

## Community Connections: For young adults, 'belonging' has little to do with neighbourhood

*Many Canadians say their neighbourhoods are less friendly than in the past; COVID-19 a key driver*

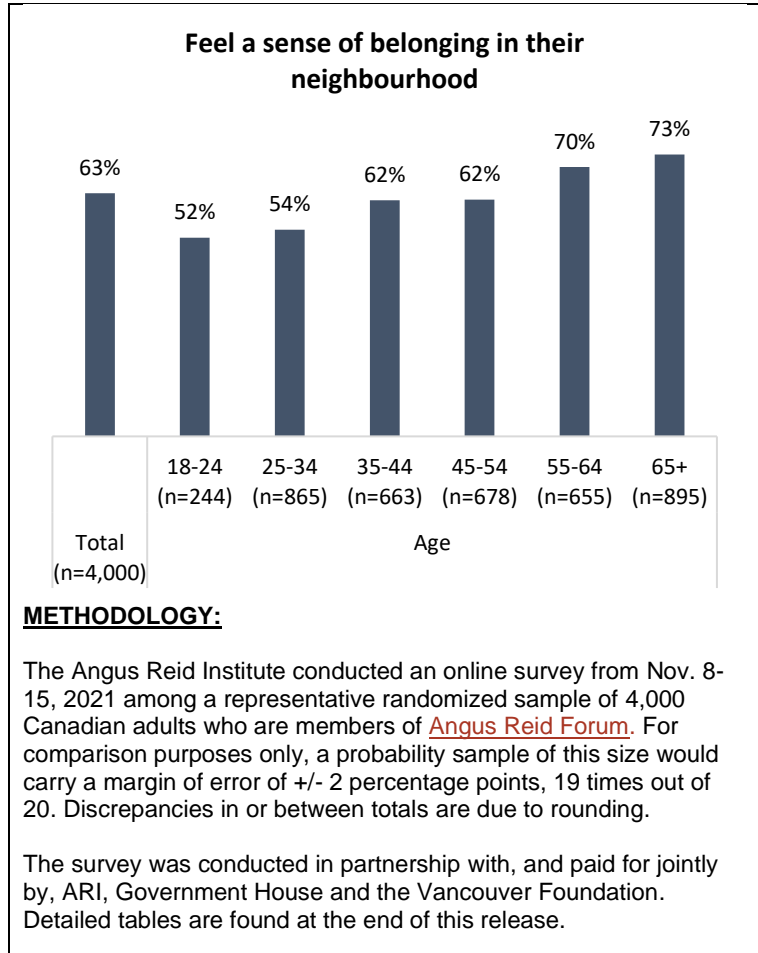
**March 30, 2022** – The myriad impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are only just beginning to be understood in Canadian society and will continue to unfold over years to come. For the time being, the crisis has initiated nothing short of an outright restructuring of some areas of society.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute in partnership with [Government House](#) and the [Vancouver Foundation](#), looks at changing community connections and realities after two years of pandemic-related challenges. The results suggest a society where belonging and connection are splintered along generational lines, with older residents drawing strength and comfort from their place-based communities, and younger people finding a sense of community rooted not in physical space but defined instead by ethnic or experience-based connections.

Consider that at least seven-in-ten Canadians over the age of 54 say they feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood. For those under the age of 35, only half say this. On the other end of this identity spectrum, Canadians aged 18 to 24 are nearly four times as likely as those 65 and older to say that they find connection with people based on a common life experience, such as identifying as LGBTQ2+, living with a disability, or being a person of colour.

The real-world implications of this are evident. Just two-in-five Canadians 18- to 34-years-old say that they have a neighbour who could be relied on to check on them if they were unwell. This rises to three-quarters (75%) among those 65 years of age and older. Similarly, just half of those under the age of 35 say they could find someone to lend them \$20 if they lost their wallet, compared to seven-in-ten of those 45 and older.

COVID-19 has exacerbated some of these silos. Overall, 36 per cent of Canadians say they have had less interaction with neighbours recently than they used to. This group points squarely to COVID-19 and



### CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl

Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)

Glenn Ewald, Vancouver Foundation: [glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca)

pandemic restrictions for this, with 78 per cent saying that's their main reason for seeing and talking to people less often.

### More Key Findings:

- While most Canadians who have had less interaction in recent years say it is primarily due to COVID-19, young people are more likely to say they simply don't want to talk to anyone.
- Sense of belonging is considerably lower in Alberta than the rest of the country. Two-thirds of Albertans say they feel like they belong in their province and as a part of Canada – both marks are the lowest in the country.
- In British Columbia, sense of belonging in neighbourhoods hovers around the national average, but both sense of belonging to province and Canada are among the highest levels in the country.
- The Angus Reid Institute's Canadian Connection Index – which measures Canadians' sense of belonging and level of engagement with others in their neighbourhoods – finds a majority of residents scoring either Disconnected (28%) or only Partially Connected (28%). This suggests that they feel largely removed from their physical location and have poor social integration where they live.

### 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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### CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
Glenn Ewald, Vancouver Foundation: [glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca)

## Part One: Exploring community connections

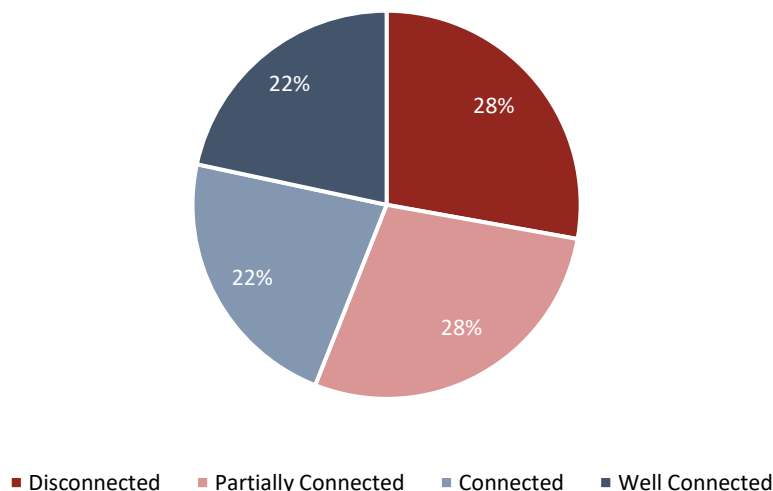
### Canadian Connection Index

Spurred by the pandemic, new realities have emerged in Canada over the past two years. As the home office becomes paramount for former officegoers, isolation has increased. Add this to persistent public health restrictions and concerns about illness, and many Canadians have been separated from their prior social supports and settings.

