection with other people in their communities:

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Percentage that agree with each statement



Part Two: Four Mindsets about Diversity and Racism in Canada

In order to better understand the mindsets that Canadians hold toward multiculturalism and racism, the Angus Reid Institute created a Diversity Index. This index scores respondents according to their answers to a series of questions on their attitudes towards racial discrimination, and newcomers and visible minorities in Canada in general. Scores for each answer are aggregated to produce a total score for each respondent. A higher score indicates a more positive view toward multiculturalism and diversity and a more critical perspective toward issues with respect to racism. A lower score indicates a more closed off view, with less perception of racism as a problem in Canada and a more conservative view on issues like immigration and diversity. This scoring yields four groups (see the methodology section at the end of report).

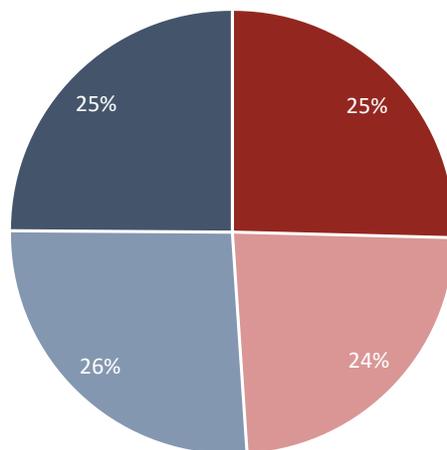
Demographics of the Diversity Index

The four mindsets of Canadians toward diversity are the **Advocates, Accepting, Guarded and Detractors**. Each represents approximately one-quarter of the population, as seen in the graph below:

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Feelings toward diversity in Canada



■ Detractors ■ Guarded ■ Accepting ■ Advocates

What follows is a brief summary of some defining details in each group:

Advocates

- Half of women aged 18 to 34 are Advocates
- Highest proportion found in Ontario (28%), Atlantic Canada (27%), and British Columbia (26%)
- Three-quarters say Canada is a racist country
- Half (47%) say they often hear others making racist comments (most of all four groups)
- Unanimous (99%) that diversity makes Canada a better country

Accepting

- Women in the 35 to 54 and 55-plus age groups are most commonly found among the Accepting
- Highest proportion also found in Ontario, Atlantic Canada, British Columbia – 29 per cent in each
- One-in-three (33%) past Liberal voters are Accepting, as are 28 per cent of past New Democrats
- 86 per cent say that people not seeing racial discrimination where it does exist is a bigger problem than people perceiving it in areas where it doesn't
- Most likely of all groups to say they feel connected to their community (80%)

Guarded

- Men in the 35 to 54 and 55-plus age groups are most commonly found among the Guarded
- Alberta (28%), Manitoba (27%), and Quebec (27%) hold the highest proportion of the Guarded
- One-in-three past Bloc Quebecois voters are Guarded, as are 29 per cent of past Conservatives
- Half (55%) say that perceptions of racial discrimination where it does not really exist is a bigger problem than people failing to see it
- One-in-five (20%) would prefer to have neighbours that are the same race

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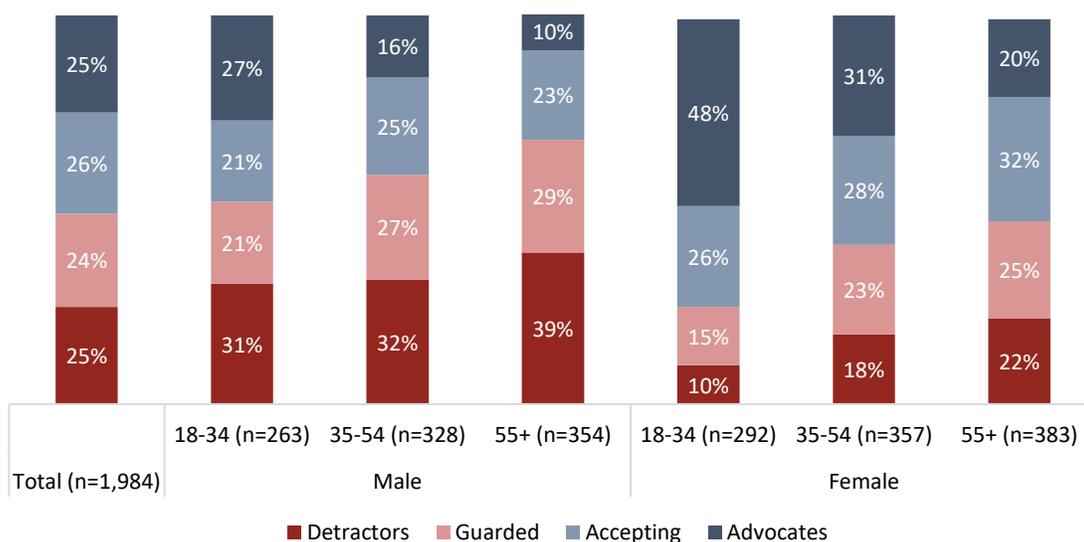
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Detractors

- Men are twice as likely to belong to this group (34%) as women (17%)
- Two-in-five men ages 55 years and older are found in this group
- Highest proportion found in Saskatchewan (38%), followed by Alberta (32%)
- Half of past CPC voters (48%) are Detractors, 39 per cent of past Bloc Quebecois voters
- Near unanimously (94%) disagree that Canada is a racist country
- More than two-in-five (44%) dispute that diversity makes Canada a better country
- One-third (34%) feel as though they are treated as an outsider in Canada

Age is a key factor along with gender. Young women are by far the most likely demographic to be Advocates, followed by women ages 35 to 54. Meanwhile, men of all ages are much more likely to be Guarded or Detractors compared to their female counterparts:

Diversity Index by Age and Gender

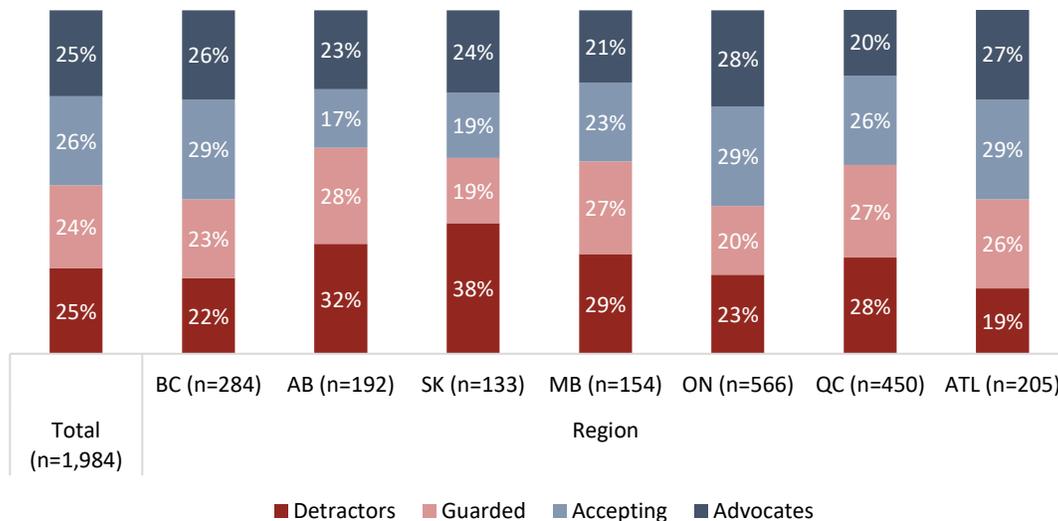


Regional differences are also significant. Ontario, B.C., and Atlantic Canada are more likely to be home to the Advocates or the Accepting, whilst other parts of the country reveal greater populations of the Guarded or Detractors:

