

Majority of Canadians view Pope Francis' apology for residential schools as a step towards reconciliation

Three-in-five say more investigation into legacy of residential schools needed

August 11, 2022 – A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds a majority of Canadians view Pope Francis July visit to Canada – dubbed the “[penitential pilgrimage](#)” – and the apology he offered on behalf of members of the Catholic Church for their role in the administration of residential schools, as a step towards reconciliation.

Overall, three-in-five (59%) say this, while one-in-three (32%) feel the apology does nothing to move reconciliation forward. Respondents are twice as likely to view it as a “small step” (40%) than a “significant” one (18%).

Among a sample of Indigenous respondents, opinions are similar but more muted, with 54 per cent feeling this was a contribution to reconciliation, and 36 per cent feeling the gesture offers no real practical impact.

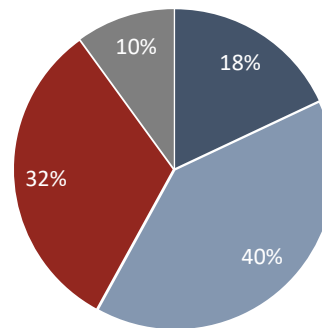
Pope Francis undertook the summer visit to Alberta, Quebec, and Nunavut to offer his apologies to Indigenous communities.

Between 1833 and 1996, an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children were forced to attend residential schools in Canada, [more than 60 per cent of the schools](#) were run by the Catholic Church.

The apology itself is largely viewed as sincere by those who followed the trip and Pope Francis' speeches. Two-thirds (64%) of those who paid attention to the visit say the pope was sincere in his lamentation of the “[evil](#)” perpetrated by some members of the church during this period. One-quarter (24%) of Canadians disagreed that the apology was genuine.

Asked who bears most responsibility for the residential school system, half of Canadians (52%) blame the federal government, Christian churches, and society at the time equally for creating it and allowing it to persist. One-in-five say the federal government bears most blame (21%), while a similar number primarily blame the church (18%).

Do you think Pope Francis' apology is a meaningful step towards reconciliation or not?
(All respondents, n=2,279)



- Yes, it was a significant meaningful step towards reconciliation
- Yes it was a small step towards reconciliation
- No, it didn't make a difference
- Not sure/ Can't say

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Aug. 8-10, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 2,279 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- For three-in-five (58%) Canadians, the path of reconciliation requires further ground to tread. This group believes the country needs to continue to interrogate the history of residential schools – something Pope Francis called for in his public statements. Two-in-five (42%) Canadians including half of men of all ages (49%) say “focusing on the future” is the way to proceed.
- On the question of how to move forward, women are significantly more likely than men to say that further investigation into the history of residential schools must be undertaken (65% to 51%).
- Indigenous respondents are more likely (64%) to say that investigations into the past should be the focus going forward, compared to visible minorities (58%) and Caucasians (58%).
- Past Conservative Party voters diverge from all other partisans on this question. Seven-in-ten (68%) say the focus should be on the future and less on investigations into the past, while at least two-thirds of all past Liberal, NDP and Bloc Québécois voters disagree.

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.

**A note on sample. The Angus Reid Institute collected responses from those who self-identify as Indigenous in this survey. This is not representative of all Indigenous experiences and perspectives. The total number of responses from Indigenous individuals (127 responses) was weighted to be statistically representative in the Canadian population at four per cent (117 responses). Please consider these views as informative but not authoritative.*

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Part One: Papal visit

Pope Francis came to Canada for a week-long “[penitential pilgrimage](#)” last month. He visited Alberta, Quebec and Nunavut, stopping at churches, former residential school sites and Indigenous sacred sites. The trip centred around the pope [delivering apologies in Canada](#) for [the role members of the Catholic Church played](#) in administering residential schools after he apologized to an Indigenous delegation to Vatican City [earlier this year](#).