To assist with understanding this phenomenon, the Angus Reid Institute created a Canadian Connection Index, using responses to questions about belonging in communities, interactions with others, and the support that respondents feel they can rely on. This Index measures specifically the connection between Canadians and the neighbourhood they live in.

What the Index reveals is that – at least for now, in this unprecedented time – a significant segment is feeling a disconnect. An equal number, approximately three-in-ten (28%), score Very Low or Low on the CCI – the criteria for which can [be viewed here](#). One-in-five (22%) are categorized as having a Very High or High level of connection to their neighbours and community members.

**Canadian Connection Index  
(All respondents, n=4,000)**



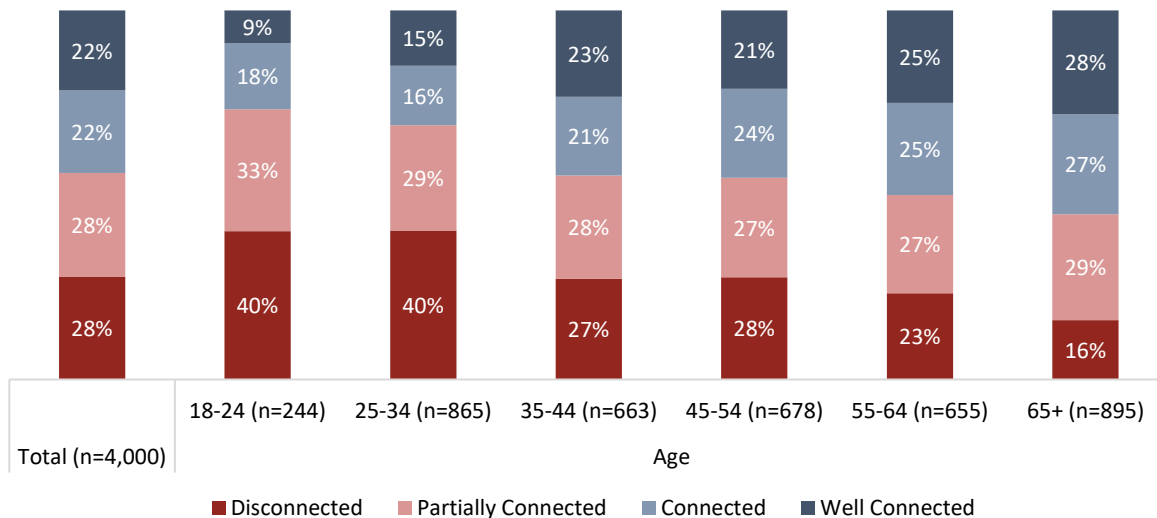
### Younger people lack reliable connection and support in their communities

The most obvious demographic correlation with the CCI is age-based. Younger Canadians, who are already more likely to be mobile as they begin their careers and the process of starting to set down roots, are most likely to score on the lower half of this index. Canadians of retirement age are most likely to be more entrenched in their communities, with higher levels of interactions and more reliable social networks, but even here 45 per cent are found on the negative end of the spectrum:

#### **CONTACT:**

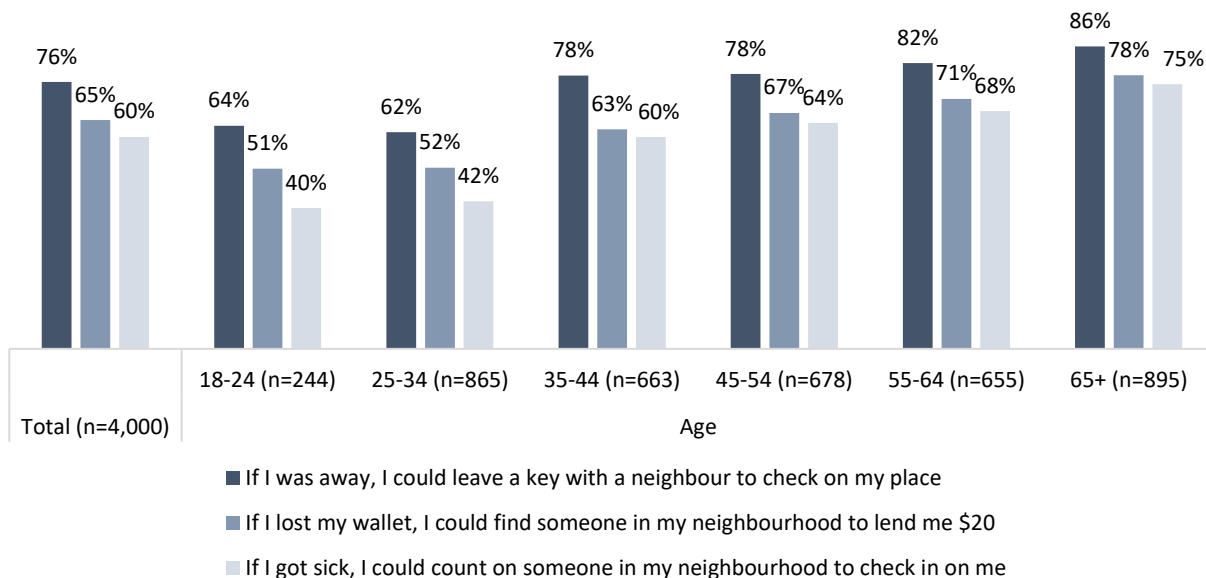
Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
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 Glenn Ewald, Vancouver Foundation: [glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca)