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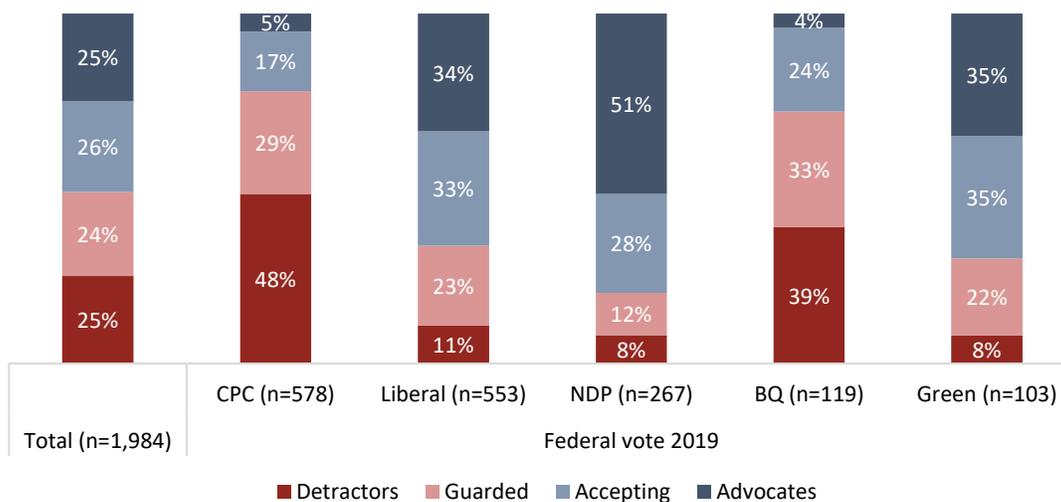
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Diversity Index by Region



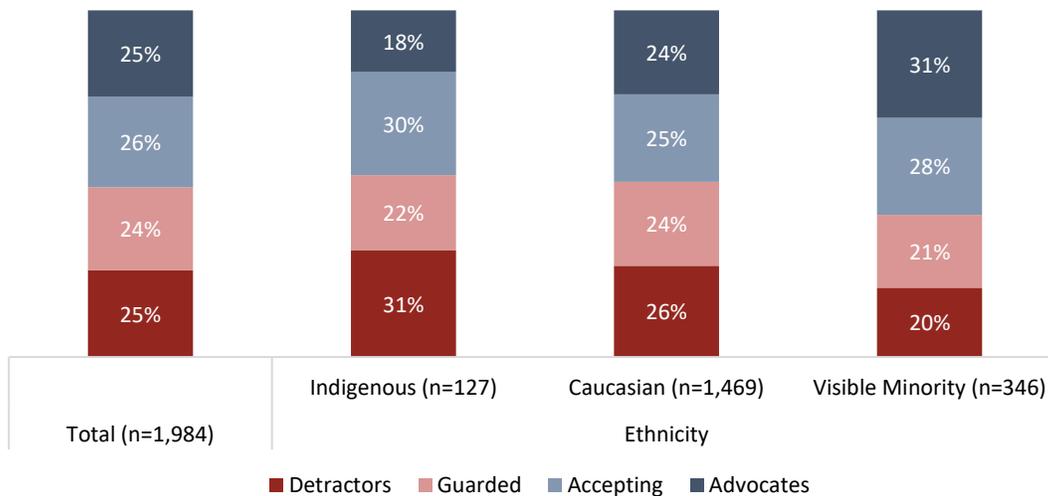
Politics is also part of the discussion. Half of those who supported the Conservative Party in the 2019 federal election are Detractors, as are 39 per cent of Bloc Quebecois voters. New Democrats are most likely to be Advocates:

Diversity Index by Federal Vote 2019



Notably, each segment of the Index is represented across the spectrum, regardless of whether respondents self-identify as Caucasian, Indigenous, or as a member of a visible minority:

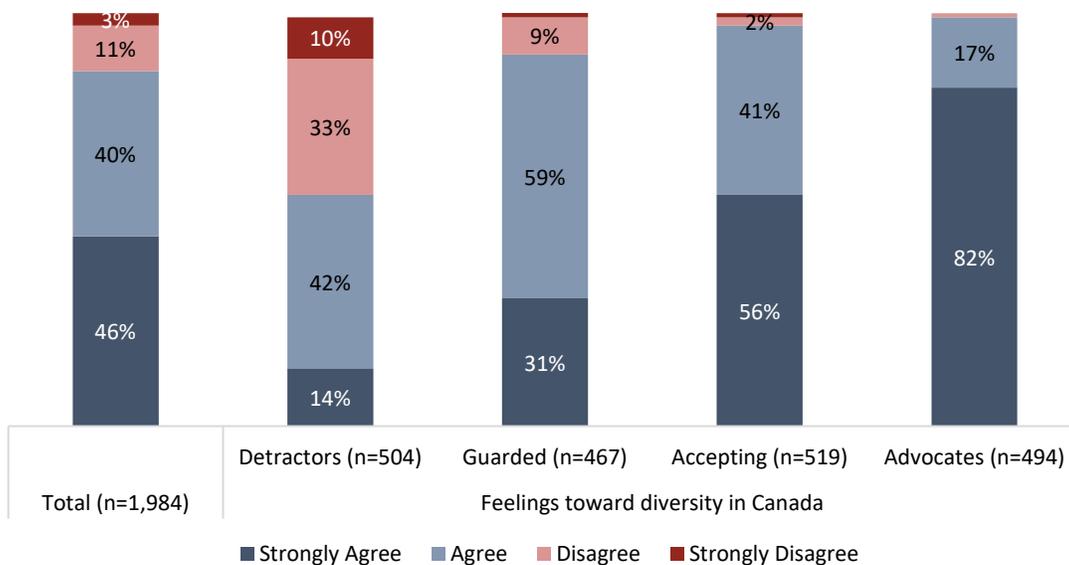
Diversity Index by Ethnicity



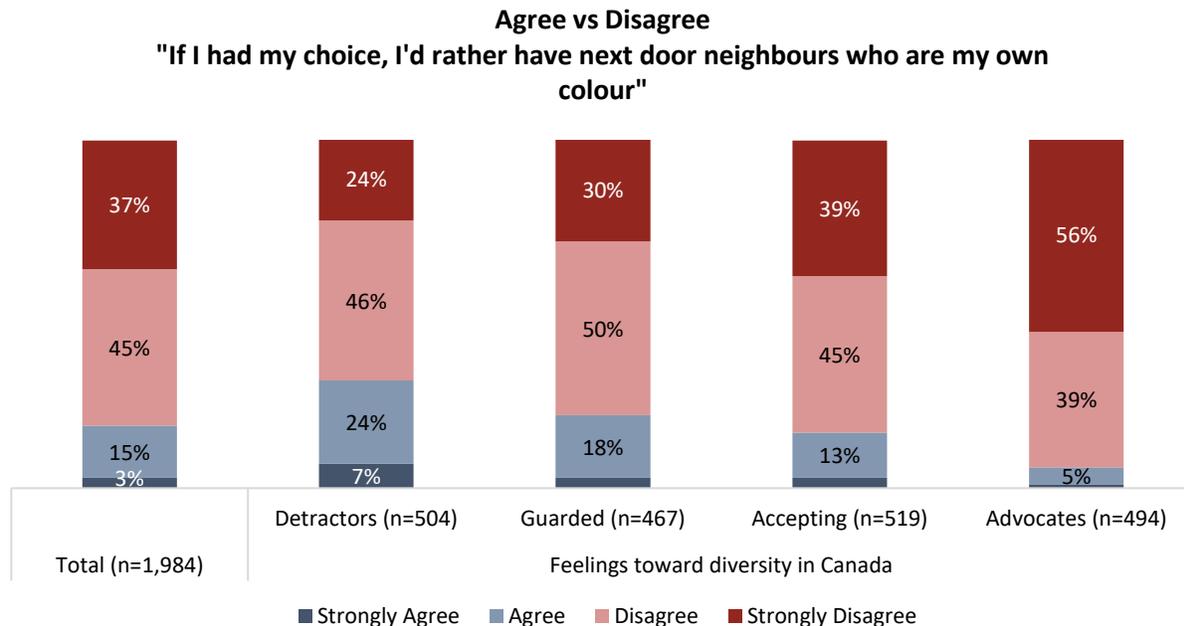
Competing ideas about multiculturalism in Canada