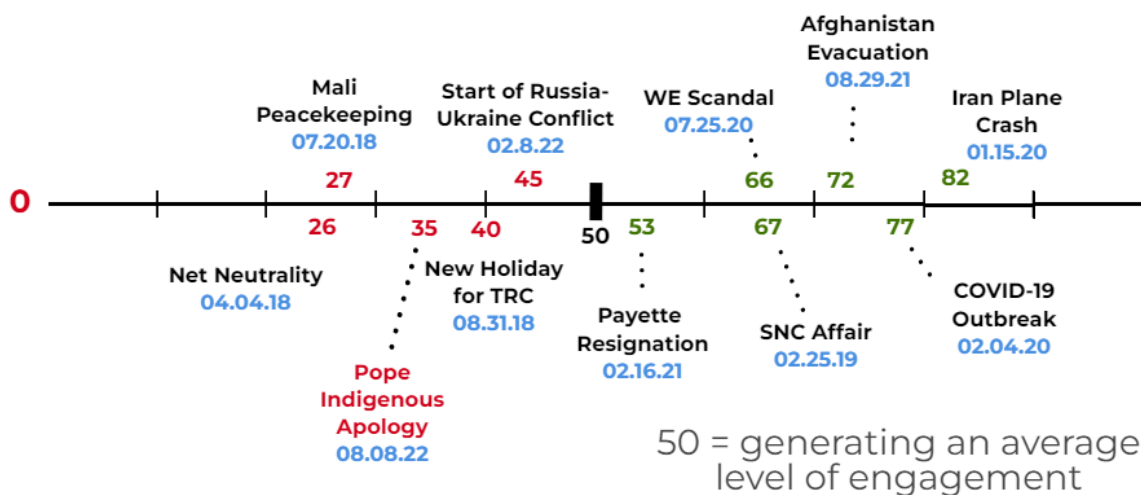
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Attention meagre for pope's visit

While Pope Francis' trip spanned two provinces and one territory – [the first papal visit to Canada in 20 years](#) – attention across the country to his summer visit was relatively low compared to other recent news events. Just six per cent of Canadians say they followed the trip closely and the overall score on the Angus Reid Institute's Engagement Index is well below average:

Scores on Angus Reid Institute Engagement Index



Apology viewed as sincere by those who followed

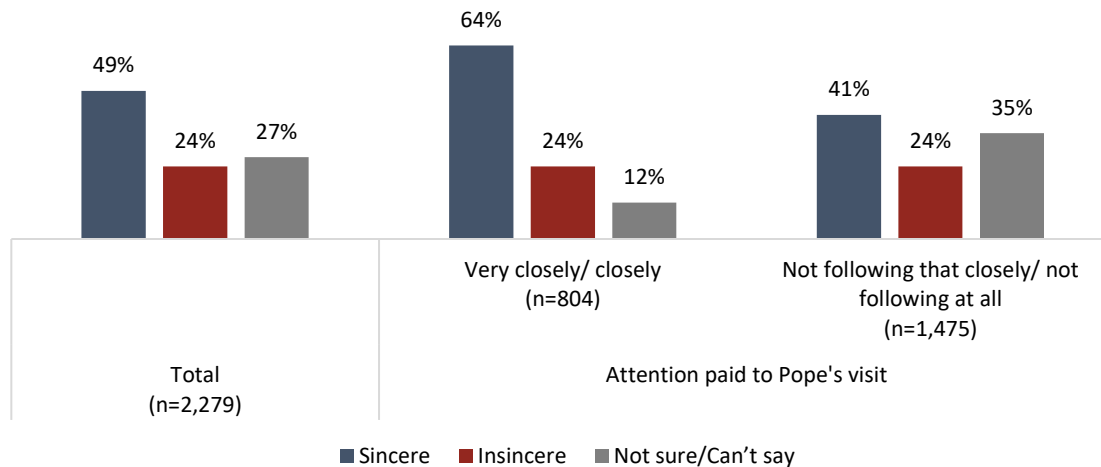
For some, such as [former Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine](#), the apology represented a step forward towards healing and forgiveness of the Catholic Church. [For others](#), it reopened a wound that has yet to be healed, highlighting the need for more concrete action towards remedying the harms of the past.

