

Canada and the Culture Wars: Most point to some progress reducing racism, but far fewer call it 'significant'

Two-in-five Canadians say they face discrimination based on their ethnicity or race

September 27, 2023 – Is Canada a racist country? A country accepting of many cultures and languages? A country that embraces difference?

As with so many issues among confronting the Canadian population in 2023, answers to these questions depend on who is asked.

The latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute – the third in a series of reports on [Canada and the Culture Wars](#) – find that while the vast majority are of the view the country has made at least some progress reducing racism over the last few generations (73%) – only a minority (28%) describe that progress as “significant”.

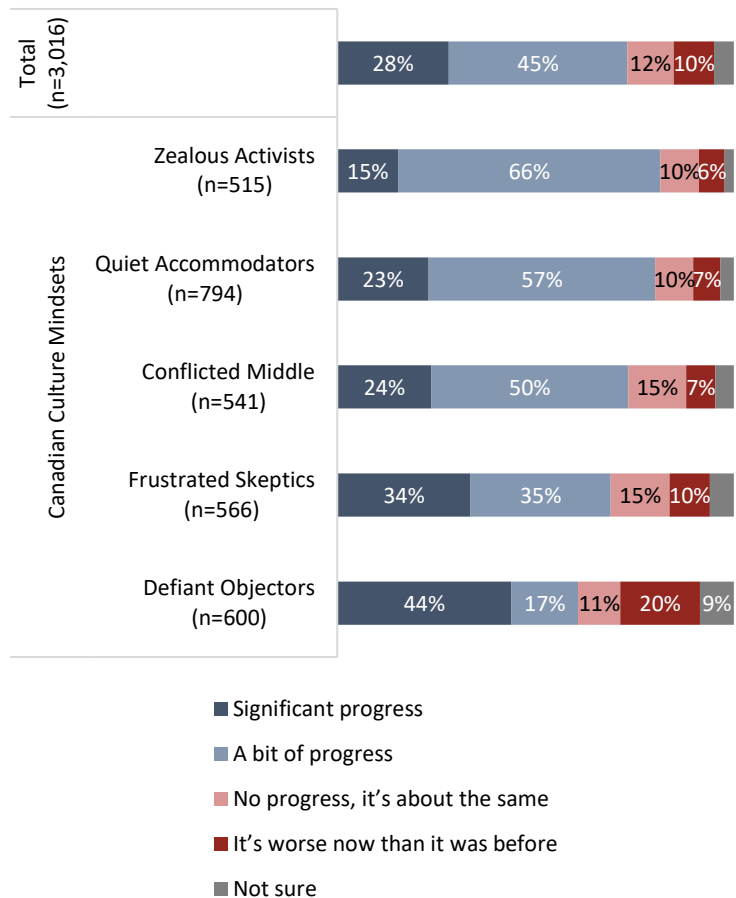
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Indeed, one-in-five (22%) are of the view that the country is going backwards – and that racial discrimination is worse than it was generations ago. This includes a higher proportion of self-identifying Indigenous (30%) and visible minority (28%) respondents, compared to Canadians who don't identify this way (19%).

Two-in-five Canadians (38%) say they face discrimination in Canada at least sometimes (28%) if not often (10%).

These proportions rise to 50 per cent among Indigenous respondents, and 78 per cent among visible minorities, with Caucasians less likely to say they've had this experience. There is, however, one exception.

Thinking about the past few generations, do you think we have made progress in reducing racism in Canada?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from July 26-31, 2023, among a representative randomized sample of 3,016 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. Another 322 Canadians who do not identify as male or female and who are also members of the Forum were also surveyed as a population booster. 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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Those found in the Defiant Objector group on ARI's Canadian Cultural Mindset spectrum, a group that is 78 per cent Caucasian (the highest level among all five groups), are much more likely than all other groups to say they face discrimination because of their race or ethnicity. Half (50%) say this, while no other group exceeds 36 per cent. This comes as residents in the Lower Mainland have voiced outrage over posters advertising "whites-only" groups for children. Organizers stated that the group is for children who are "tired of being a minority" in the places they live. Similar sentiments are evident within the Defiant Objector population. This group is also twice as likely as the rest of the population to say that being Black, female, or Indigenous are sources of privilege, while they're one-quarter as likely to say the same of being white.

