

## Young leaders in Canada: Plurality emphasize restructuring society over improving existing systems

*Over half of Canadians under 40 perceive legacy of Baby Boomers as negative*

**November 10, 2021** – For many young Canadian leaders, starting over is preferred to building on the foundations provided by previous generations.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, conducted in partnership with [Cardus](#), finds a plurality of leaders aged 18-29 (47%) and 30-40 (40%) believe that the future development of Canadian society requires beginning anew and restructuring differently.

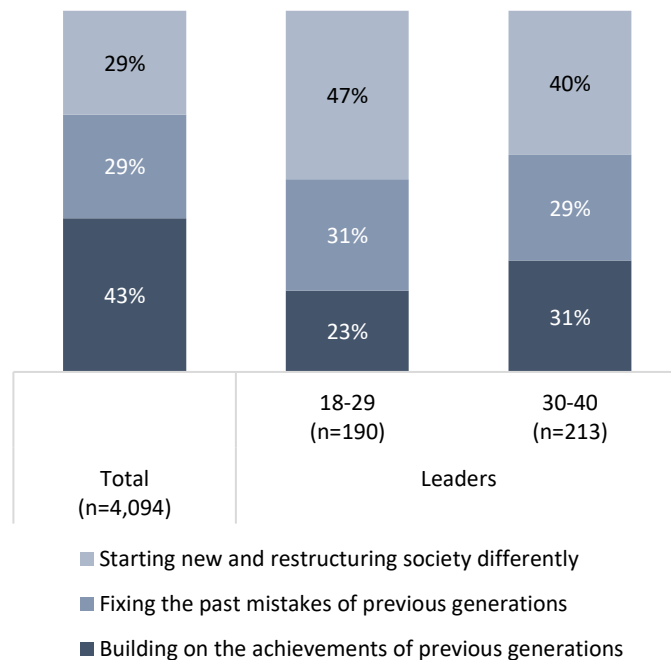
By employing a model of leadership which focuses on both personality traits and engagement with societal issues, this study was able to explore the priorities of Canadian leaders across generations.

This preference for structural change is reflected in a generational divide on existing, and potential, legacies. When asked about the legacy of the Baby Boomers, over half of those between the ages of 18 and 40 qualified it as negative – with a quarter of younger leaders saying it was very negative.

When it comes to the hypothetical legacy of the Millennial generation, the inverse is true. Half of those aged 41 and older say that what the Millennials leave behind will be worse than that of the Baby Boomers, with only between one fifth and one third saying it will be positive.

There are significant differences at play, but there is also much that unites leaders of all generations. A majority believe in working for the common good (66-77%) and hold a strong belief that individuals can make a difference (86-96%).

**When thinking about the future development of Canadian society, which of these three broad approaches do you think the upcoming generations should be mostly focused on:**



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from July 26 – Aug. 2, 2021, among a representative randomized sample of 4,094 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 +/- 1.5 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. This included an augmented survey sample of those who qualified as "leaders" in several pre-screening surveys. Both further information on the methodological approach adopted and detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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### **More Key Findings:**

- Leaders of all generations are united with the rest of society in their concern with climate change: the top issue facing Canada as chosen by respondents of all age groups.
- A majority of younger Canadians, including three quarters of leaders between the ages of 18 and 40, say that cultural diversity is preferred over integration. Younger Canadians are also more likely to be open to public displays of religion in politics than their older peers.
- Approximately half (46%) of those between the ages of 30 and 40, and a majority (57%) of Canadians below the age of 30, define their relationship to the country in pragmatic terms: it's where they live but they would not be opposed to moving if opportunities arose elsewhere.

### **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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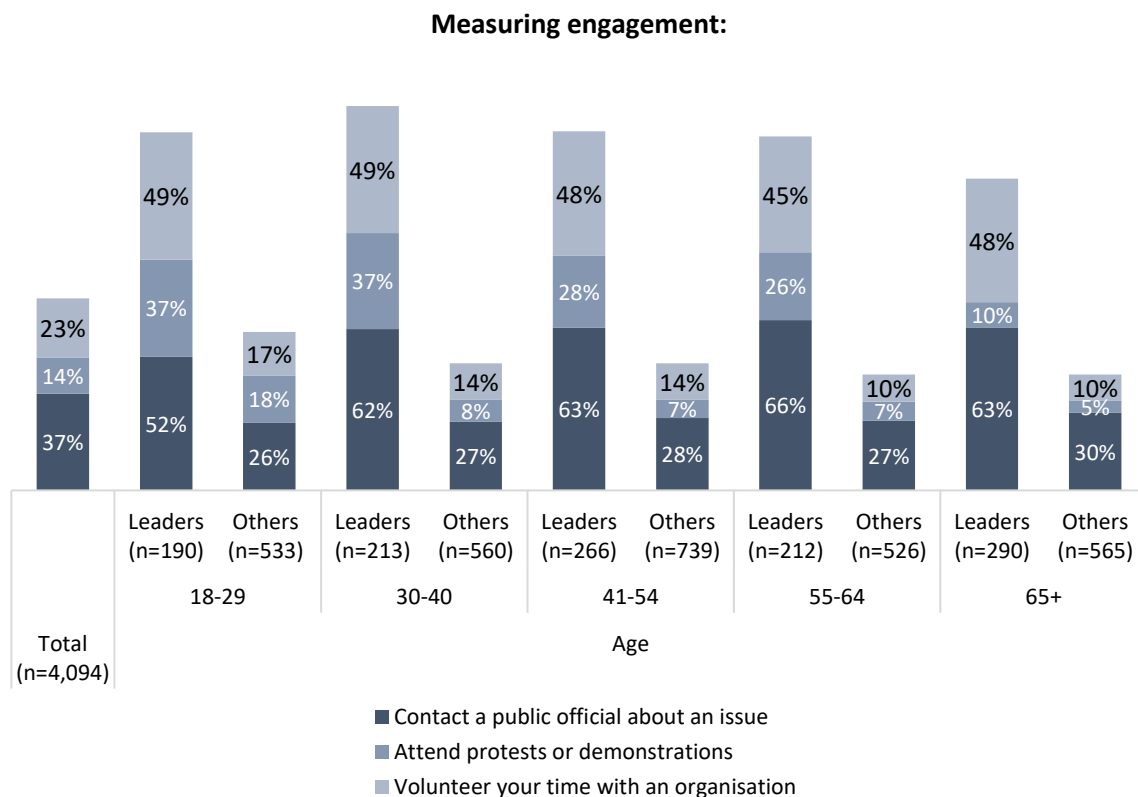
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## Part One: Understanding leadership

In order to better understand the challenges facing Canada and how they are perceived by different generations, two primary analytical lenses were adopted in this study: leadership and age.

On the first point, respondents were asked a series of psychographic questions (e.g., about their personality traits) designed to get at qualities related to leadership identified in existing literature such as ambition or the ability to handle stressful situations.

This was combined with a series of questions designed to measure engagement, or the extent to which a respondent was involved in actively advocating for their positions and viewpoints. Some of the ways in which engagement was gauged was by asking whether respondents contacted public officials, volunteered, or attended protests:



Respondents were assigned a score for each of these separate indices, with those who received the highest scores on both being designated as leaders.

The second analytical lens, age, opens the possibility of examining shifting trends in leadership across generations. Recognizing that generational definitions are contested, age cohorts are used here in lieu of generation labels when referring to the survey results.