In part, what defines these four groups is the range of intensity they voice on different aspects of Canadian society. For example, the Detractors are most likely to disagree that multiculturalism is a net benefit to Canada, while the strength of agreement with that principle increases across each group:

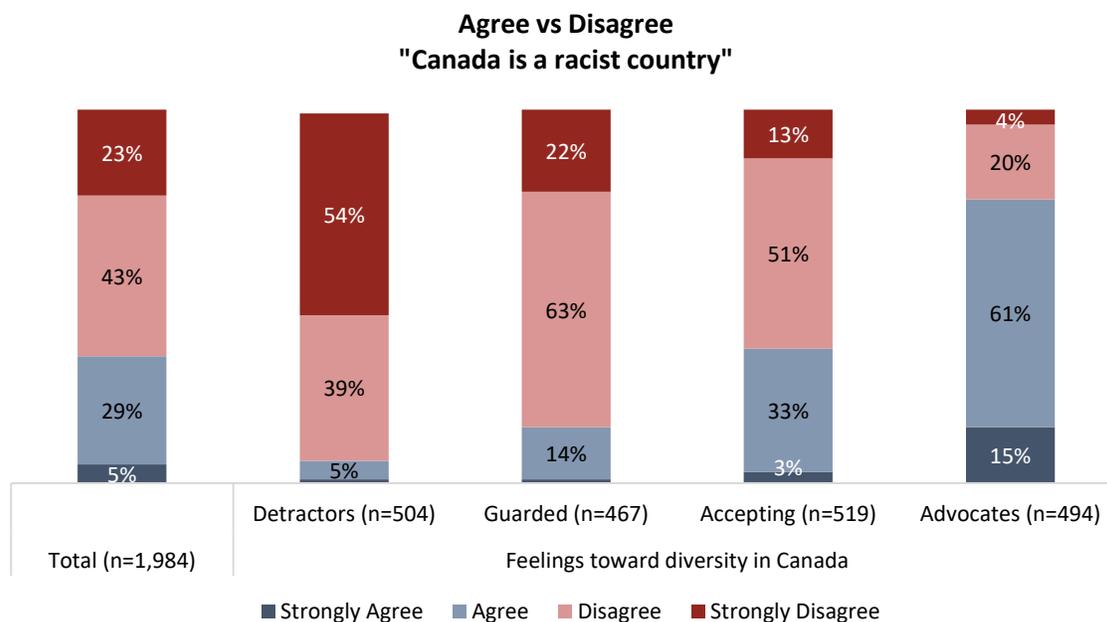
Agree vs Disagree
"The fact that our population includes many people from different racial backgrounds makes Canada a better country"



While the vast majority of Canadians in all four groups do not agree that they would like to live in a community with neighbours that look like them, three-in-ten among the Detractors agree. Strong disagreement with this statement increases across each of the three other groups:



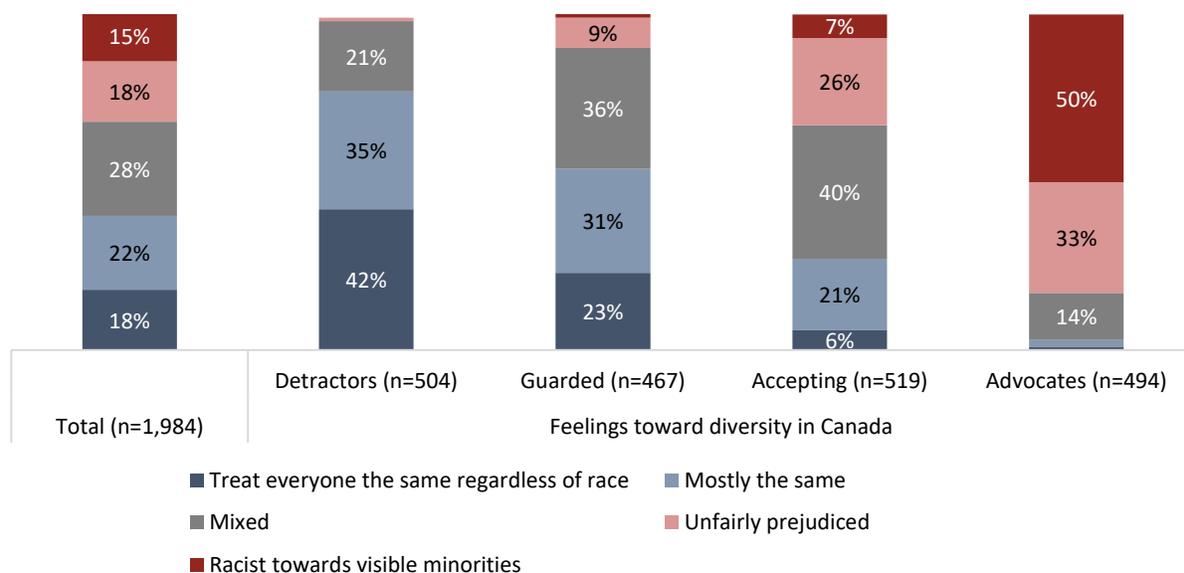
The Advocates are largely in a category of their own when it comes to believing that Canada is inherently a racist country. Three-quarters (76%) agree with that statement, while majorities across other segments do not:



Views on treatment of minority groups

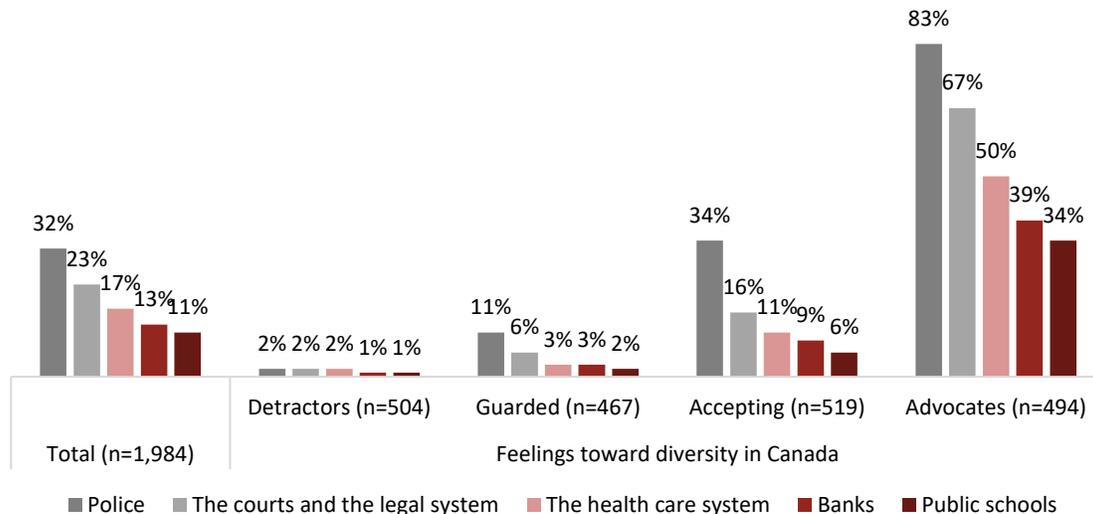
While the RCMP has itself acknowledged issues with systemic racism, Canadians are divided over how visible minorities are treated by police compared to others. When asked how they think the police handle this group, the Detractors feel there is little difference, the Guarded tend to agree, while the Accepting offer a mixed view. The Advocates are much more certain that police treatment of visible minorities is unfair:

**In your own community these days, how would you say each of the following treats Canadians who are visible minorities?
'The Police'**



There is a similar pattern evident when it comes to other areas of society, including health care, the courts, and banks:

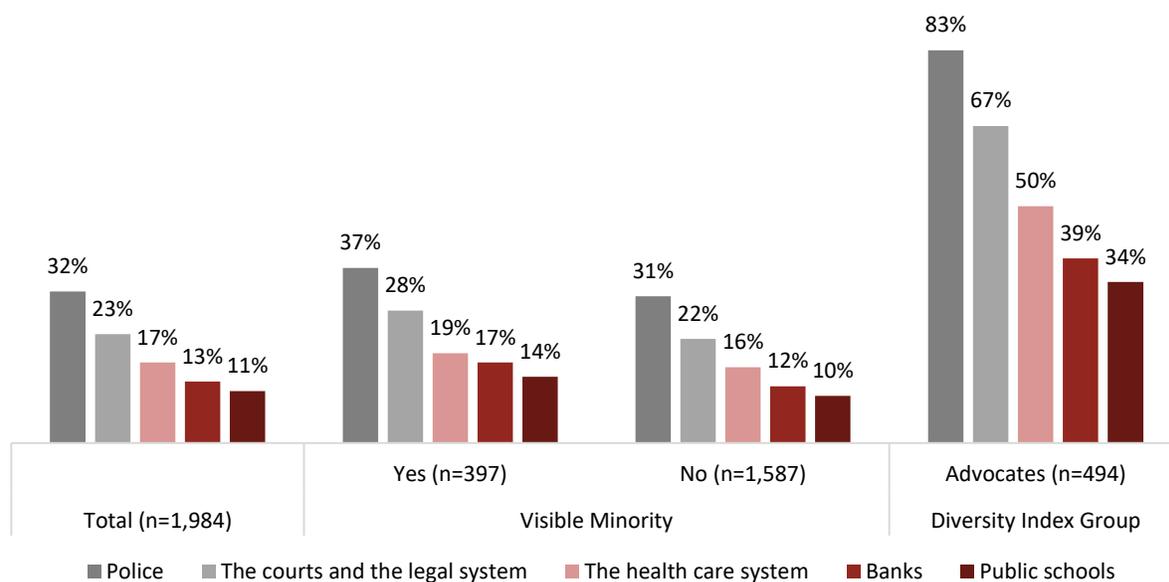
Percentage who say that each is unfairly prejudiced or racist toward visible minorities



Advocates see more racism than visible minorities themselves

Canadians who identify as a visible minority themselves are most critical of how they feel police treat other non-Caucasians. Nearly two-in-five (37%) say that this treatment is unfairly prejudiced or racist. That said the Advocates outpace all groups by a considerable margin in feeling that different aspects of society marginalize visible minorities:

Percentage who say that each is unfairly prejudiced or racist toward visible minorities



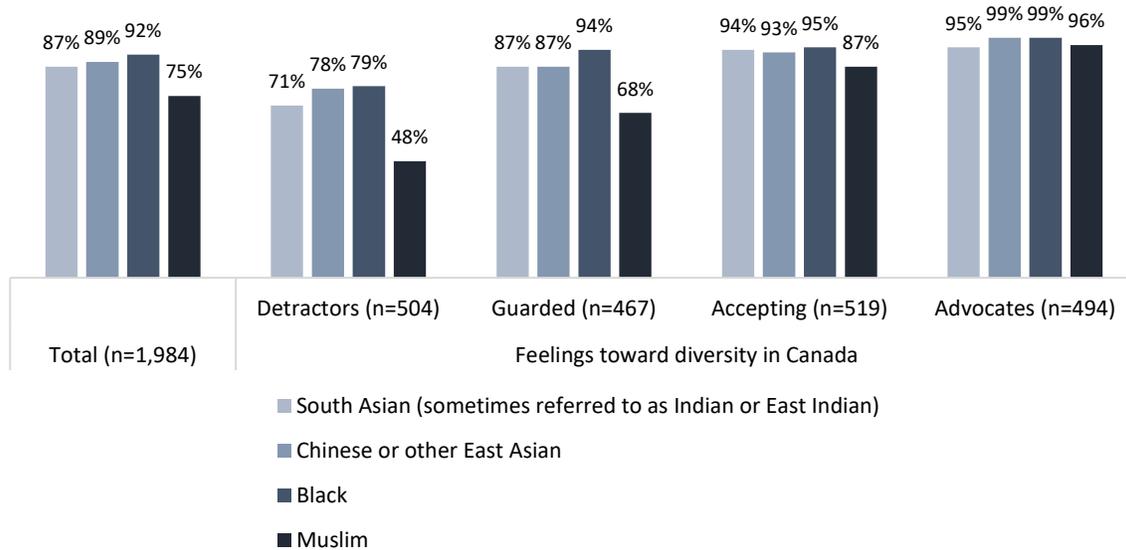
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Views of minority groups

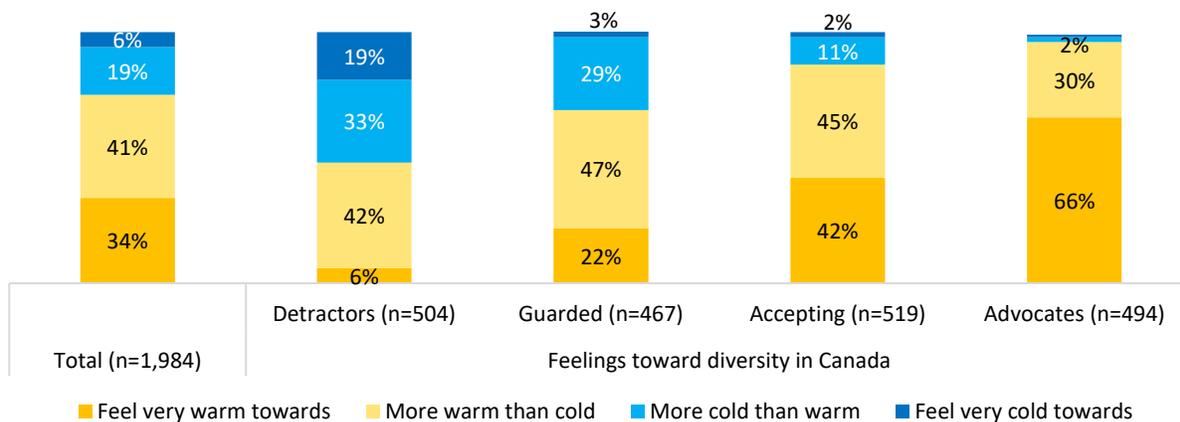
When it comes to different minority groups in Canada, religious or ethnic, as noted earlier the Muslim community stands out as a source of antipathy for some Canadians. This is not the case for all, almost all among of the Accepting and the Advocates view Muslim Canadians warmly. That number drops to two-thirds (68%) among the Guarded and just 48 per cent among Detractors, well below the level of warm feeling towards Black, Chinese, or South Asian Canadians:

Percentage of Canadians who say they feel warm or more warm than cold toward each group



One-in-five Detractors have “very cold” views toward the Muslim community and are divided evenly between warm and cold proclivities. On the opposite end of the spectrum, two-thirds of Advocates (66%) say they view Muslim Canadians “very” warmly:

Please indicate your own personal feelings towards Canadians who are: Muslim



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Part Three: Racism in Canada

Is Canada racist? One-in-three say “yes”

Common debates in Canada include that of the size and scope of the problem of racism. Fundamental to these discussions are whether people in this country fundamentally agree or disagree that the nation itself has an inherent problem with race.