Overall, half of Canadians (51%) say that being white is a source of privilege in Canada. Perhaps, for this reason, many are supportive of Employment Equity programs designed to increase representation among those they're less likely to see as having an inherent advantage. This includes majority support for assisting visible minorities (55%), Indigenous people (56%), women (59%), and those who have a disability (61%). Three-in-10 (30%) say nobody should receive this type of assistance.

More Key Findings:

- Appropriation is a source of contention in Canada. For example, two-in-five (42%) say it is unacceptable to wear a Halloween costume that represents another race or ethnicity from one's own. That said, 78 per cent say this among the Zealous Activists, dropping to just 14 per cent among Defiant Objectors.
- Those who self-identify as visible minorities in Canada were asked what they prefer to be referred to as. Two-in-five say visible minority is fine (38%), 16 per cent say a hyphenated option, like "Chinese-Canadian", while just six per cent prefer the broad terms BIPOC or racialized person. One-in-three say (35%) they don't like any of this terminology.
- A majority of all five groups on the Canadian Cultural Mindset spectrum feel that Canada has made progress in reducing racism in recent decades.

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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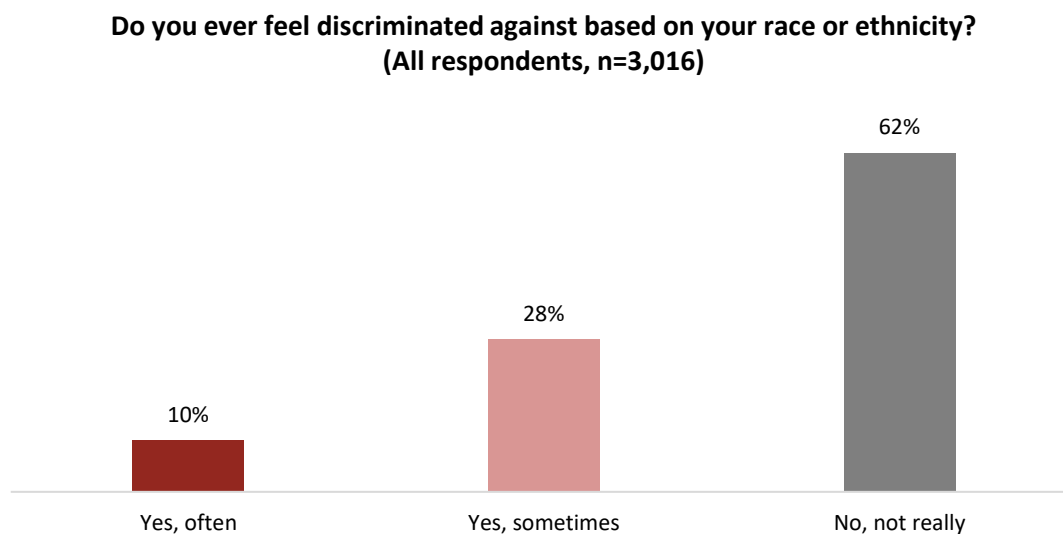
Part One: Experiences and perceptions of racism

Who faces discrimination

In a multicultural country like Canada, concerns over racial discrimination remain ever-present in the national discourse. In recent years the Angus Reid Institute has studied this in the form of [Islamophobia](#), [anti-Asian racism](#), and challenges faced by [Indigenous Peoples](#) living in Canada.

Related: ARI work on discrimination in Canada

Broadly, two-in-five Canadians say they face discrimination in their day-to-day lives at least sometimes based on their race or ethnicity, with one-in-ten (10%) saying this happens to them often:

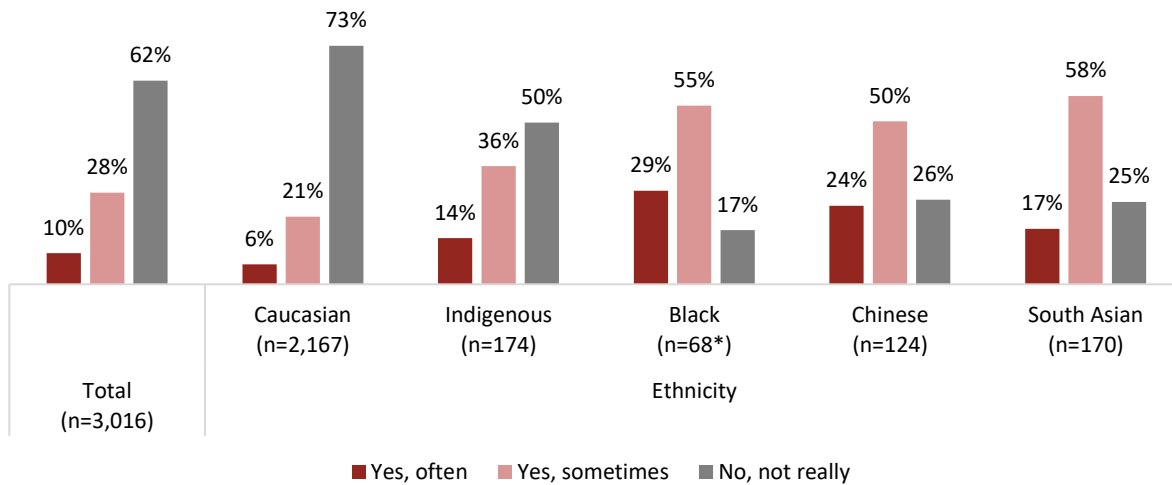


Regular experiences of discrimination are much more common among those who identify as a visible minority in Canada (73%, [see detailed tables](#)) and those who self-identify as Indigenous (50%). Nearly one-in-three Black respondents say they often face discrimination:

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Do you ever feel discriminated against based on your race or ethnicity?



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Note on methodology:

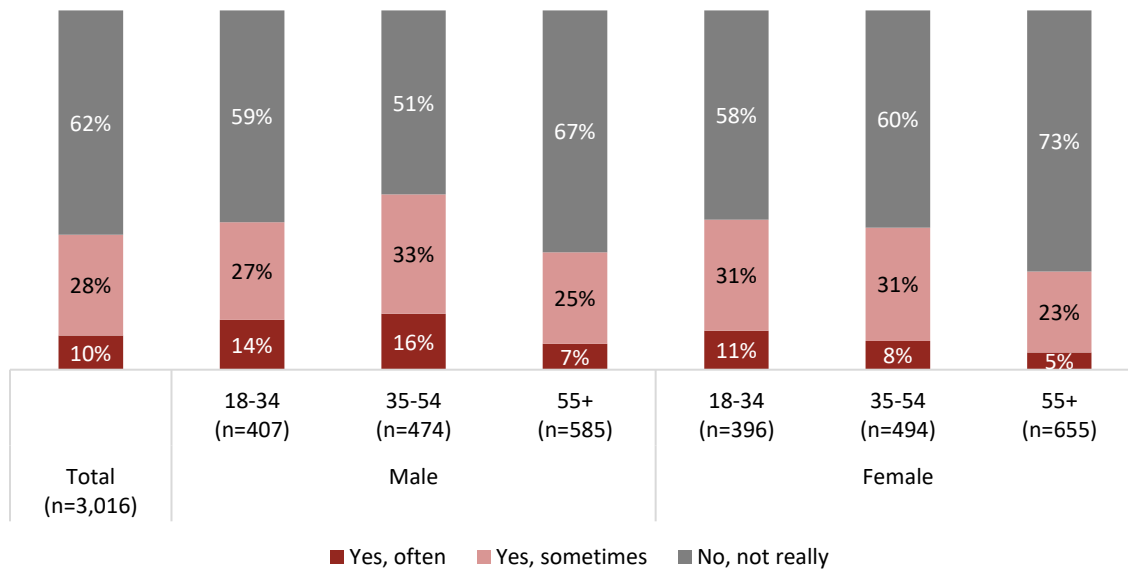
*Please note, while the views of self-described Indigenous people are reported here to provide valuable context, it should be noted that this sample is not necessarily representative of the Indigenous population of Canada as a whole. The [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has identified systemic discrimination](#) as a significant problem in Canada.