### Who displays attributes of leadership?

With that being said, who are the leaders which emerge from this model? Broadly defined, they are those who are most likely to have an impact on the lived experiences of others through their actions.

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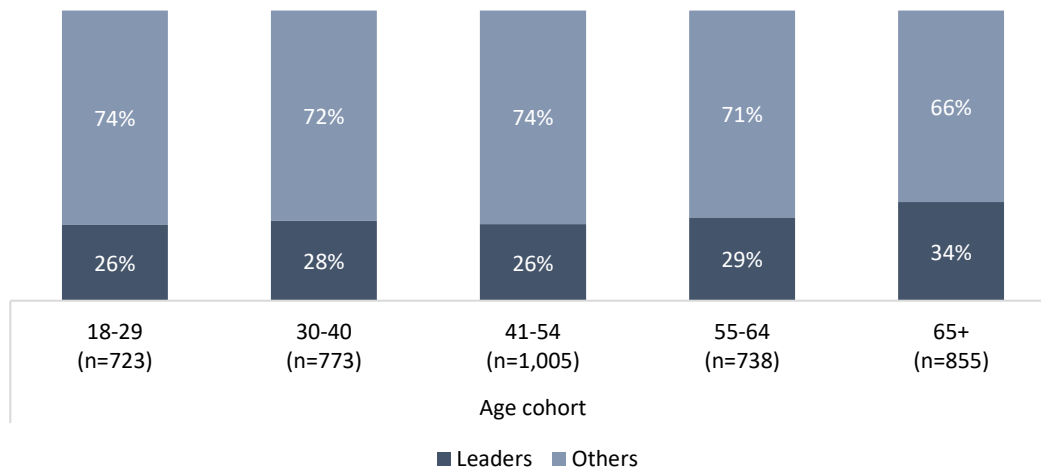
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They are decision-makers – be it at the level of a local community organization or that of federal politics. They are active in their communities through volunteering and political involvement and are informed on the issues of the day.

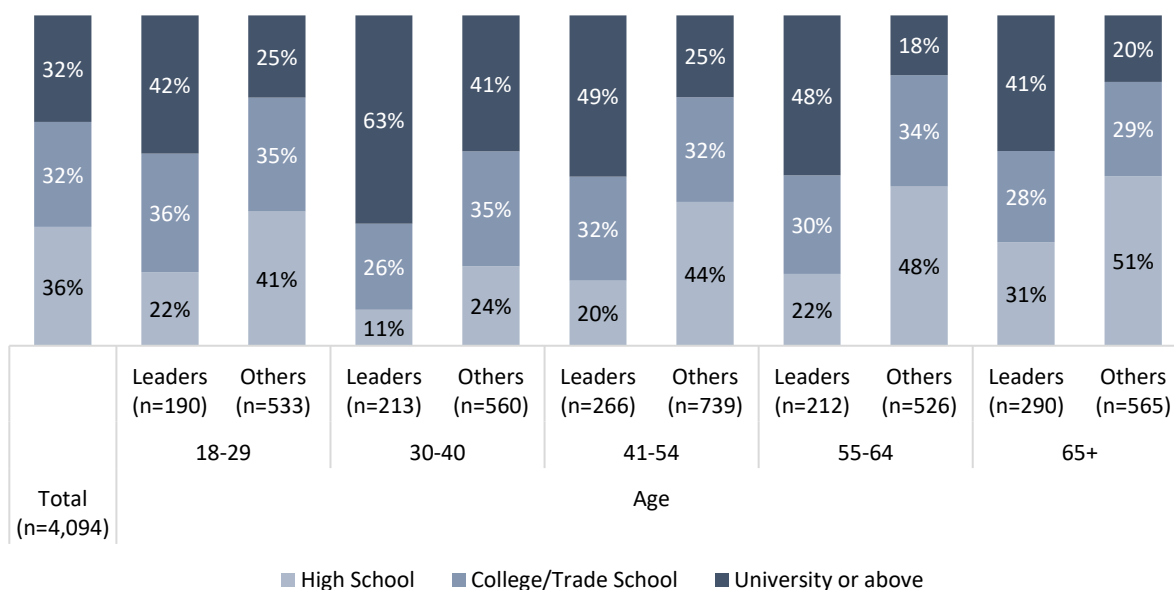
The highest scoring members of the leadership index make up about three-in-ten of the whole sample, and approximately one-quarter to one-third of their respective age cohorts.

**Distribution of leaders by age:**



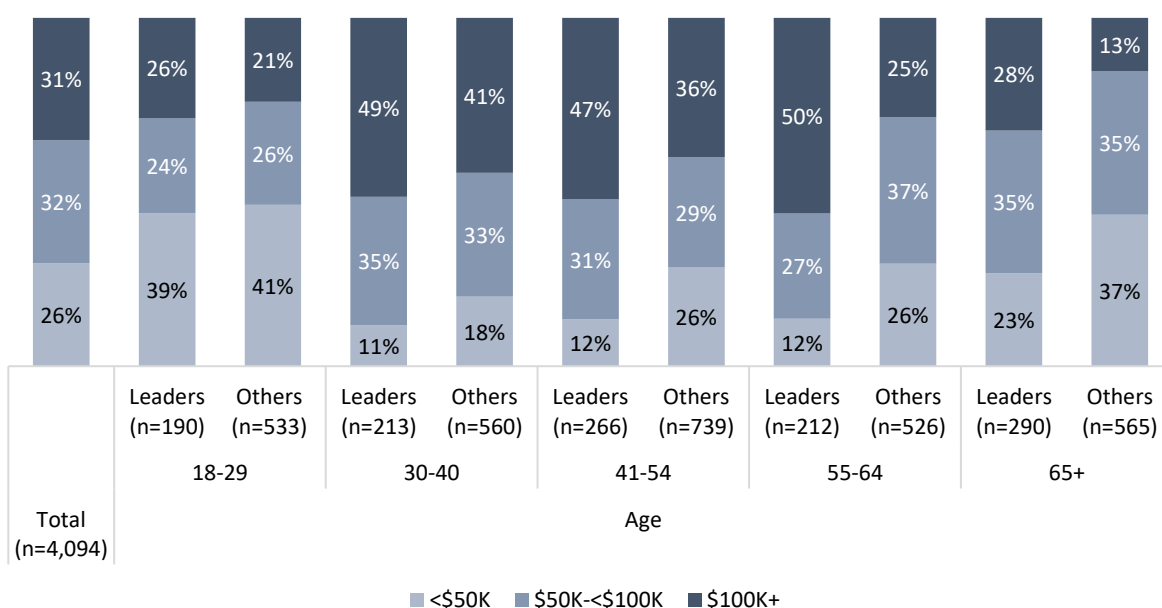
While these leaders are already distinguished by their psychographic profiles and levels of engagement, a more in-depth look reveals that leaders tend to have, on average, higher levels of educational attainment than the rest of society. Leaders are far more likely to have a university degree than their counterparts, with this number rising to almost two-thirds (63%) of 30- to 40-year-olds and half of 41- to 54-year-olds (49%) and 55- to 64-year-olds (48%):

**Educational attainment:**



Given their educational outcomes and the [strong relationship between education and income](#), it is perhaps not surprising that leaders are slightly wealthier on average than the rest of society. Worth noting, however, is that these income gaps are far more prominent in older generations. Leaders aged 55 to 64, for example, are twice as likely to be in the highest earning brackets as their counterparts.