**Canadian Connection Index**



Younger Canadians are less likely to report having support systems close to home, and the generational differences on this front are stark. Two-thirds of adults under the age of 35 say they could trust a neighbour to check on their residence when they're away. Half say they could find someone to lend them \$20 if they lost their wallet. At a time in their lives when they may need more care and support, just two-in-five say they could count on a neighbour to check in on them if they were sick. Those over the age of 54 are much more likely to have support systems near them to lean on in each of these real-world scenarios:

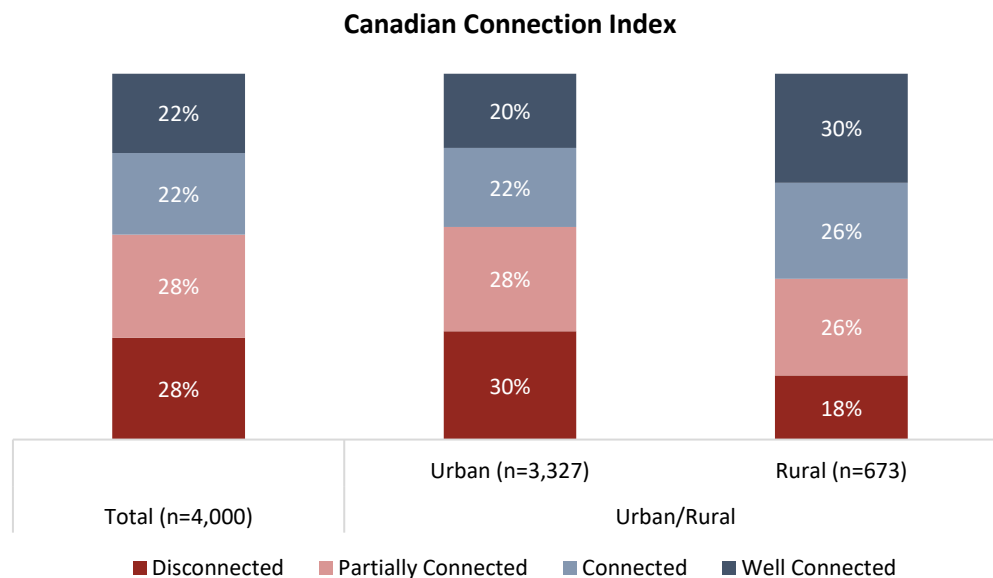
**Agreement with statements**



**Rural Canadians have more people to rely on close to home**

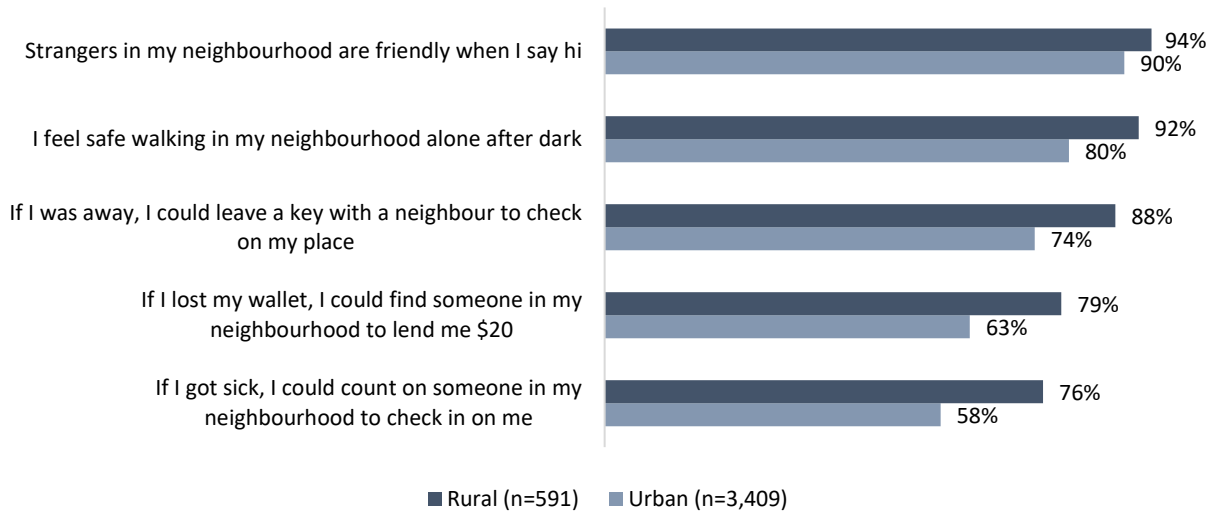
Another core finding from the Canadian Connection Index is the placement of urban and rural residents. People living in urban spaces can often experience a poor work-life balance – the so-called “rat-race” effect – and populations in these areas tend to be more transient.

Supporting these ideas, those in urban settings are much more likely to score Very Low on the CCI (30% vs 18%) compared to rural Canadians. More than half (56%) of rural respondents score on the positive half of the Index, which is the case for two-in-five in urban areas:



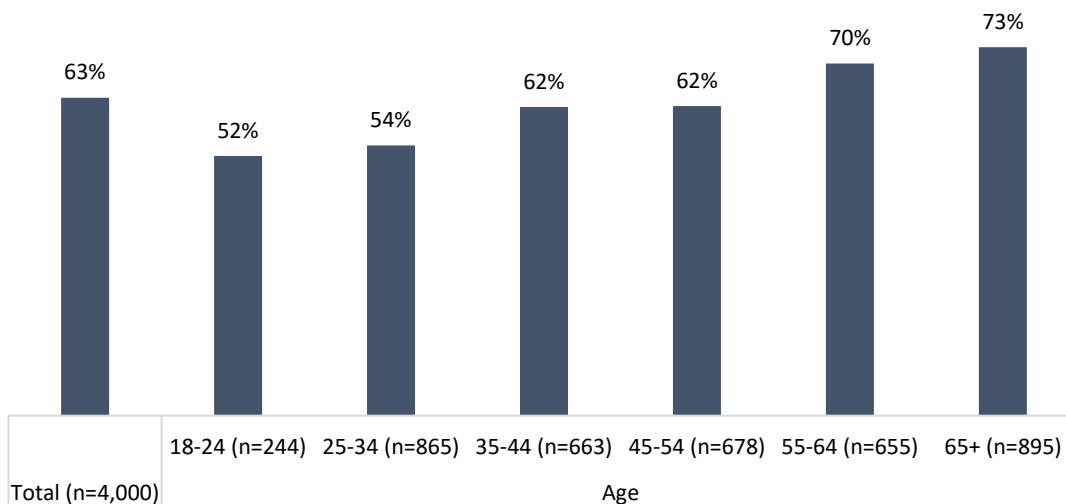
Driving this is the fact that rural Canadians rate their neighbourhoods as friendlier and safer than their urban counterparts and are much more likely to have neighbours to trust to look after their place when they’re gone, lend them money if needed, and check in on them if they were sick.

**Agreement with statements**



Belonging is, thus, a phenomenon that not everyone in Canada experiences. This is particularly true at the neighbourhood level. From coast to coast, from downtown apartments, to sprawling suburbs, three-in-five Canadians (63%) say they feel that they belong in their closest physical community. This dips to half among those younger than 35 and above seven-in-ten for those 55 years of age and older:

**Feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood**



Rural Canadians are also slightly more likely to say that they feel a sense of neighbourhood belonging compared to urbanites (71% vs 62%, [see detailed tables](#)).

For those who score as Disconnected on the Canadian Connection Index, few say they have any real connection to their neighbourhood, or even the city they are living in. Many more identify as have a strong sense of belonging in Canada more broadly:

**Now, thinking about the following geographic communities, how would you describe your sense of belonging to each?**

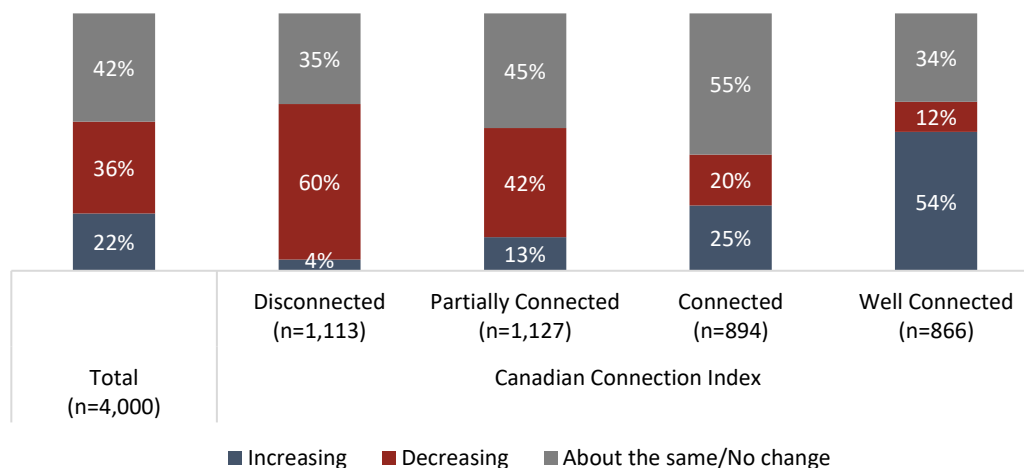
	Total (n=4,000)	Canadian Connection Index			
		Disconnected (n=1,113)	Partially Connected (n=1,127)	Connected (n=894)	Well Connected (n=866)
Your neighbourhood	63%	22%	60%	90%	93%
Your city or town	68%	44%	64%	85%	87%
Your province	70%	55%	69%	77%	82%
Canada	76%	68%	77%	78%	81%

**COVID-19 has made connecting a challenge**

Canadians, overall, are more likely to say social interactions in their neighbourhoods have been declining in recent years than increasing. One-third (36%) say they've noticed less personal social contact in their neighbourhood in recent years, while one-in-five (22%) say they've noticed more and more. A plurality (42%) say social contact within their neighbourhood has remained consistent.

Those who have the lowest levels of connection are also the most likely to say recent years have exacerbated this issue. Three-in-five of the Disconnected say their personal interaction have been diminishing:

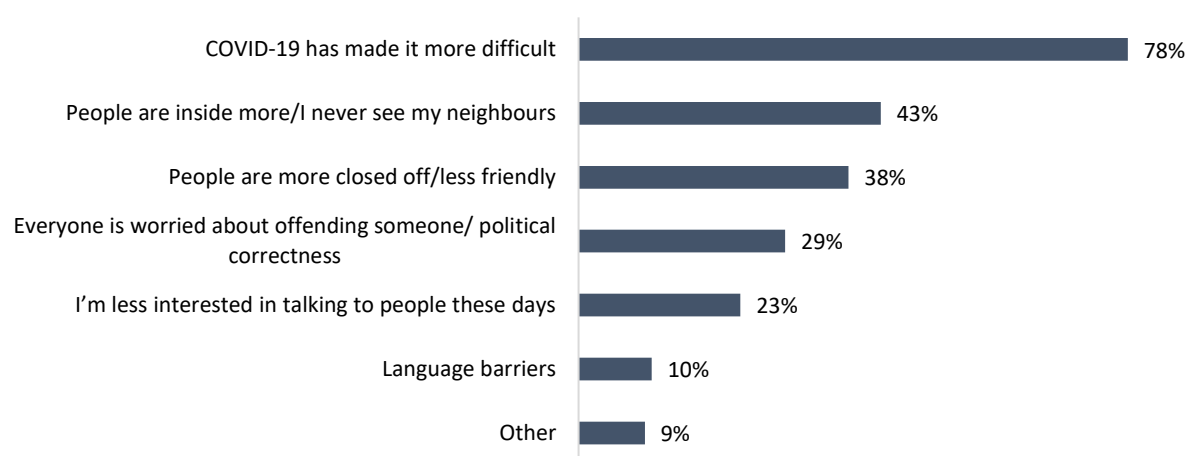
**Thinking about personal social contact/interactions in your neighbourhood, would you say it has been increasing or decreasing in recent years?**