One-third say “yes” (34%). This view is most commonly held by women younger than 55 years of age and men 18 to 34 years of age. For two-thirds, (66%) this statement goes too far; they do not believe that Canada is a racist country.

<i>Agree vs Disagree</i>								
		Total (n=1,984)	Male			Female		
			18-34 (n=263)	35-54 (n=328)	55+ (n=354)	18-34 (n=292)	35-54 (n=357)	55+ (n=383)
Canada is a racist country	Agree	34%	33%	28%	21%	54%	39%	30%
	Disagree	66%	67%	72%	79%	46%	61%	70%

Notably, despite being more likely to hold the opinion that diversity does not make the country better and that they would like to live in an area of people with similar ethnicity, Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents are among the most likely to feel Canada is a racist country. They, alongside B.C., are the three regions where at least two-in-five residents agree:

<i>Agree vs Disagree</i>									
		Total (n=1,984)	Region						
			BC (n=284)	AB (n=192)	SK (n=133)	MB (n=154)	ON (n=566)	QC (n=450)	ATL (n=205)
Canada is a racist country	Agree	34%	40%	33%	44%	40%	36%	24%	36%
	Disagree	66%	60%	67%	56%	60%	64%	76%	64%

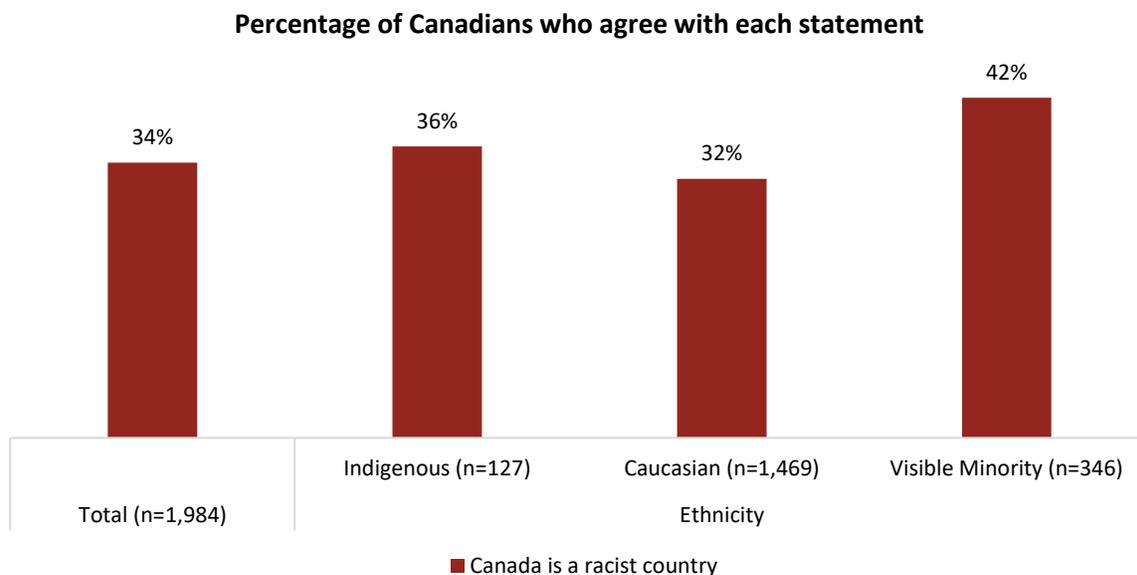
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A full majority of those who supported the Green Party or NDP in the 2019 election say Canada is a racist country, while this concept is rejected by most Liberals, Conservatives, and Bloc Quebecois supporters:

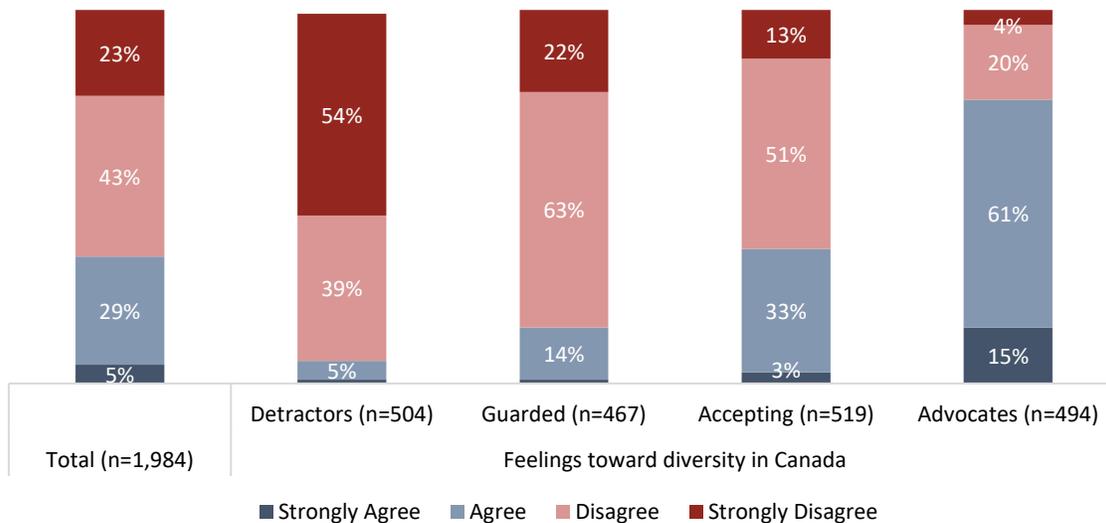
<i>Agree vs Disagree</i>							
		Total (n=1,984)	Federal vote 2019				
			CPC (n=578)	Liberal (n=553)	NDP (n=267)	Bloc Quebecois (n=119)	Green (n=103)
Canada is a racist country	Agree	34%	18%	38%	55%	13%	54%
	Disagree	66%	82%	62%	45%	87%	46%

What does this sentiment look like based on ethnicity or race itself? Respondents who self-identify as Indigenous or as visible minorities are slightly, but not significantly, more likely to say Canada is a racist country:



It is notable that only among the Advocates is there majority agreement that Canada is a racist country. Elsewhere, disagreement is the majority response. For Detractors, the statement has no veracity whatsoever:

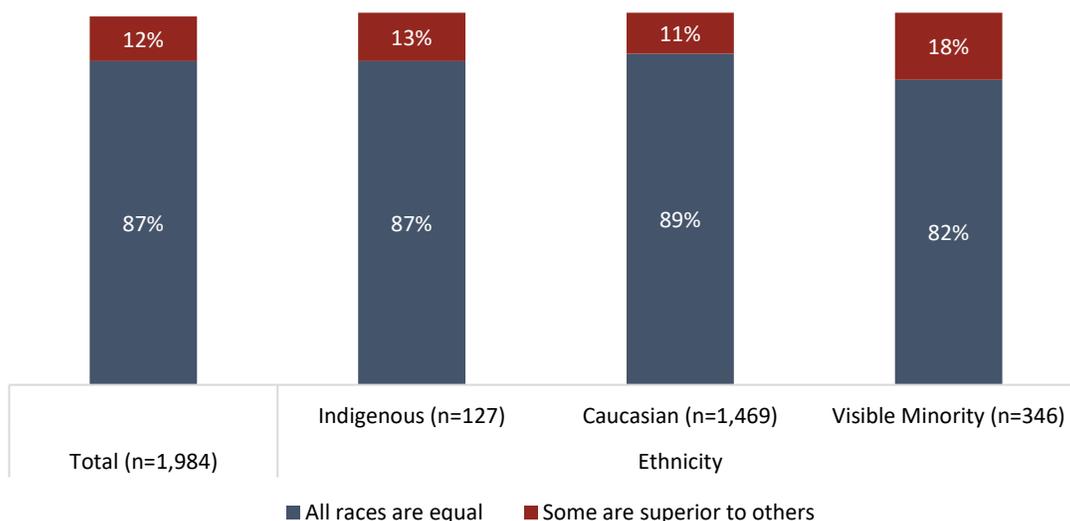
**Agree vs Disagree
"Canada is a racist country"**



But how many actually think some races are superior?

While one-third of Canadians say that Canada is a racist country, just 12 per cent of Canadians agree with a statement that could be considered definitively racist. This group says that they feel some races are naturally superior to others. Notably, this group is at least 11 per cent across each ethnic group and highest among visible minorities at 18 per cent:

In all honesty, do you think that all races are equal in terms of their natural characteristics, or do you think that some races are naturally superior to others?

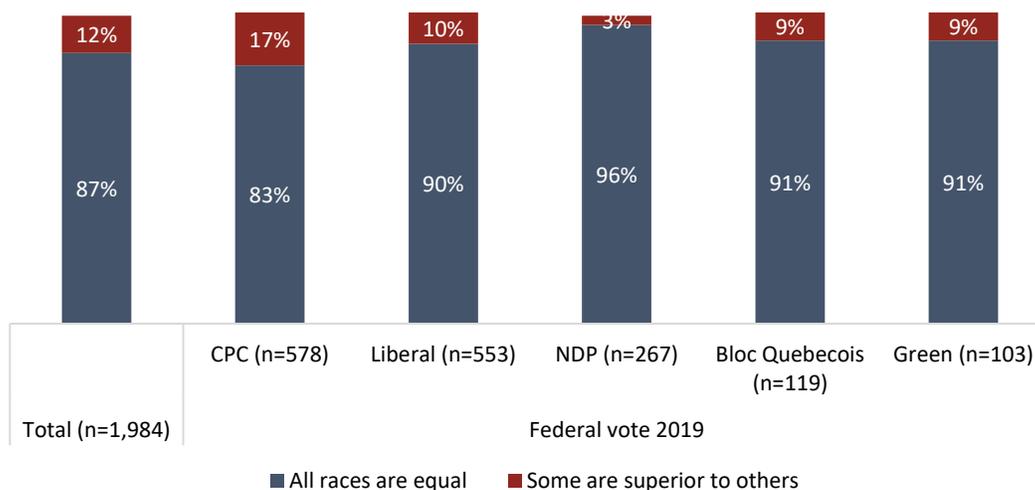


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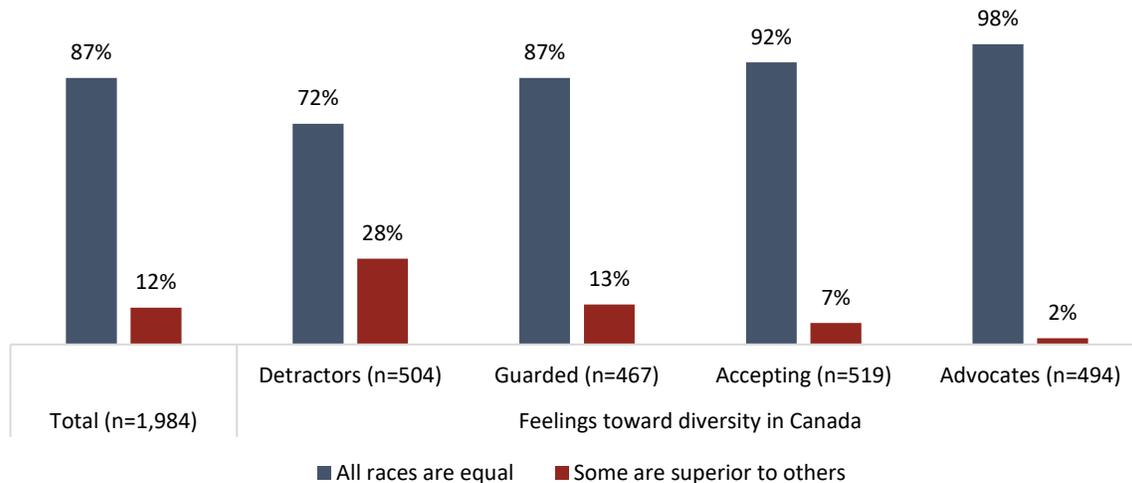
Vast majorities across the Canadian political spectrum share a consensus view on this question, though it is of note that those who supported the Conservative Party in 2019 are nearly twice as likely as others to hold this view – although again, it is the minority view among this group. Politics is the only demographic that generates variance on the question. Men and women of all ages are equally likely to hold this view at approximately 12 per cent ([see detailed tables](#)).

In all honesty, do you think that all races are equal in terms of their natural characteristics, or do you think that some races are naturally superior to others?



That said, the Index reveals yet more division over this question. Three-in-ten Detractors agree that some races are superior to others – the most among any segment across the Index:

In all honesty, do you think that all races are equal in terms of their natural characteristics, or do you think that some races are naturally superior to others?

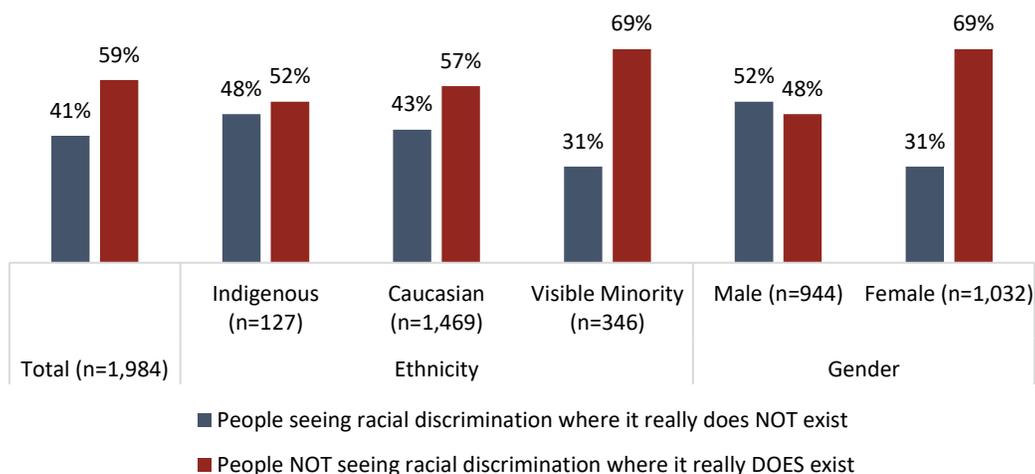


Do Canadians perceive too much racism? Or not enough?

A common debate in Canada centres on the breadth and intensity of racism in this country, and whether the push to overcome it goes too far. Indeed, some have argued that in 2021 there is a propensity to see race issues where they do not exist. Others push back against this narrative and call it a denial of reality.