**Household income:**



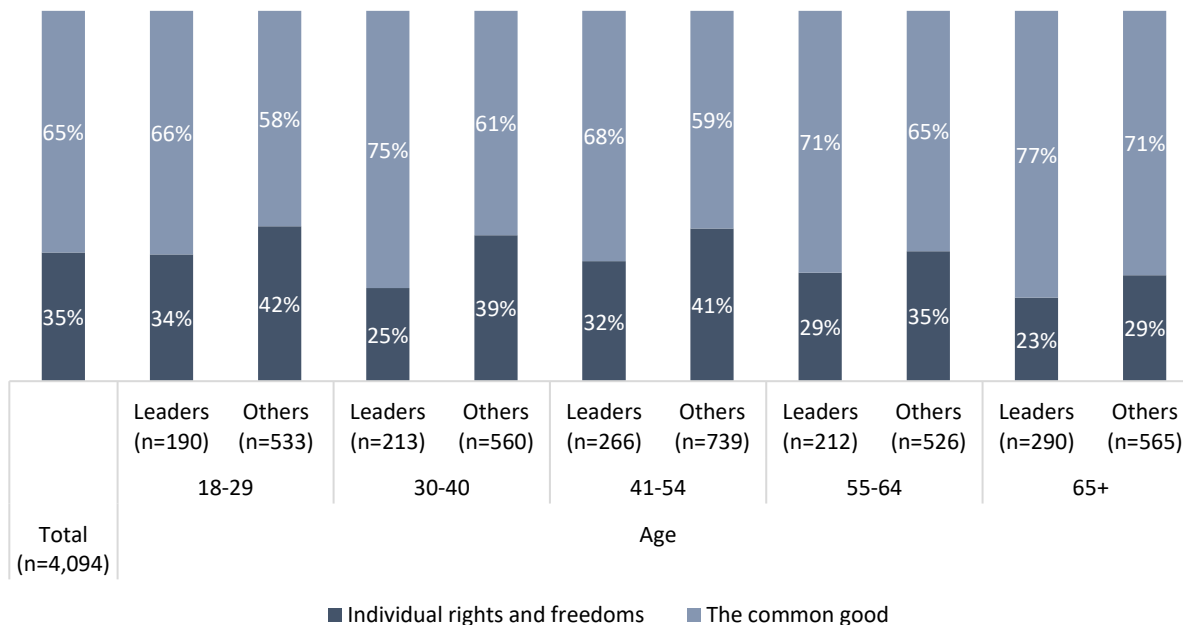
Echoing the increasing diversity of Canada, younger generations of leaders are far more diverse than older ones, with one-in-five (20%) 18- to 29-year-old leaders identifying as a visible minority and three-in-ten (28%) identifying as LGBTQ2+ ([see detailed tables](#)).

When it comes to geographic and gender distributions, leaders are fairly evenly spread out across Canada and between genders – the one exception being the 41- to 54-year-old cohort, where men represent 57 per cent of leaders ([see detailed tables](#)).

### **What drives leaders?**

In addition to sharing a bundle of similar psychographic traits, leaders profess to prioritize the common good. On average, leaders believe the common good should be society’s higher priority over individual rights and freedoms more so than their peers of the same age:

#### **Which would you say should be our highest priority as a society?**



In addition to being more likely to say that they prioritize the common good, leaders share a strong belief in the ability of an individual to affect change in the world. From a low of 86 per cent among 18- to 29-year-olds to a high of 96 per cent among those aged 65 and over, leaders overwhelmingly see the possibility for individuals to make a difference in the world around them.

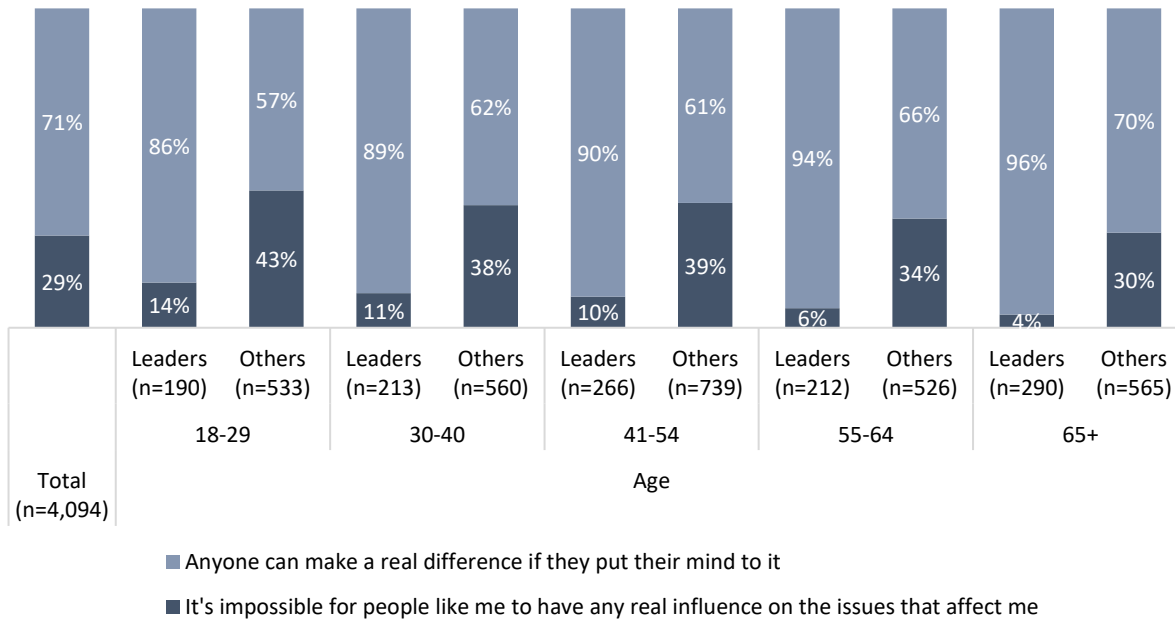
By contrast there is a significant segment of society which does not see room for individuals to affect change – effectively foreclosing this as a possibility. Of note younger generations, both leaders and their counterparts, are more likely to hold this view:

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Do you believe:



**Part Two: Where do leaders stand on the issues facing Canada?**

What are the greatest challenges facing Canada and where do the leaders of today and tomorrow stand on these issues?

Climate change is the top concern for all age cohorts, regardless of whether they are leaders or not, and has consistently been a top issue for Canadians in [recent years](#).

When it comes to Indigenous Issues and Reconciliation, leaders are more likely than others in their cohort to be concerned. Canadians' focus on Indigenous issues [spiked in the summer](#) after the confirmation of the graves of 215 children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential school site in May, but has [since declined](#).