Half (49%) of Canadians believe the apology was sincere. However, those who were more closely following news of the pope's cross-country visit are much more likely (64%) to believe the apology came from the heart:

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Based on what you know have read, seen, or heard, would you say his apology was...?



Majority see visit and apology as a productive step toward reconciliation

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples National Chief Elmer St. Pierre called the apology “[a significant first step towards reconciliation](#).” Still others believe that there is [much more work to be done](#), including the [release of documents related to residential schools held in the Vatican](#).

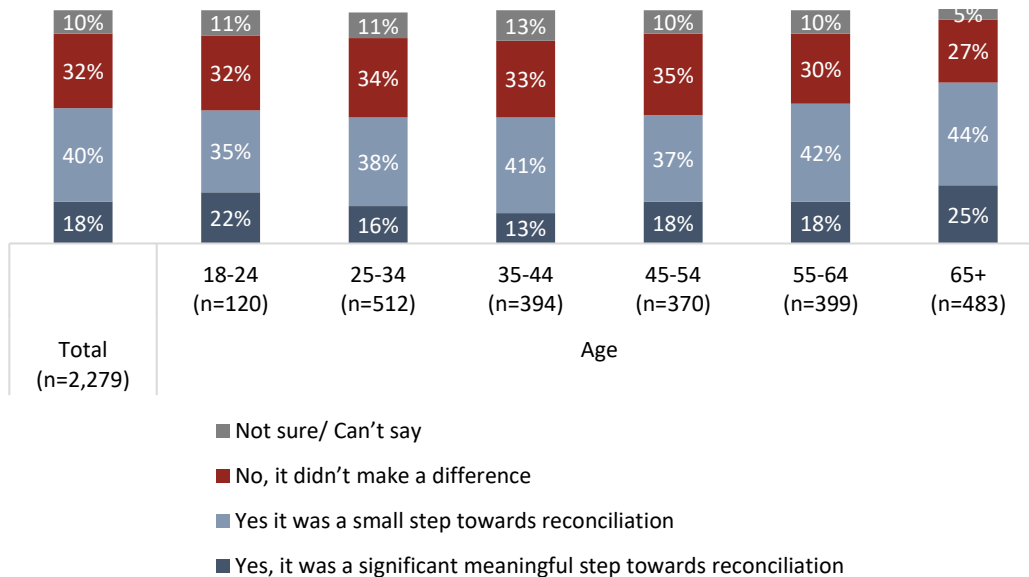
One-in-five (18%) agree with St. Pierre and say the apology was a significant step towards reconciliation. Twice as many (40%) say it was a small step. One-third (32%) feel the apology achieved nothing in regards to reconciliation.

Canadians over the age of 64 are more likely to say it represented progress towards reconciliation; seven-in-ten (68%) say so:

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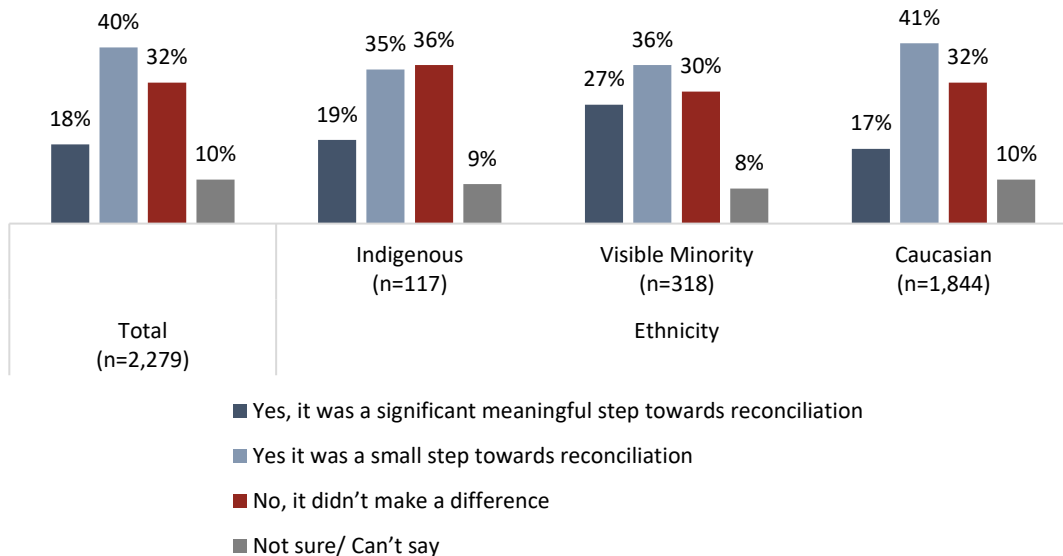
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Do you think Pope Francis' apology is a meaningful step towards reconciliation or not?



Canadians who identify as Indigenous are less likely than those who don't identify as such to believe the pope's apology was a step towards reconciliation. In fact, as many in that group say it didn't make a difference (36%) as would call it slight progress (35%):

Do you think Pope Francis' apology is a meaningful step towards reconciliation or not?



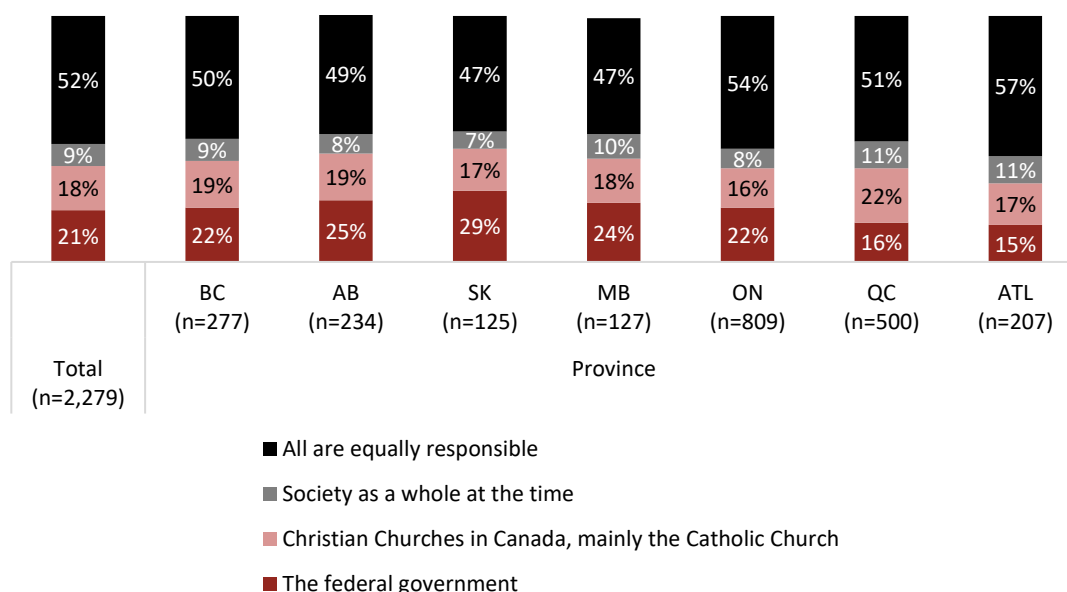
Part Two: Looking forward and back

Half say all parties to blame for residential schools

The Catholic Church played a significant role in residential schools – running the majority of them – but there were many other Canadian institutions and individuals involved in the more than 160-year long tragedy.