The COVID-19 pandemic, and rules around social distancing, has clearly played a role in decreasing social interactions. Indeed, four-in-five (78%) of Canadians who say interactions in their neighbourhood are decreasing say that is the case. Meanwhile, two-in-five (43%) say it's because their neighbours spend much more time inside or that people seem to be less friendly (38%). So called "political correctness" is evidently a factor for three-in-ten (29%), who say people are too worried about offending others in their social interactions:

**And what do you think are the main reasons for decreasing social interactions in your neighbourhood?**

**(Those who believe interactions are decreasing, n=1,427)**



Older Canadians have felt the most isolated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than four-in-five (85%) Canadians aged 65 and older who say social interactions in their neighbourhood are decreasing say COVID-19 has made social contact more difficult, the most of any age group. They are also the least likely age group to blame people being less friendly, or being antisocial themselves, for social contact decreasing.

By contrast, younger Canadians are the most likely to say they feel unsocial and that's why interactions aren't as plentiful as they used to be. Three-in-ten (30%) 25- to 34-year-olds and two-in-five (37%) 18- to 24-year-olds say they are less interested in chatting with others.

**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
 Glenn Ewald, Vancouver Foundation: [glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca)



And what do you think are the main reasons for decreasing social interactions in your neighbourhood? (Among those who feel social interactions are decreasing)							
	Total (n=1,427)	Age					
		18-24 (n=94*)	25-34 (n=321)	35-44 (n=223)	45-54 (n=263)	55-64 (n=218)	65+ (n=307)
COVID-19 has made it more difficult	78%	74%	78%	79%	71%	74%	85%
People are inside more/ I never see my neighbours	43%	49%	48%	42%	41%	36%	41%
People are more closed off/less friendly	38%	31%	43%	41%	41%	41%	29%
Everyone is worried about offending someone/ political correctness	29%	20%	33%	30%	32%	26%	27%
I'm less interested in talking to people these days	23%	37%	30%	23%	23%	18%	13%
Language barriers	10%	7%	10%	14%	10%	11%	9%
Other	9%	13%	9%	10%	9%	13%	7%

*\*Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

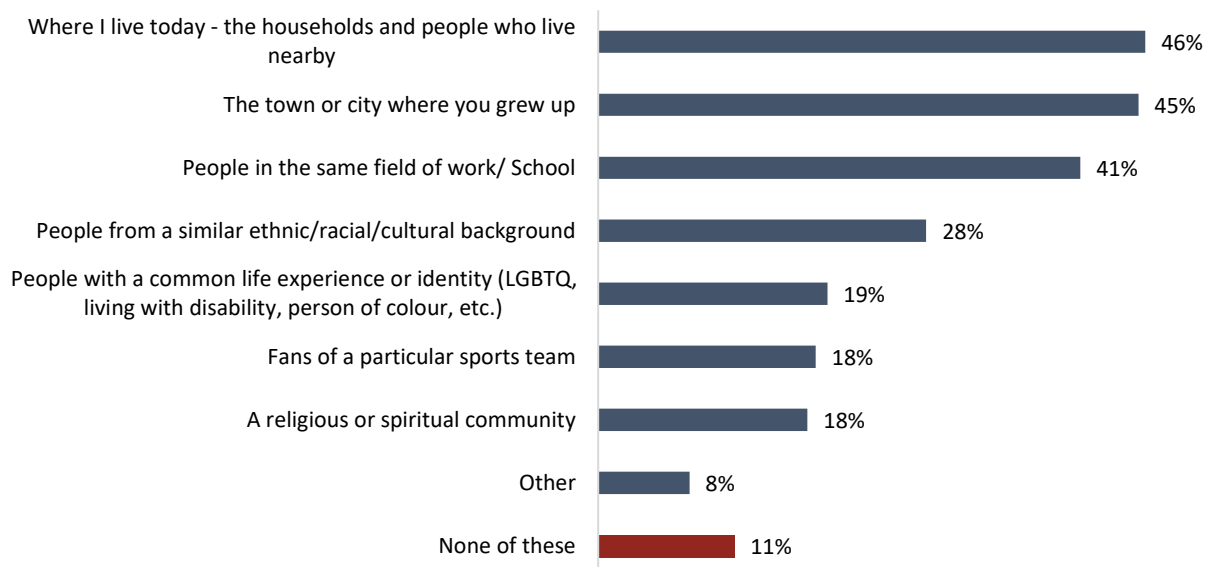
## Part Two: Community attachments

While many Canadians' sense of belonging to their physical space are evidently undergoing a transformation, there are other elements of communities – physical and imagined – that connect much of the population. Asked about their own attachments, nearly half say that they feel a strong connection with the place that they live now (46%) or the place they grew up (45%). Two-in-five say that their profession (41%) provides a source of strong attachment, while 28 per cent say that they are connected to people who have a similar ethnic or cultural background:

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Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
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**Which, if any, do you feel you have a strong attachment to?  
(All respondents, n=4,000)**



**Older Canadians rooted by location; younger residents find belonging elsewhere**

These sources of attachment vary generationally. At least half of those aged 55 and over say they have a strong attachment to the households and people who live nearby. For younger age groups their current location is not as important. Instead, attachment is stronger to people with similar backgrounds, identities, or life experiences. Two-in-five 18- to 24-year-olds say they feel a strong attachment to people with similar ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, while one-quarter of those aged 35 and over feel the same way:

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Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
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Which, if any, do you feel you have a strong attachment to?							
	Total (n=4,000)	Age					
		18-24 (n=244)	25-34 (n=865)	35-44 (n=663)	45-54 (n=678)	55-64 (n=655)	65+ (n=895)
Where I live today - the households and people who live nearby	46%	35%	38%	45%	45%	50%	56%
The town or city where you grew up	45%	45%	54%	49%	42%	44%	37%
People in the same field of work/school	41%	49%	56%	46%	41%	32%	25%
People from a similar ethnic/racial/cultural background	28%	39%	33%	24%	26%	24%	26%
People with a common life experience or identity (LGBTQ, disability, person of colour, etc.)	19%	36%	28%	20%	18%	15%	10%
Fans of a particular sports team	18%	16%	21%	19%	20%	20%	13%
A religious or spiritual community	18%	26%	21%	17%	18%	16%	13%

For Canadians who identify as a visible minority, the ethnic and cultural background of their social network is an extremely important aspect of community attachment.

**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
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Which, if any, do you feel you have a strong attachment to?				
	Total (n=4,000)	Ethnicity		
		Indigenous* (n=208)	Visible Minority* (n=517)	Caucasian (n=3,274)
Where I live today - the households and people who live nearby	46%	46%	38%	47%
The town or city where you grew up	45%	49%	44%	45%
People in the same field of work/ school	41%	38%	42%	40%
People from a similar ethnic/racial/cultural background	28%	29%	53%	23%
People with a common life experience or identity (LGBTQ, living with disability, person of colour, etc.)	19%	22%	33%	17%
Fans of a particular sports team	18%	12%	19%	19%
A religious or spiritual community	18%	18%	25%	16%

\*See note at the end of the release.

### **Comparing urban and rural experiences**

Three-in-five (57%) of those living in rural Canada say they feel a strong attachment to nearby households and people, a rate much higher than their urban counterparts. On the other hand, urban Canadians are more likely to feel a strong connection to people of similar backgrounds and identities:

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Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
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Which, if any, do you feel you have a strong attachment to?			
	Total (n=4,000)	Urban or Rural	
		Urban (n=3,409)	Rural (n=591)
Where I live today - the households and people who live nearby	46%	44%	57%
The town or city where you grew up	45%	46%	45%
People in the same field of work/ school	41%	41%	36%
People from a similar ethnic/racial/cultural background	28%	29%	21%
People with a common life experience or identity (LGBTQ, disability, person of colour, etc.)	19%	21%	12%
Fans of a particular sports team	18%	19%	12%
A religious or spiritual community	18%	18%	15%

### **What makes a good community? For younger people, it's affordability**

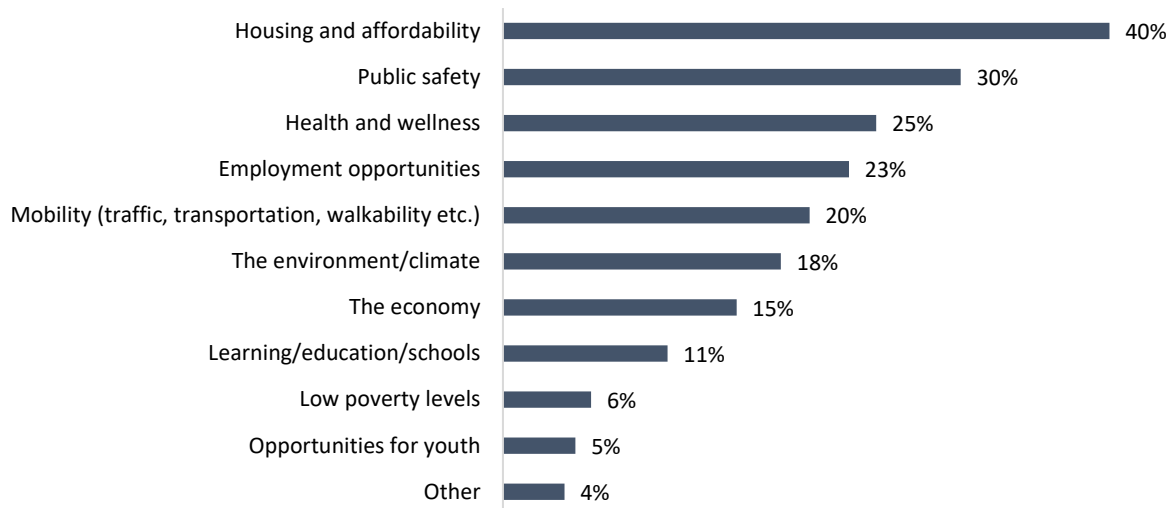
Housing affordability continues to be a key issue for many Canadians. Housing prices have accelerated across the country this century, and spiked significantly [during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Indeed, it even is the top factor for Canadians when they consider what makes a good place to live. Two-in-five say housing and affordability is a top-two factor that they consider important when it comes to making a community a good place to live. Three-in-ten say public safety is a top consideration, while one-quarter say health and wellness (25%) and employment opportunities (23%):

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**Many factors go into what makes a city, town, or community a good place to live. Please select the top two that are most important to YOU personally:  
(All respondents, n=4,000)**



Affordability is a much bigger factor for younger Canadians. Nearly half (48%) of 18- to 24-year-olds say it's a top-two factor in making a city desirable and 44 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds echo that choice. Older Canadians are much more concerned about the public safety, health and wellness of communities than their younger counterparts:

Many factors go into what makes a city, town, or community a good place to live. Please select the top two that are most important to YOU personally:

	Total (n=4,000)	Age					
		18-24 (n=244)	25-34 (n=865)	35-44 (n=663)	45-54 (n=678)	55-64 (n=655)	65+ (n=895)
Housing and affordability	40%	48%	44%	37%	39%	39%	37%
Public safety	30%	28%	21%	30%	31%	35%	35%
Health and wellness	25%	15%	17%	19%	19%	30%	39%
Employment opportunities	23%	29%	29%	26%	30%	21%	9%
Mobility (traffic, transportation, walkability etc.)	20%	16%	21%	17%	19%	19%	24%
The environment/climate	18%	19%	19%	13%	19%	17%	21%
The economy	15%	13%	16%	16%	16%	16%	14%
Learning/education/schools	11%	11%	14%	19%	8%	7%	7%
Low poverty levels	6%	4%	6%	7%	6%	6%	6%
Opportunities for youth	5%	7%	5%	8%	5%	3%	2%
Other	4%	2%	4%	5%	5%	3%	5%

The role of affordability in creating connection for Canadians is perhaps nowhere more evident than when looking at the CCI. Fully half (50%) of those with Very Low scores say that housing affordability is most important to them. Employment opportunities are also slightly more valued by those on the lower half of the Index.