With rising government spending due to the COVID-19 pandemic contributing to [increasing inflation](#) in the country, older Canadians, and non-leaders especially, are concerned about balancing the budget. For younger Canadians, and leaders in particular, economic inequality and housing prices are a greater concern:

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Most pressing issues that Canada needs to address over the next 10 years (Top three chosen)									
Age									
18-29		30-40		41-54		55-64		65+	
Leaders (n=190)	Others (n=533)	Leaders (n=213)	Others (n=560)	Leaders (n=266)	Others (n=739)	Leaders (n=212)	Others (n=526)	Leaders (n=290)	Others (n=565)
Climate change 63%	Climate change 56%	Climate change 62%	Climate change 47%	Climate change 54%	Climate change 39%	Climate change 56%	Climate change 42%	Climate change 59%	Climate change 52%
Housing prices 39%	Housing prices 44%	Reconciliation 39%	Housing prices 39%	Reconciliation 39%	Economic growth 36%	Reconciliation 35%	Balancing the budget 38%	Balancing the budget 36%	Balancing the budget 35%
Reconciliation 36%	Economic inequality 29%	Economic inequality 36%	Economic growth 29%	Economic growth 29%	Balancing the budget 33%	Economic inequality 34%	Economic growth 33%	Economic growth 33%	Economic growth 31%
Economic inequality 33%	Reconciliation 26%	Housing prices 34%	Economic inequality 28%	Economic inequality 27%	Housing prices 30%	Economic growth 30%	Poverty 26%	Reconciliation 31%	Reconciliation 27%
Economic growth 25%	Balancing the budget 21%	Economic growth 22%	Balancing the budget 27%	Balancing the budget 23%	Poverty 27%	Poverty 26%	Reconciliation 25%	Economic inequality 26%	Poverty 23%

### Values and trade-offs

While climate change is selected as a pressing concern by majorities of all generations of leaders, economic growth factors into the top five for each of them as well. When presented with a direct trade off on what Canada should prioritize, some generations are more split than others. Two-in-five 41- to 54-year-old leaders believe economic growth should be emphasized over environmental protection, a rate double that of the youngest group of leaders:

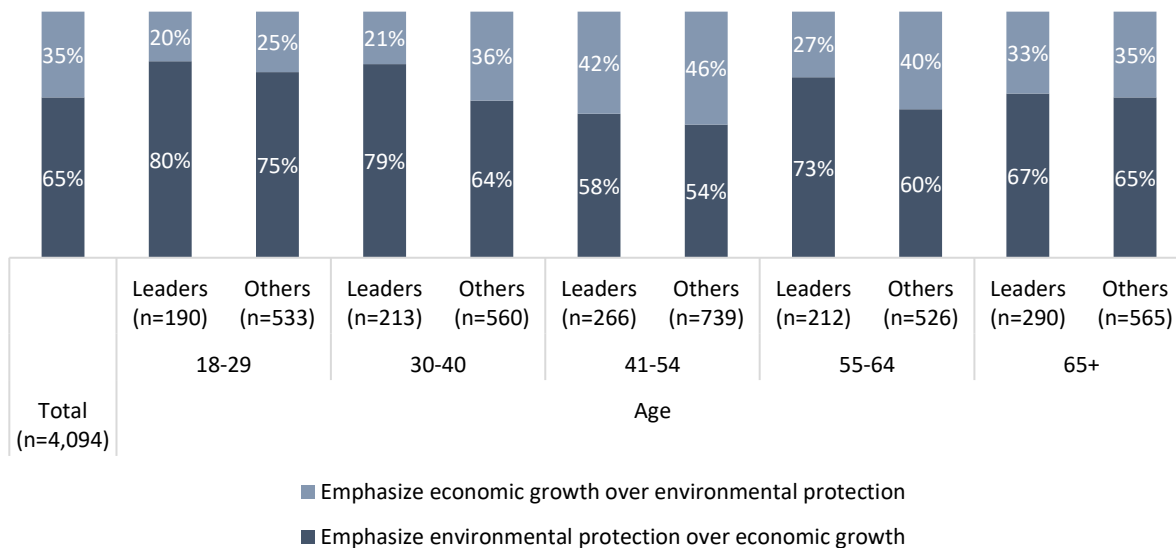
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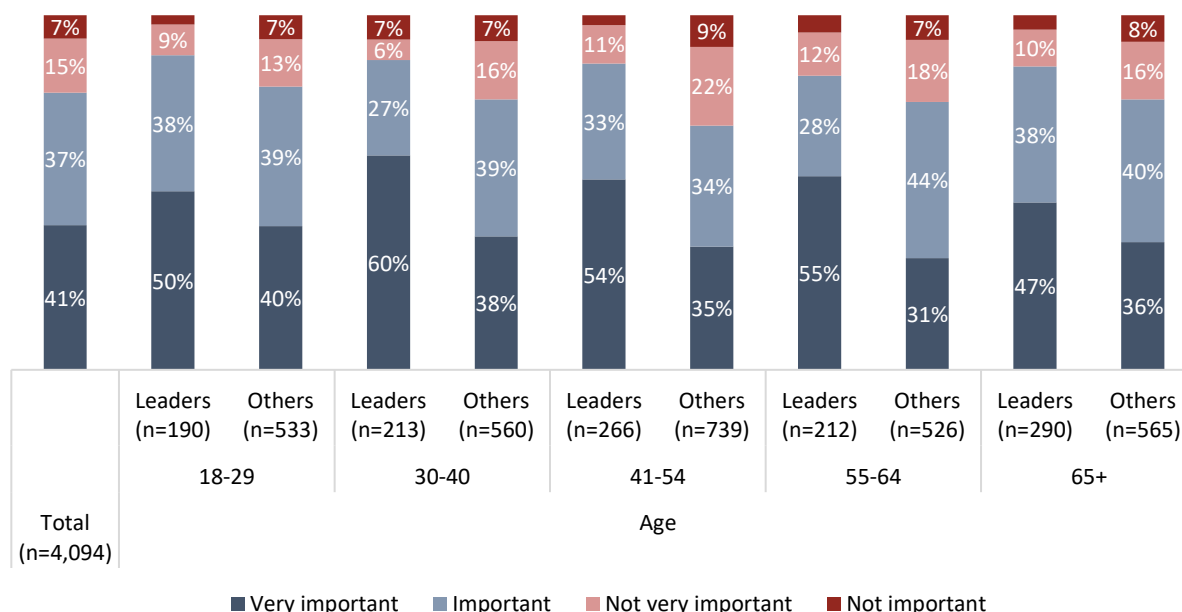
**Overall, Canada's policies should:**



Leaders are much more concerned about Indigenous issues than their peers, peaking at two-in-five (39%) 30- to 40-year-olds who rank reconciliation as a pressing issue the country needs to address in the next decade ([see detailed tables](#)).

This is reflected in how important the two groups feel reconciliation is to them personally. While at least seven-in-ten of all respondents say reconciliation is important, non-leaders are more likely to say it isn't important to them personally. At least half of all leaders say it is "very important":

**How important is reconciliation between Indigenous communities and Canadians to you?**



■ Very important ■ Important ■ Not very important ■ Not important

Leaders, and especially those 40 and under, are also much more likely to believe white people benefit from societal advantages that visible minorities do not have. While this is the view of two-thirds (63%) of Canadians, three-quarters of 18- to 29-year-old (76%) and 30- to 40-year-old (78%) leaders say this, a rate at least 10-points higher than their age cohort.