Half (52%) of Canadians say the federal government, Christian churches and society as a whole at the time share equal responsibility for residential schools. One-in-five (21%) level most of the blame at the federal government for creating and enforcing attendance at the schools. The same proportion (18%) say the Christian churches should be blamed the most for operating the schools. One-in-ten (9%) blame society as a whole at the time the most for accepting the residential school system:

Thinking about this, which of the following do you think was MOST responsible:



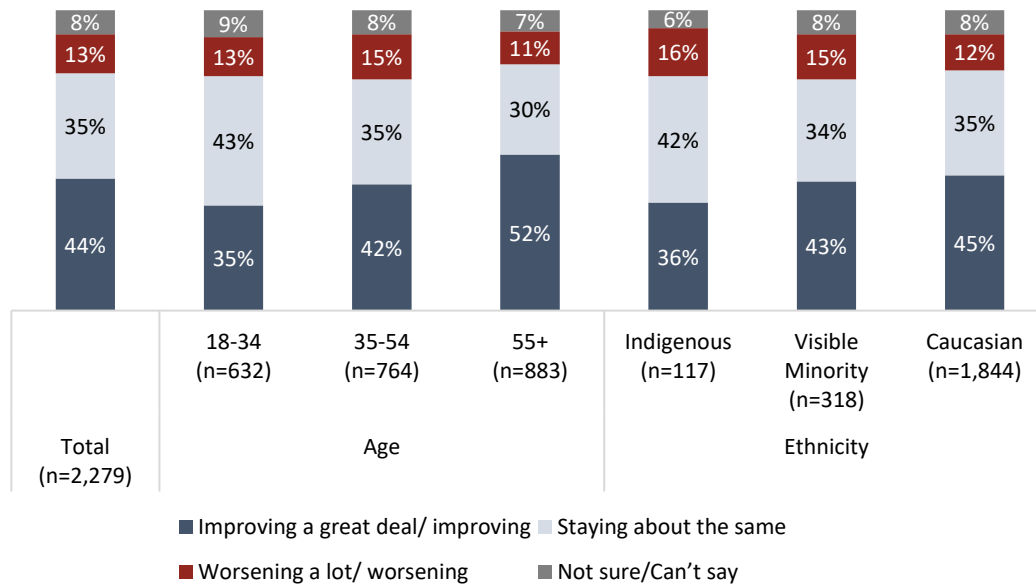
Relationship between Canada and Indigenous people seen as improving

Respondents were first asked, before any other questions regarding the pope's visit, about their own perceptions of the current relationship between the country and Indigenous peoples. Overall, the trend is seen as more positive than negative. More than two-in-five (44%) Canadians say the relationship is improving, while 13 per cent feel the situation has worsened. One-in-three (35%) say that there has been little progress or regress. There are, however, considerable differences in optimism generationally, with older Canadians more positive. Additionally, non-Indigenous respondents are also more positive:

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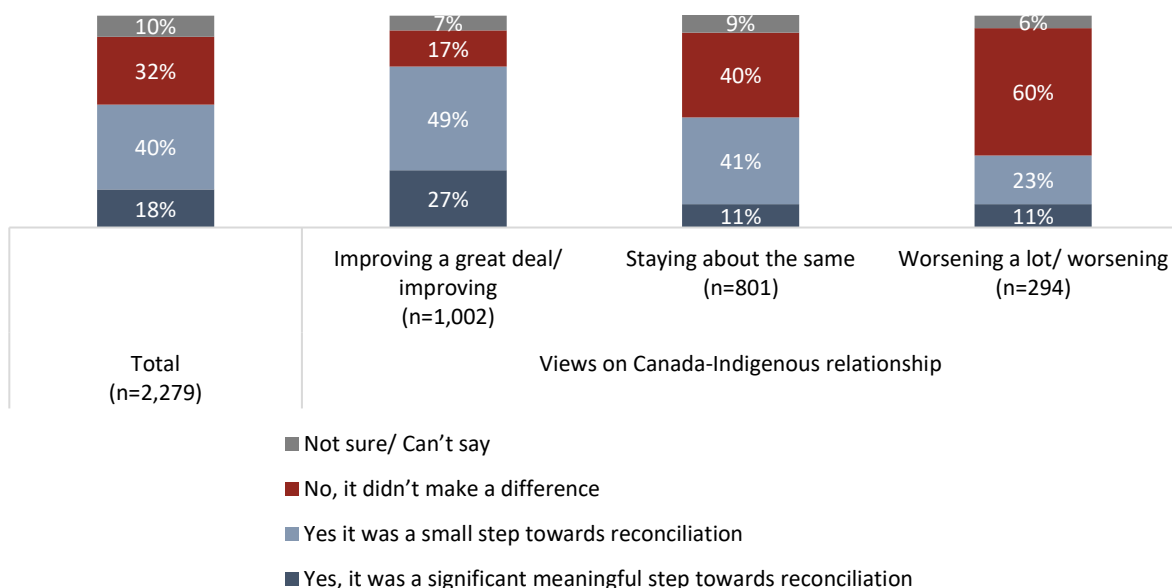
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In your opinion, what best describes the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples in Canada?



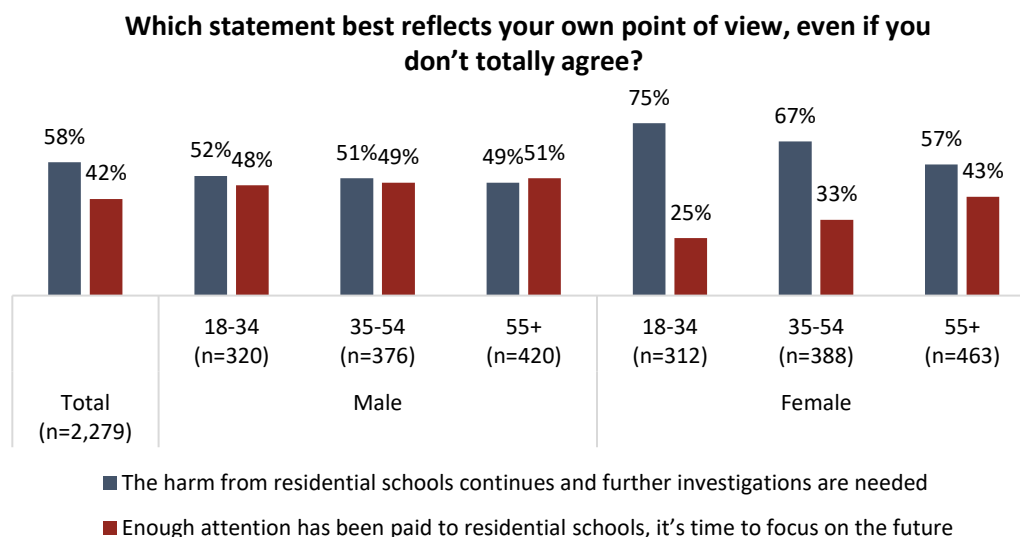
This optimism or pessimism about this relationship colours views of Pope Francis' apology. Those who feel the situation is improving are much more likely to say that this is a positive step toward reconciliation, while those who perceive stagnation or a worsening of the relationship are much less likely to agree:

Do you think Pope Francis' apology is a meaningful step towards reconciliation or not?



Division over how to move forward

Canadians are more likely to believe there needs to be more investigations into residential schools before the country can move forward (58%) than not (42%), but there is a significant generational and gender divide on this matter. Women, and younger ones especially, are much more likely to believe more work is needed. Men are more likely to say enough attention has been paid to residential schools and that it's time to move forward:



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

For detailed results by how closely respondents were following the visit and their views on Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples, [click here](#).

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