**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
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Many factors go into what makes a city, town, or community a good place to live. We've listed some below. Please select the top two that are most important to YOU personally:

	Total (n=4,000)	Canadian Connection Index			
		Disconnected (n=1,113)	Partially Connected (n=1,127)	Connected (n=894)	Well Connected (n=866)
Housing and affordability	40%	50%	41%	34%	31%
Public safety	30%	29%	27%	34%	32%
Health and wellness	25%	19%	21%	29%	31%
Employment opportunities	23%	26%	26%	20%	17%
Mobility (traffic, transportation, walkability etc.)	20%	22%	20%	18%	21%
The environment/climate	18%	16%	19%	18%	20%
The economy	15%	13%	16%	16%	17%
Learning/education/schools	11%	8%	11%	14%	12%
Low poverty levels	6%	6%	6%	4%	6%
Opportunities for youth	5%	4%	5%	7%	4%

### Part Three: Canadians' sense of belonging is being challenged

In a time where political divisions and protests have exacerbated feelings of separation for many Canadians, unity can appear to be more of a wish than a reality. And while challenges persist and deficits in feelings of belonging demand attention, it is important to note that many Canadians feel that they still fit into the Canadian milieu. The vast majority – three-quarters of Canadians (76%) – feel a sense of belonging within Canada. However, this represents an eight-point drop since the Angus Reid Institute [last asked this question in 2015](#). Driving this downward movement is a considerable feeling of disconnect in Alberta.

#### Albertans and Quebecers not sure where they fit

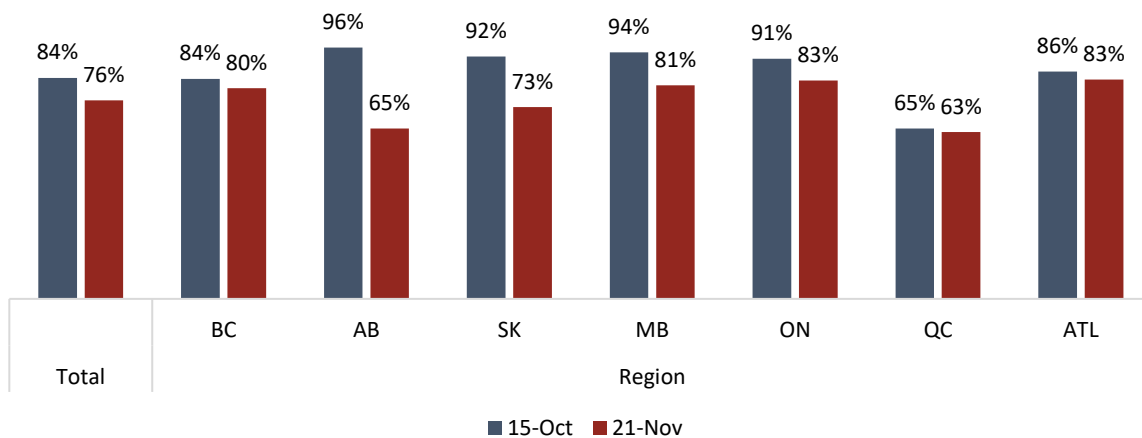
Albertans' sentiment towards Canada has regressed significantly [from 2015](#). At that time, nearly all (96%) Albertans said they felt a sense of belonging to Canada. That figure has dropped by 31 points, putting Albertans' attachment to the country at a similar level to Quebecers', who have historically been much less likely to align themselves with "Canadianism" than the rest of the country. Notable, too, is the negative direction of responses on this question regardless of region:

#### CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
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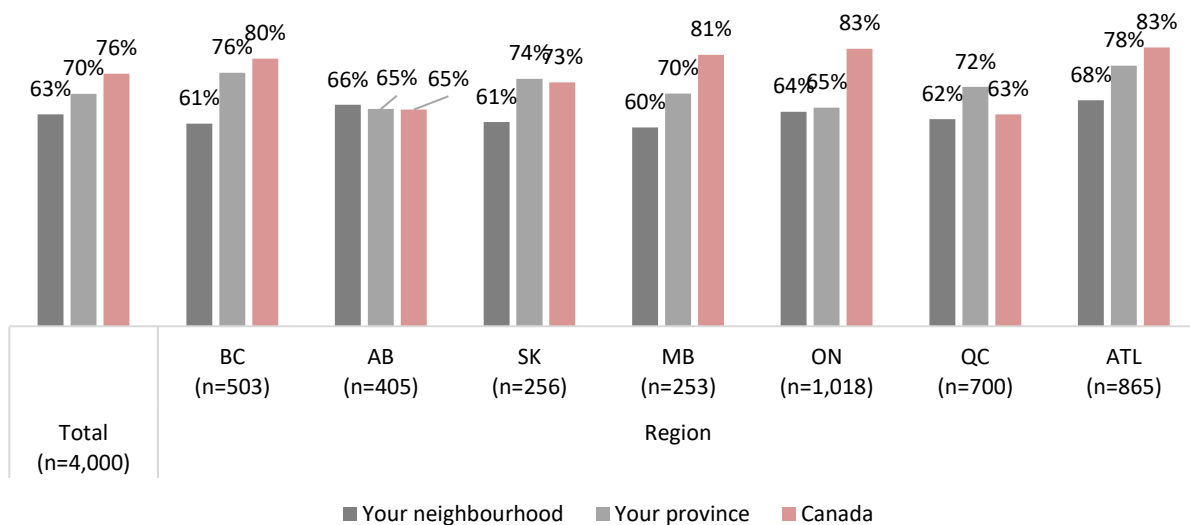