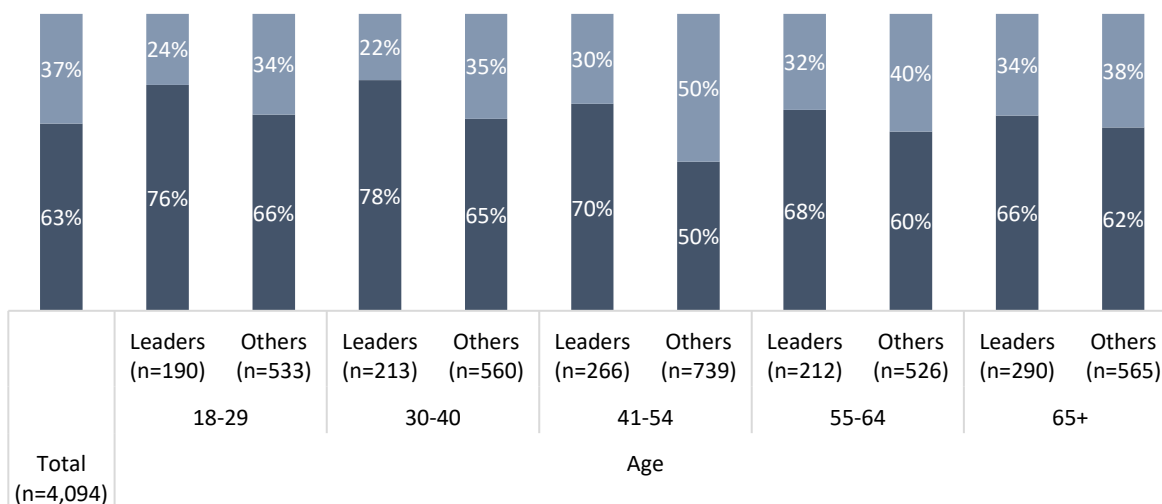
Last year, many young Canadians took part in Black Lives Matter protests [across the country](#). Notably, leaders 40 and under (37%) are also 10-points more likely to have attended a protest in the last year than 41- to 54-year-old and 55- to 64-year-old leaders (28%, 26% respectively, [see detailed tables](#).)

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Would you say:



- All people regardless of their background enjoy the same advantages in society
- White people benefit from advantages in society that Indigenous people and visible minorities do not have

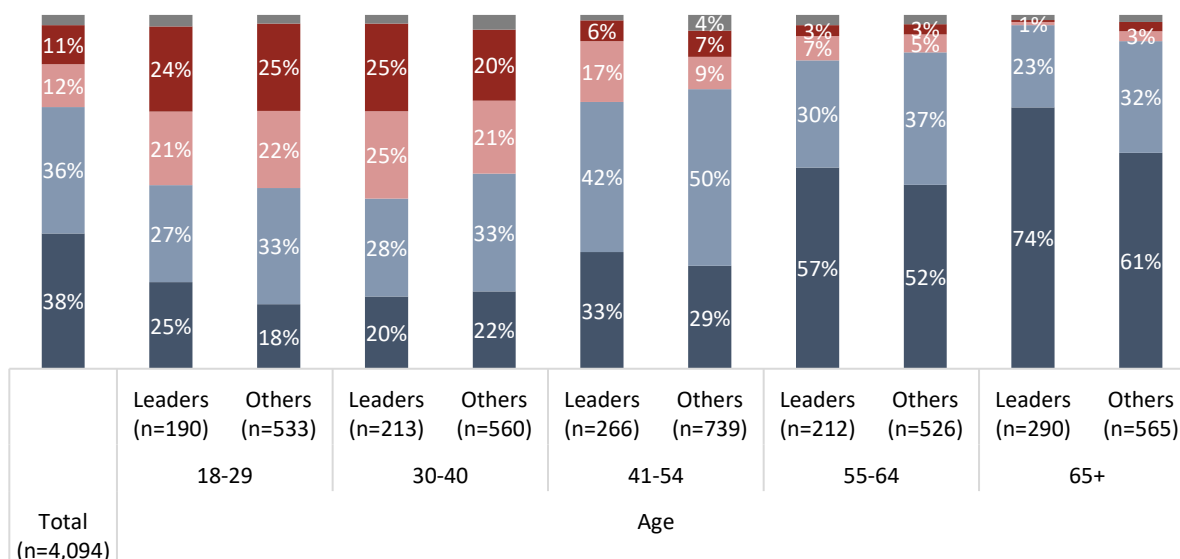
**Part Three: Generational differences**

In generational research the “cohort effect” is the idea that generations can hold distinct outlooks formed by specific events or unique historical circumstances that they experienced (e.g., the Vietnam War).

This can be seen reflected in the way generations perceive themselves. When it comes to Millennials, they have been called the “unluckiest” generation as they have come of age with lower wages and higher housing prices. This has meant that the generations’ overall wealth has lagged significantly behind Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. The COVID-19 pandemic, after the recession of 2008, represents the second major economic downturn of their careers.

Over 40 per cent of those under the age of 41 consider their generation to be unlucky. In contrast, a vast majority of older Canadians – including over nine-in-ten respondents aged 65 and over – say that their generations have been lucky:

**All things considered, would you say your generation has been lucky or unlucky compared to other generations?**



- Don't know/Can't say
- My generation has been very unlucky, and lacking in opportunities
- Moderately unlucky
- Moderately lucky
- My generation has been very lucky, with plenty of opportunities

When it comes to what generations feel lucky about, older generations universally agree that they are fortunate when it comes to their overall quality of life – the top choice for respondents over the age of 40. While this appears in the top five for younger generations, it falls out of the top spot with leaders aged 40 and under.

One of the clearest distinctions between generations is on the question of property ownership. While those above the age of 41 say it is one of the three areas they've been particularly lucky, between 82 to 88 per cent of those 40 and under say their generation was unlucky in this regard ([see detailed tables](#)). Given that house ownership [is still a dream](#) for younger Canadians, that it remains [unattainable for many](#) is likely contributing to generational disillusionment.

One point where younger generations consider themselves fortunate – and older ones do not – is on the question of social acceptance. Although there is still [much room for improvement](#), the increasing visibility of diversity across society appears to be echoed in the data from those under the age of 40:

Would you highlight any of the following as areas where your own generation has been particularly lucky? (Among those who say their generation has been lucky)									
Age									
18-29		30-40		41-54		55-64		65+	
Leaders (n=99*)	Others (n=272)	Leaders (n=102)	Others (n=309)	Leaders (n=200)	Others (n=584)	Leaders (n=184)	Others (n=471)	Leaders (n=282)	Others (n=523)
Educational opportunities 76%	Social acceptance 70%	Opportunities for travel 71%	Overall quality of life 65%	Overall quality of life 73%	Overall quality of life 69%	Overall quality of life 71%	Overall quality of life 73%	Overall quality of life 78%	Overall quality of life 76%
Social acceptance 75%	Educational opportunities 70%	Educational opportunities 66%	Opportunities for travel 61%	Educational opportunities 66%	Educational opportunities 59%	Property ownership 68%	Property ownership 69%	Property ownership 76%	Property ownership 71%
Overall quality of life 65%	Opportunities for travel 63%	Social acceptance 63%	Educational opportunities 61%	Property ownership 59%	Property ownership 52%	Opportunities for travel 61%	Financial opportunities 53%	Educational opportunities 64%	Educational opportunities 54%
Opportunities for travel 54%	Overall quality of life 59%	Overall quality of life 57%	Social acceptance 53%	Career advancement 57%	Opportunities for travel 45%	Educational opportunities 57%	Educational opportunities 52%	Financial opportunities 59%	Opportunities for travel 52%
Career advancement 31%	Career advancement 32%	Career advancement 33%	Career advancement 33%	Opportunities for travel 56%	Career advancement 39%	Career advancement 53%	Opportunities for travel 47%	Opportunities for travel 58%	Financial opportunities 49%

### Generational legacies

If it is an aphorism to say it is possible to learn much about the path forward by examining the past, it must also be noted that how the past is received is inherently contested. To this point, how the legacy of the Baby Boomers is perceived differs dramatically depending on who you ask – did they save the world or did they ruin it?