Two-in-five say that people seeing racial discrimination where it does not actually exist is a bigger problem than the inability of some to where it's real. Visible minorities and women lean heavily toward the latter as being a more significant issue, while men and self-identified Indigenous respondents are divided:

Which do you think is the bigger problem for the country today?

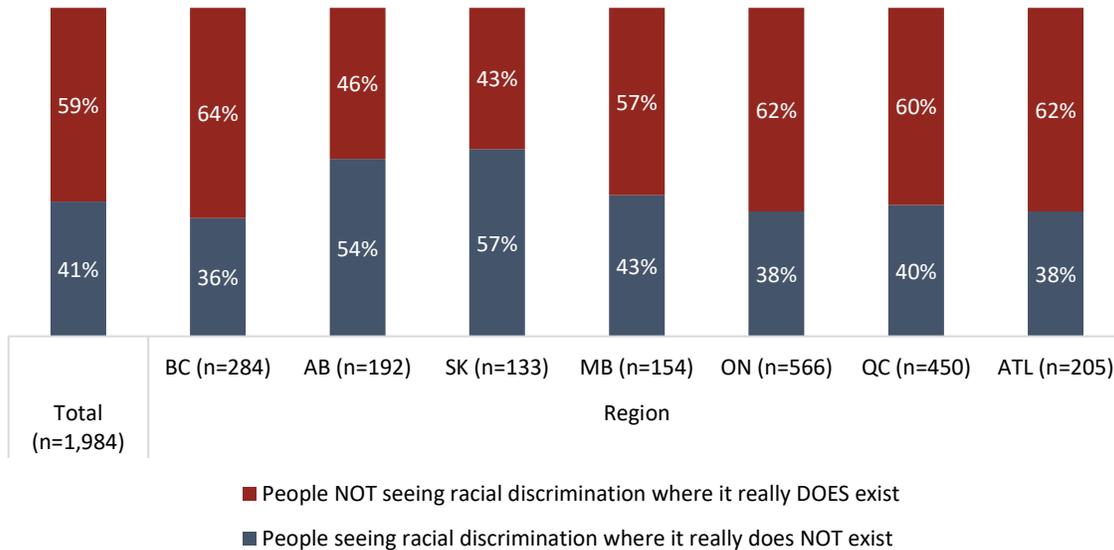


A majority of residents in Alberta and Saskatchewan say that people exaggerating racism is a bigger problem in Canada, whereas majorities in the rest of the country take the other side of this debate:

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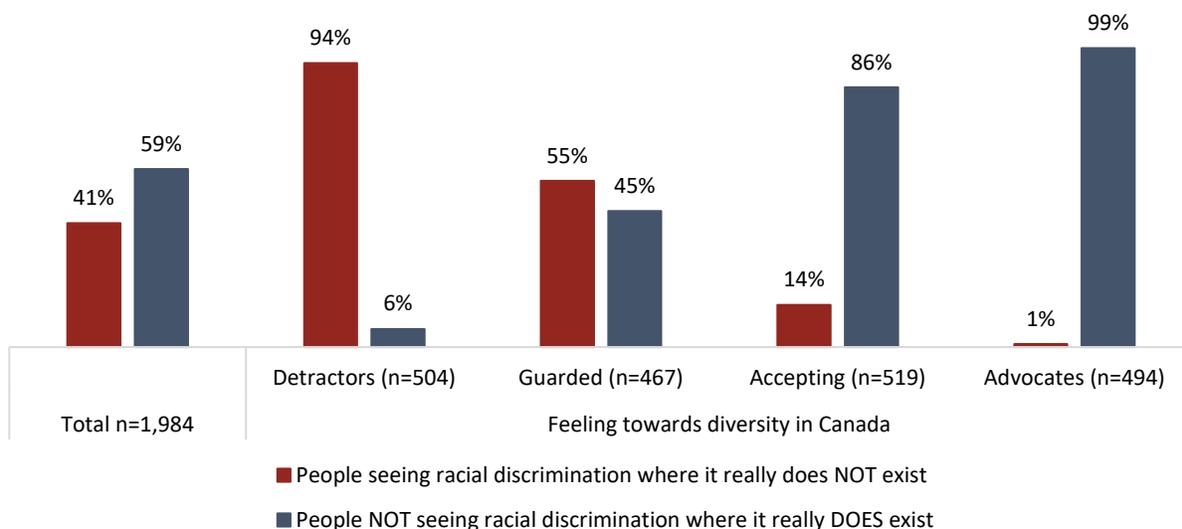
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Which do you think is the bigger problem for the country today?



There was a significant split along the Diversity Index when it came to this perception. Detractors and Advocates were near mirrors of each other, with Detractors overwhelmingly (94%) believing that seeing racism where it does not exist is the problem while Advocates believe the exact opposite:

Which do you think is the bigger problem for the country today?



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What is and isn't perceived to be racist?

The issue of 'political correctness' has generated headlines, articles, and social media arguments unceasingly over the past decade. What is okay to say and with whom can one say it? For Canadians, the issue of racism in daily speech is a complicated one which generates considerable disagreement and sheds more light on just how difficult this subject is to distill.

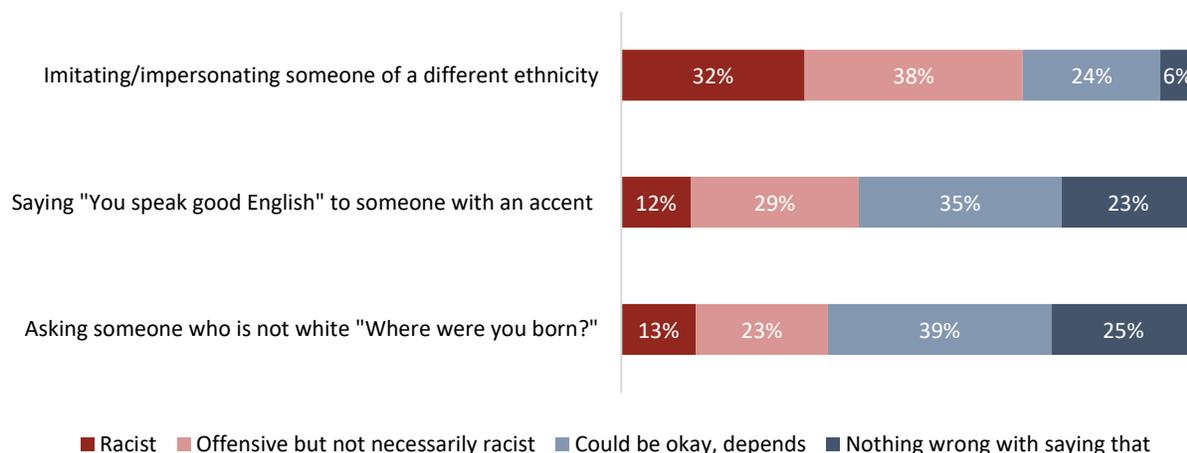
Respondents were given three different situations where they may hear somebody saying or doing something in public and asked if each was appropriate or offensive. These 'microaggressions' were also discussed in [part one of this series](#), when ARI asked Asian Canadians about their own experiences.

Related Research: Anti-Asian Discrimination: Younger Canadians most likely to be hardest hit by experiences with racism, hate

The highest level of agreement is found in the case that someone is doing an imitation of someone from a different ethnicity. One-in-three Canadians say this is racist (32%), while 38 per cent say it is offensive but doesn't necessarily meet the standard of racism, depending on the content and context.

Fewer say that telling someone that they "speak good English" or asking them where they were born if they are not white meet their standard of racist, but in each case only one-quarter say there is nothing wrong with each:

Here's some different things you might overhear someone say or do in public. What is your own reaction?