**Feel a sense of belonging with Canada:  
(2015 vs. 2021)**



Across the country, the sense of belonging to both their own province and the country vary significantly. Albertans are equally likely to say they feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood, province, and country, while for most of the country, a sense of belonging with 'Canada' is stronger than the more proximate associations with their communities and provinces:

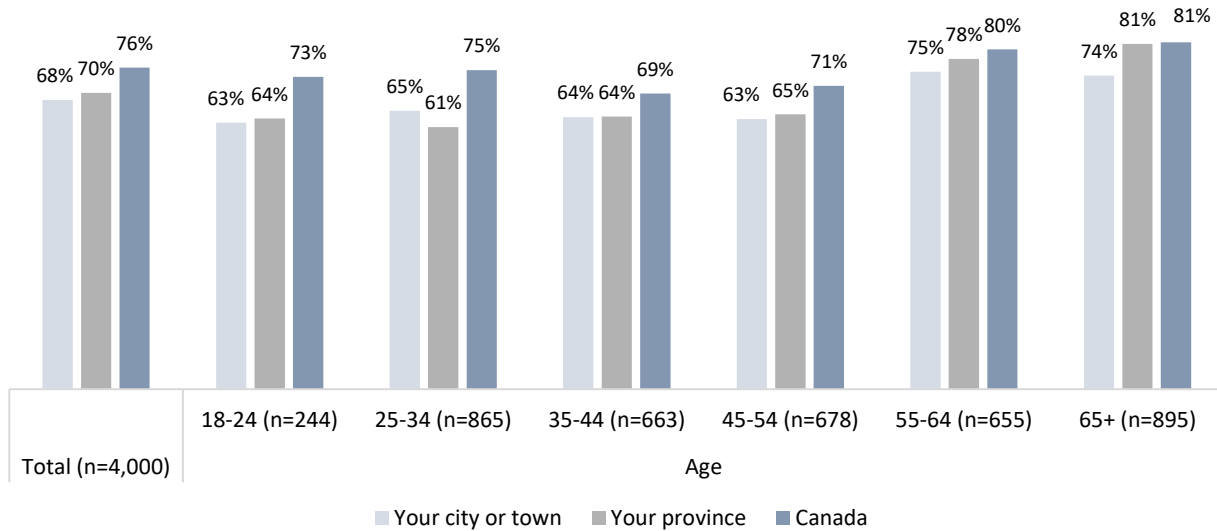
**Feel a sense of belonging with each**



Canadians older than the age of 54 feel much stronger sense of belonging to their city, province and the country than younger adults. That difference is most notable when respondents are asked about their sense of belonging to their province. Four-in-five Canadians 55-years-old and older say they feel a sense of belonging to the province they live in while at most two-thirds of Canadians 54-years-old and younger feel the same:

**CONTACT:**  
 Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
 Glenn Ewald, Vancouver Foundation: [glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca)

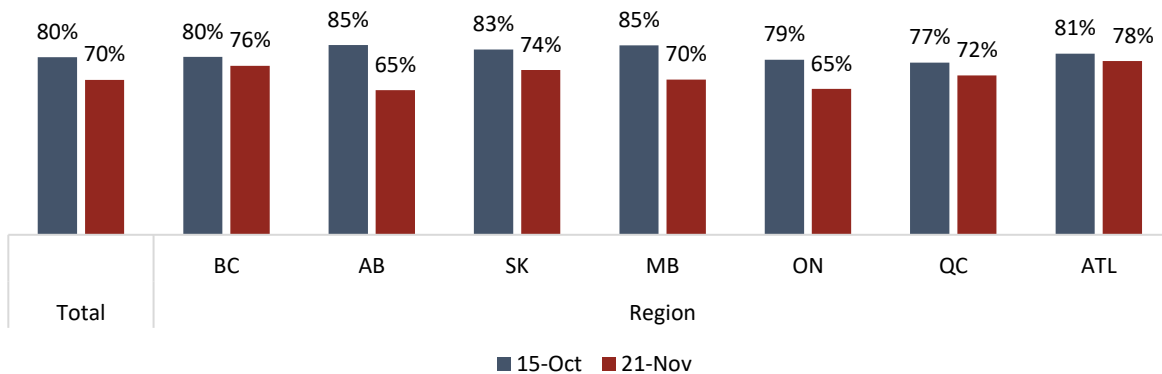
**Feel a sense of belonging with each:**



Canadian identity may be undergoing a formative change. Countrywide, attachment to their home provinces has dropped for Canadians, but the largest declines are seen in Alberta (20 points from 2015), Manitoba (15 points from 2015) and Ontario (14 points from 2015):

**How would you describe your sense of belonging to each?**

**Your province  
(2015 vs. 2021)**



**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
 Glenn Ewald, Vancouver Foundation: [glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca)

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*\*Note, the proportion of the sample who identify as Indigenous is consistent with the proportion reported in the most [recently available Canadian census data](#). However, the proportion of the sample which identifies as visible minority is not. This is due to discrepancies between the Statistics Canada definition of visible minority and whether Angus Reid Forum members choose to identify as such in surveys. For Statistics Canada, [all who identify as any group defined by the Employment Equity Act](#) are referred to as visible minorities. For Angus Reid Forum surveys, visible minorities are self-identified.*

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

***For detailed results by the Canadian Connection Index, [click here](#).***

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**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Amanda Campbell, Government House, [amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:amanda.campbell@gov.bc.ca)  
Glenn Ewald, Vancouver Foundation: [glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:glenn.ewald@vancouverfoundation.ca)