Those aged 55 to 64 and 65 and older hold overwhelmingly positive views with between three-quarters (75%) to nine-in-ten (87%) rating the Boomers’ legacy as positive. Although still majority positive, there is a noticeable downward shift in perceptions among 41- to 54-year-olds. Perceptions of the Boomers’ legacy fall even further among those 40 and under where a majority qualify it as negative – including roughly a quarter who say it’s very negative.

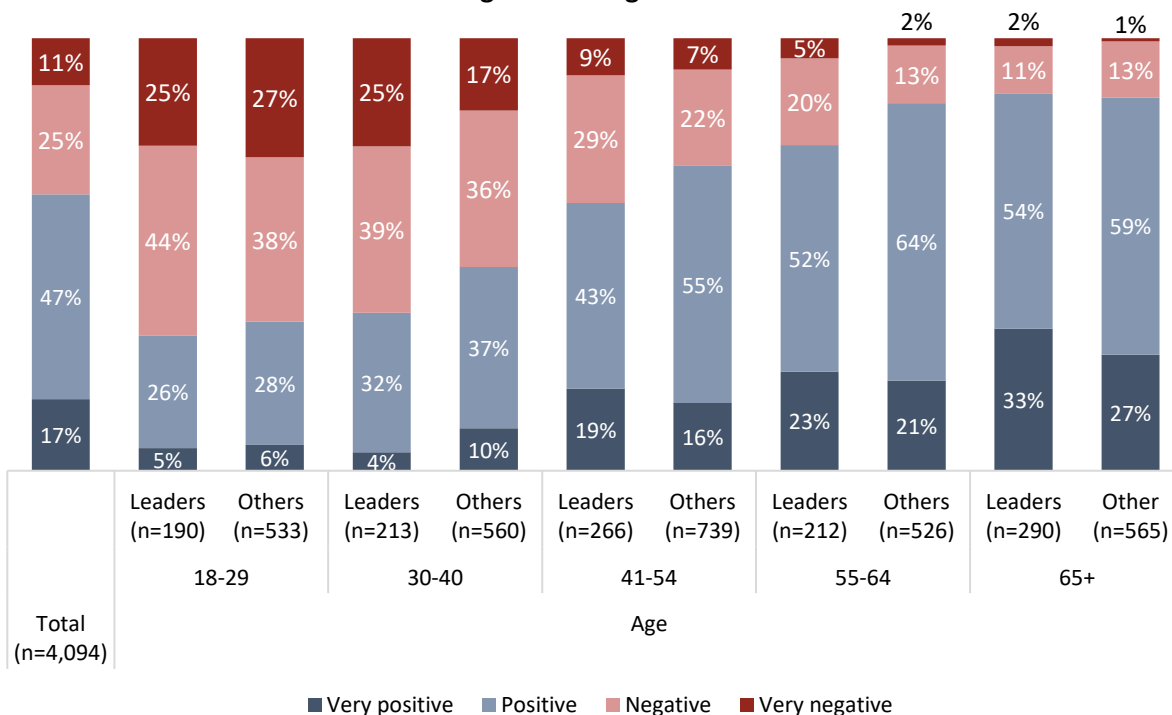
With the exception of those aged 65 and older, leaders are, on average, more skeptical than the rest of society about the legacy of the Boomers:

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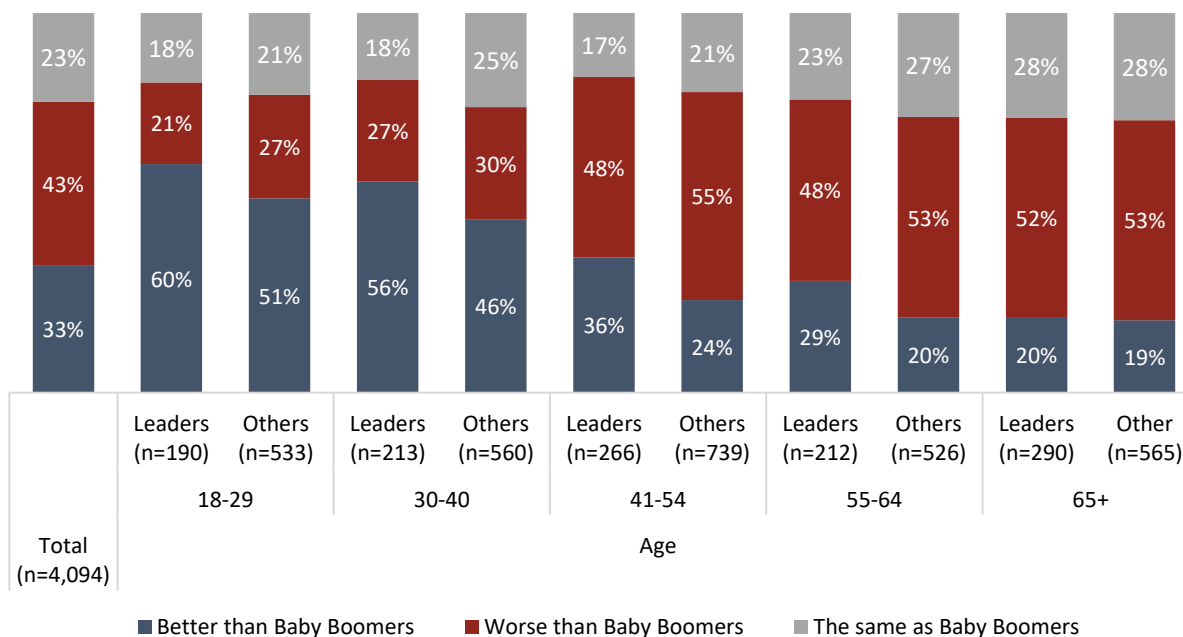
**How would you describe the Baby Boomers' legacy – that is, what they are leaving for future generations?**



Perceptions are reversed when looking at the speculative future legacy of Millennials. Over half of respondents from younger generations believe that what the Millennials will leave behind will be more positive than that of the Boomers. This image flips when looking at those over the age of 40, with half instead saying that the Millennial generation will leave things off in worse shape than what they inherited.