There is an exception with the non-visible minority group. Scanning the Canadian Cultural Mindsets, it is evident that the Defiant Objectors – a group that is 78 per cent white – are much more likely to say that they face discrimination based on their race or ethnicity compared to other groups ([see detailed tables](#)). This is likely due to their increased likelihood of being men between the ages of 35 and 54, as well as either past Conservative or PPC voters. Each of these are correlated with increased levels of feeling persecuted, as seen in the graphs below:

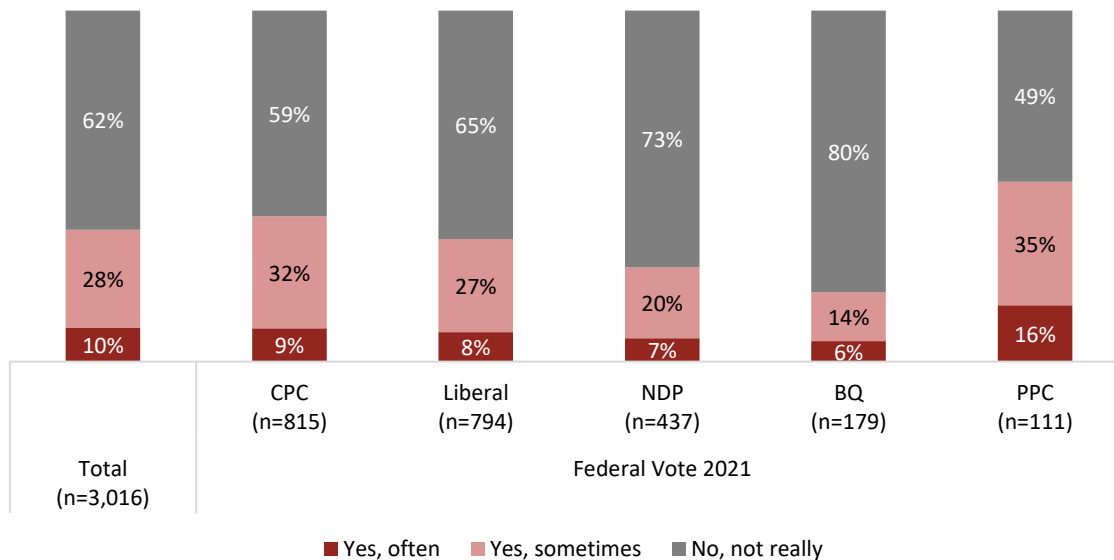
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Have we made progress?

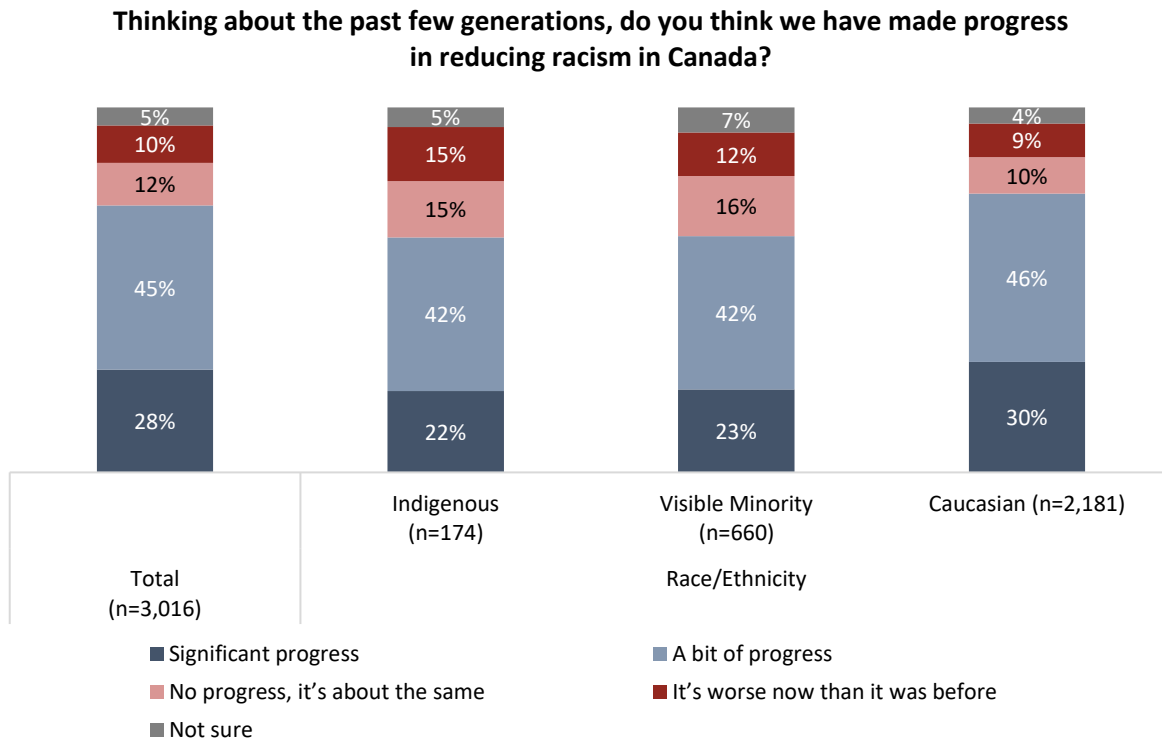
There was an uproar this week when a poster advertising a “Whites-only Moms and Tots” group in Port Coquitlam, B.C. went viral on social media. The city denounced the posters as “vile garbage” and bylaw officers were instructed to search for them and remove them. While anti-racist advocates were