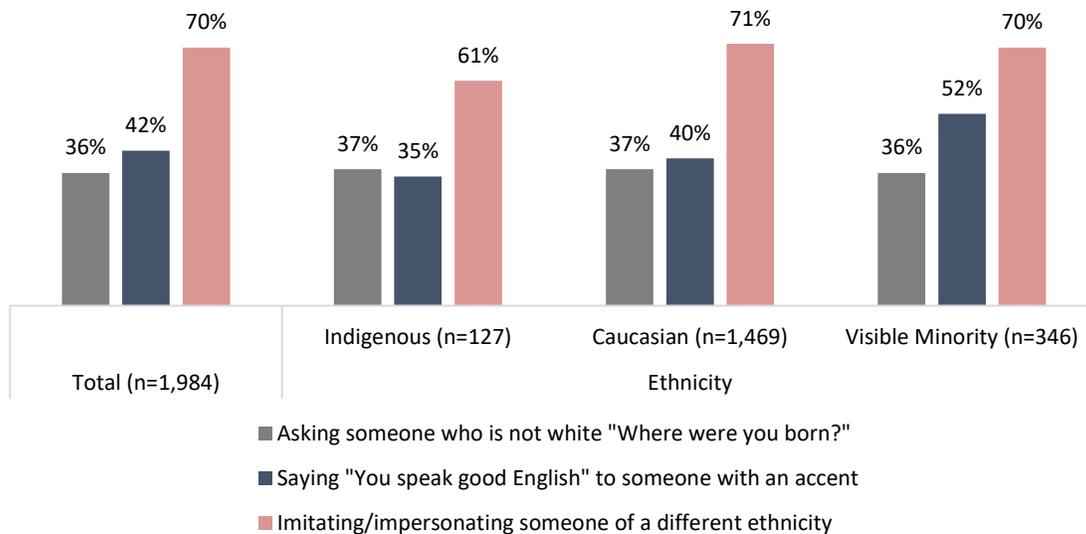


Canadians tend to hold relatively consistent views for each of these questions across different ethnic groups.

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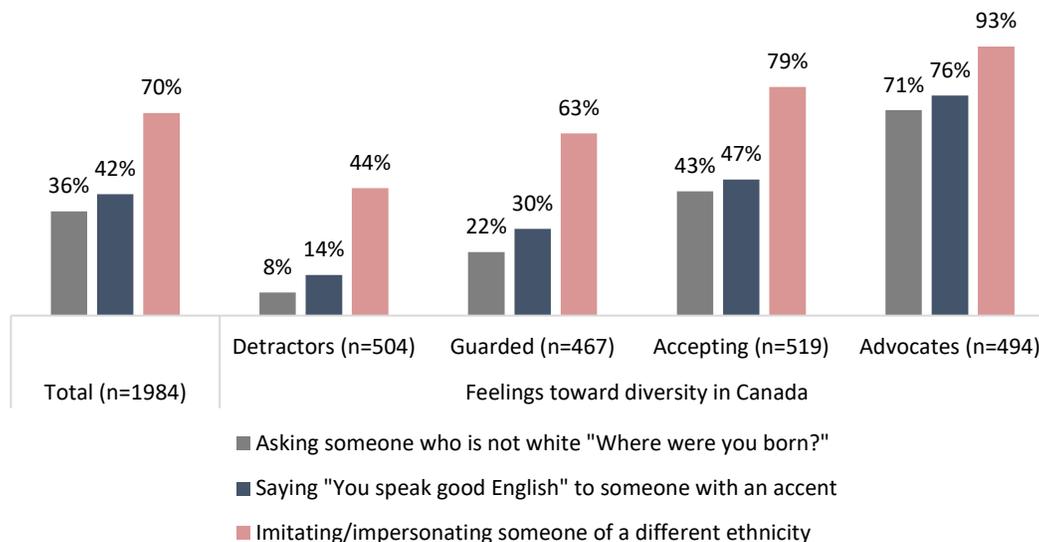
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Percentage of Canadians who say each is either racist or offensive



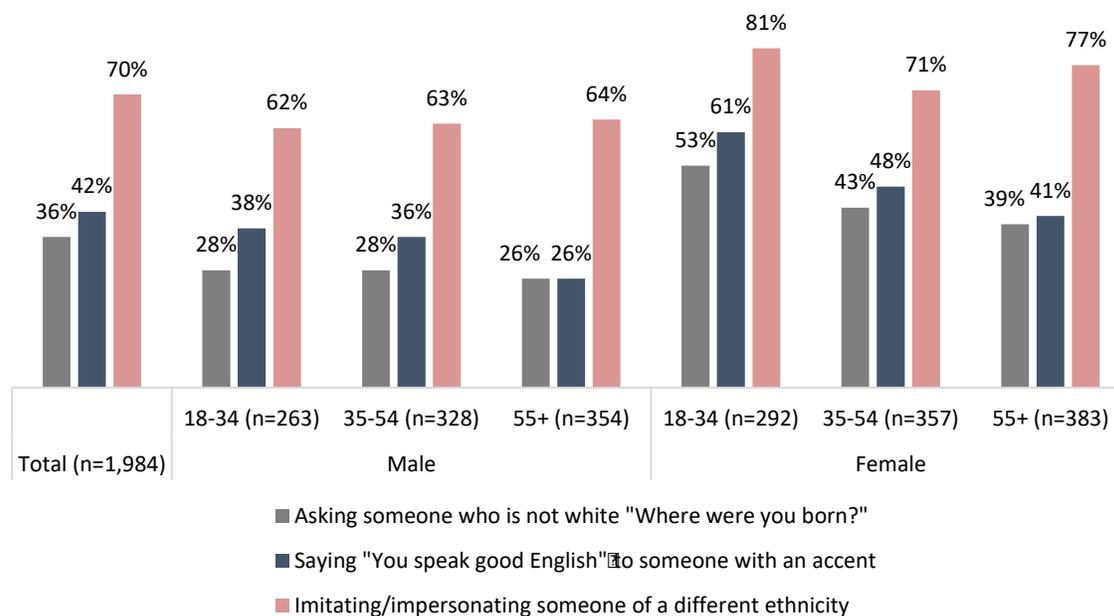
The Detractors are less concerned about these examples, though 44 per cent say that impersonating other ethnicities is offensive. The Advocates are overwhelmingly of the opinion that each is offensive:

Percentage of Canadians who say each is either racist or offensive



Women, particularly young women, are much more sensitive to the racist or offensive potential of these situations compared to men, for whom each is largely acceptable:

Percentage of Canadians who say each is either racist or offensive



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

For detailed results by Diversity Index, [click here](#).

For detailed results by Ethnicity, [click here](#).

Notes on Methodology

Feelings toward diversity in Canada Index

The Angus Reid Institute's Diversity Index scores respondents according to their answers to a series of questions on their attitudes towards racial discrimination, and newcomers and visible minorities in Canada in general. Scores for each answer are aggregated to produce a total score for each respondent. A higher score indicates a more positive view toward multiculturalism and diversity and a more critical perspective toward issues with respect to racism. A lower score indicates a more Detractors view, with less perception of racism as a problem in Canada and a more conservative view on issues like immigration and diversity.

The Index is based on seven questions in total. Scores ranged from -44 to 50, and respondents were divided into four groups of roughly equal size, evenly distributed across the scale. Those with scores from 16 to 50 were sorted into the Advocates category, those with scores from 15 to 1 became the Accepting category, those with scores from 0 to -12 became the Guarded, and those with scores of -13 or lower were sorted into the Detractors category.

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