If leaders were more negatively disposed towards the bequest of the Baby Boomers, they remain more hopeful for the future. With the exception of those 65 and older, all leaders are more hopeful about the legacy of the Millennials than the rest of society:

**Millennials meanwhile are between the ages of 25 and 40 today. Looking to the future, do you expect the Millennial generation to leave things in better or worse shape than the Baby Boomers?**



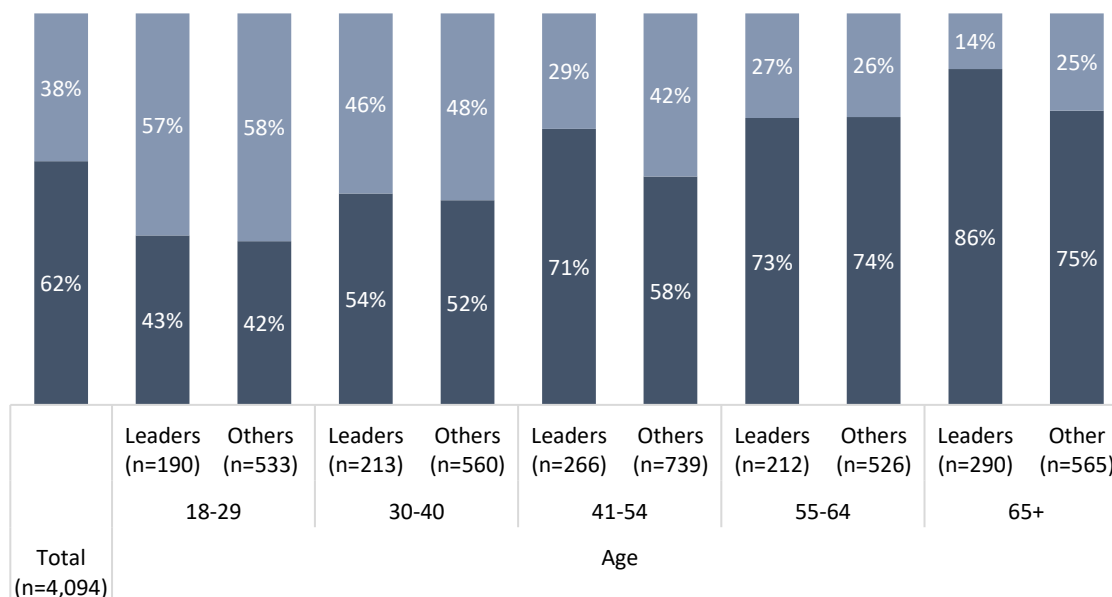
**Part Four: The path forward for Canada**

These data offer several insights into what might come to be as one generation of leaders transitions to the next.

On a foundational level, younger generations appear to have a different relationship with Canada than their parents and grandparents. For 41-year-olds and older, a majority say they have a strong emotional attachment to Canada – they love the country and what it stands for.

Those 40 and younger primarily define their relationship to the country in pragmatic terms. Between three-in-five (57-58%) 18- to 29-year-olds and almost half of 30- to 40-year-olds (46-48%) see the country as a place where they live, but would not be opposed to pursuing opportunities elsewhere:

**Which is closer to how you feel about Canada?**



- Canada is where I live, but it wouldn't bother me to leave for more opportunity elsewhere.
- I have a deep emotional attachment to Canada. I love the country and what it stands for.

There are important regional variations with only half (46%) of all Quebecers reporting a strong attachment to Canada. By contrast, seven-in-ten (70%) of those from the Maritimes said the same ([see detailed tables](#)).

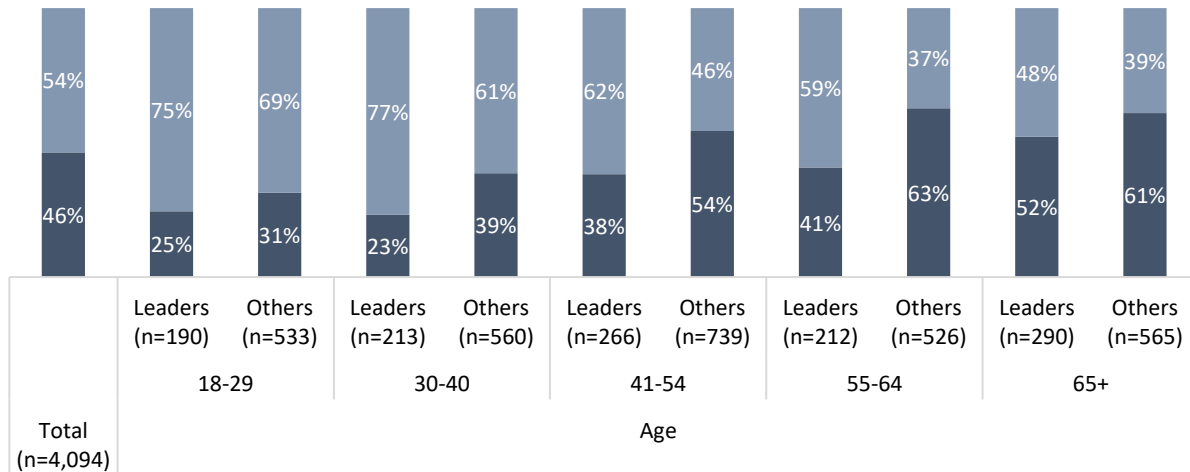
**Openness to difference**

Canada is becoming [more diverse](#) over time and as such younger Canadians grew up in a much more diverse society than their parents. In turn, respondents under 40 report being more open to both public displays of faith in politics as well as deeper forms of cultural diversity.

Younger generations, and especially young leaders, are more supportive of a deeper cultural pluralism. Older leaders, while more supportive than others in their age cohort, are more likely to believe that minorities should do more to fit in with mainstream society.



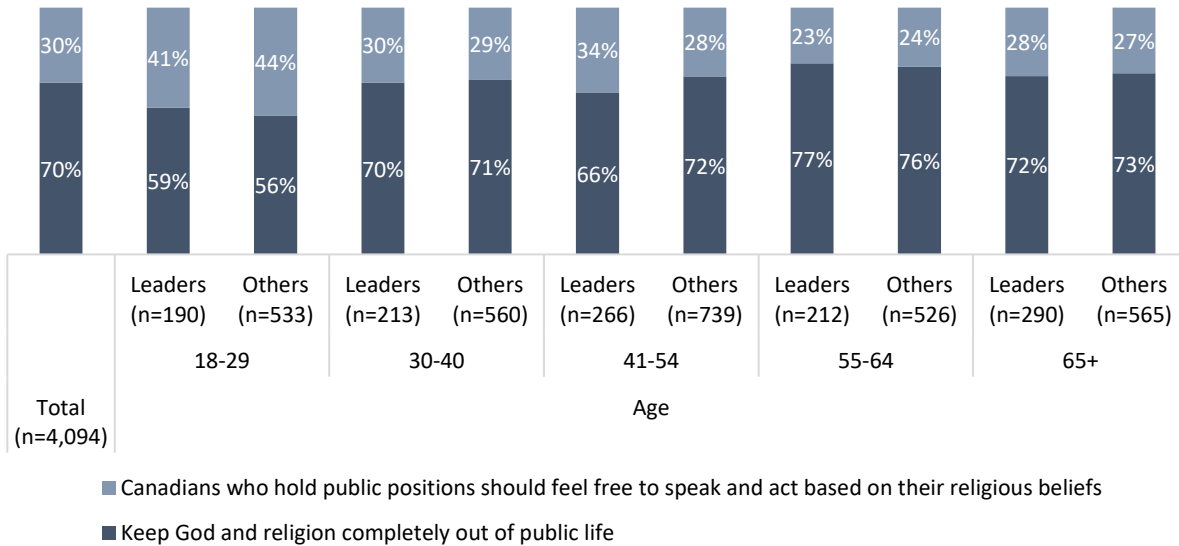
**On diversity:**



- We should encourage cultural diversity, with different groups keeping their own customs and languages
- Minorities should do more to fit in better with mainstream Canadian society

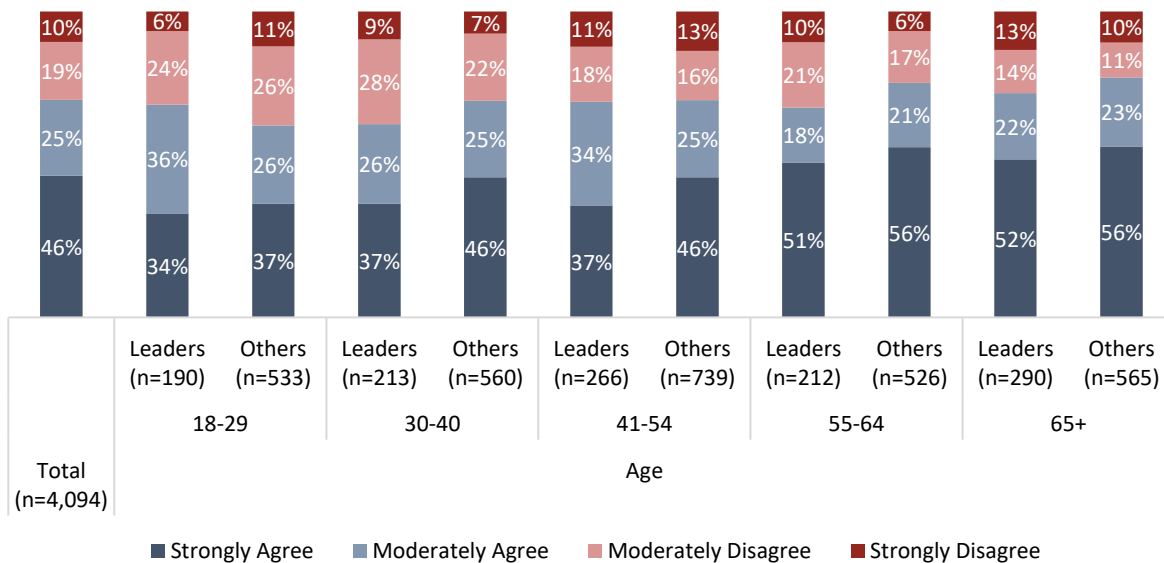
When it comes to religious diversity, however, the youngest generation is more open to faith entering public life. While at least three-in-five leaders of all ages say God and religion should be kept completely out of public life, two-in-five of 18- to 29-year-olds say Canadians in public positions should be able to speak and act based on their faith, the highest rate of any cohort:

**In Canada, we should:**



This perhaps points to alternate paths for future leaders. While majorities of all cohorts agree that there is no role for religion in political activism, leaders – and especially younger ones – are more likely to disagree:

**Agree or disagree: There is no role for religion in political activism**

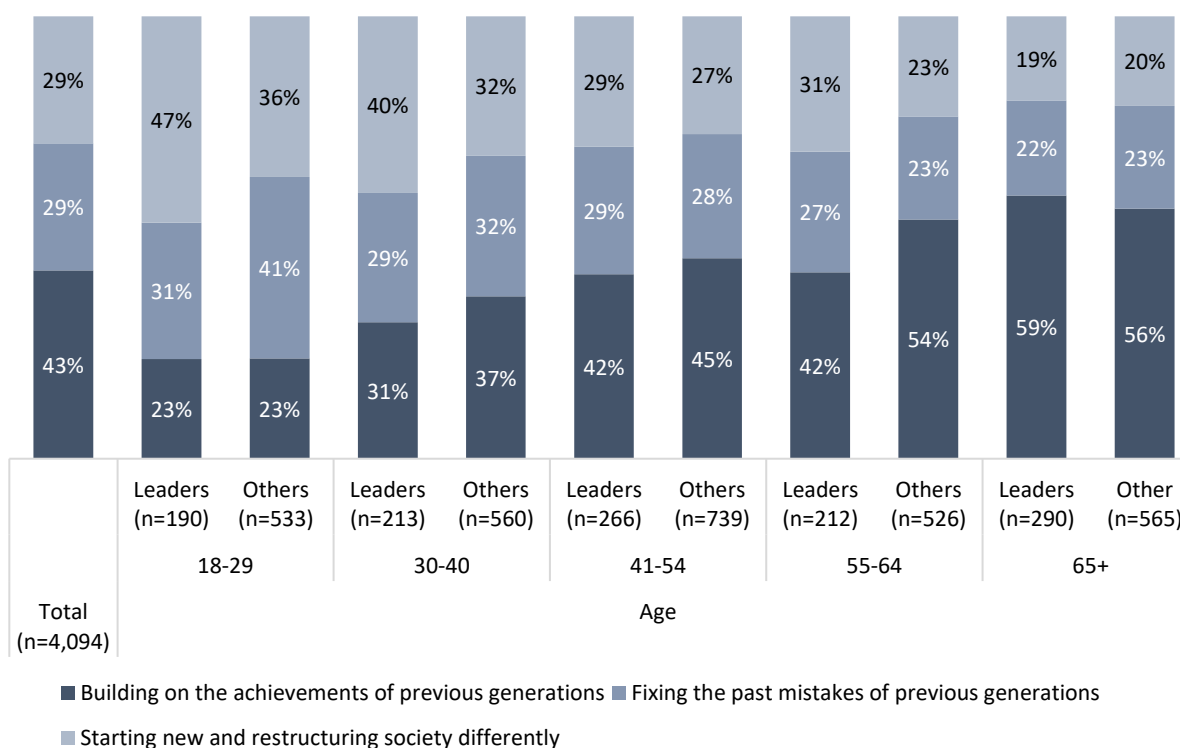


### To start over or build on the existing foundations?

The next generation of leaders will be left to pursue their vision of what Canada *could* be. Echoing the radically different interpretations of generational legacies discussed above, it would appear there is a sizeable appetite for structural change.

Half (47%) of 18- to 29-year-old and two-in-five (40%) 30- to 40-year-old leaders say that the future development of Canadian society will require starting anew. In contrast, those 55 and older would much rather prefer society be built on the foundations of previous generations:

**When thinking about the future development of Canadian society, which of these three broad approaches do you think the upcoming generations should be mostly focused on:**



### Appendix: Studying leadership across generations

In order to better understand the challenges facing Canada and how they are perceived by different generations, two primary analytical lenses were adopted in this study: leadership and age.

On the first point, respondents were asked a series of psychographic questions (e.g., about their personality traits) designed to get at qualities related to leadership identified in existing literature such as ambition or the ability to handle stressful situations.

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This was combined with a series of questions designed to measure engagement, or the extent to which a respondent was involved in actively advocating for their positions and viewpoints.

Respondents were assigned a score for each of these separate indices, with those who received the highest scores on both being designated as leaders.

By not using an approach which links leadership to formal positions of authority, this model goes beyond those who are currently in leadership roles and opens analytical windows on those who may have already stepped down from such positions as well as those who have yet to have such an opportunity.

This is not an attempt to come up with a definitive way of categorizing leadership. Instead, this model is a heuristic through which differences between leaders and society can be parsed.

The second analytical lens, age, opens the possibility of examining shifting trends in leadership across generations. [Generational analysis](#) is valuable in that it offers insights into the views of those at different stages of their life cycle, to what extent opinions within a generation converge, and variation between generations.

Recognizing that generational definitions are [contested](#), age cohorts are used here in lieu of generation labels when referring to the survey results.

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

*For detailed results by the leadership index, [click here](#).*

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