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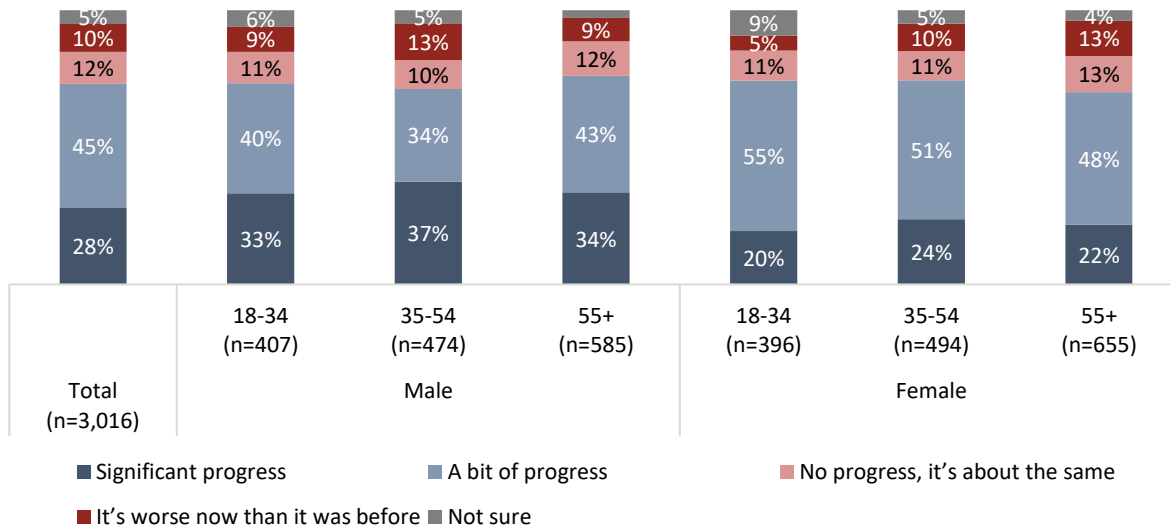
encouraged by the backlash to the posters, they provide evidence there are still incidents of racism and discrimination in Canada.

Canadians are largely optimistic about the progress that the country has made at reducing racism in recent generations. Three-in-ten (28%) overall, including close to one-quarter of Indigenous (22%) and visible minority (23%) respondents, say that Canada has made significant progress, while the largest group across all demographics say that this progress is being made, but is slighter:



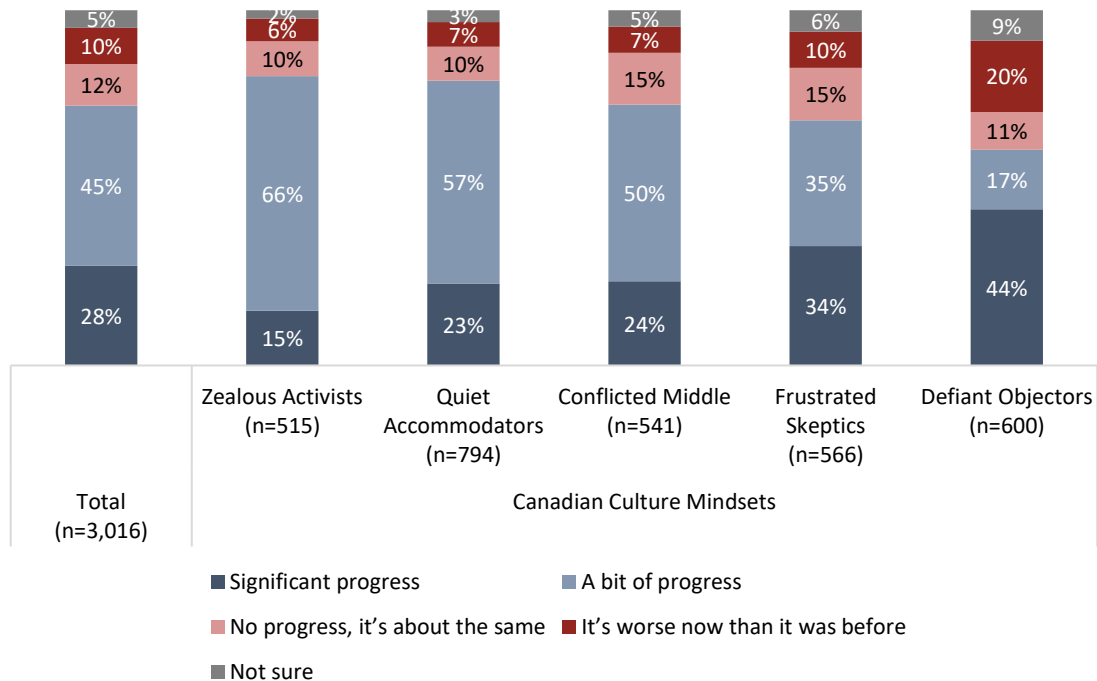
This sense of progress is not equally distributed. Men are much more likely than women in all age groups to say that significant progress has been made, while women are more reserved in their assessment:

Thinking about the past few generations, do you think we have made progress in reducing racism in Canada?



All groups on the Canadian Cultural Mindsets spectrum tend to agree that progress has been made, but Zealous Activists and Quiet Accommodators are more muted in this feeling. Defiant Objectors hold a unique space as the most likely to say that things are both much better and much worse:

Thinking about the past few generations, do you think we have made progress in reducing racism in Canada?



Part Two: Privilege and priority

In recent years there has been a brighter spotlight put on Canada's institutions and societal structures as awareness in the country has grown of systemic racism and privilege.

Is being a white an advantage?

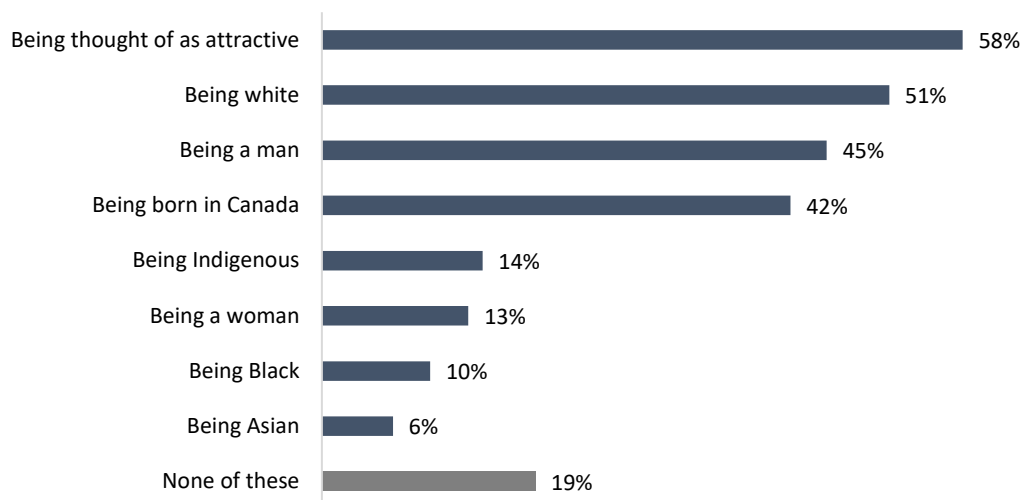
In 1988, American women's studies scholar Peggy McIntosh wrote a paper titled "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," a launch point in the modern conversation of privilege. Her paper detailed 46 examples of where she gained an advantage in society by being white, including "I am never asked to speak for all people of my racial group" and "I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives."

More than three decades later, the concept is still much debated. Half (51%) of Canadians feel being white is a source of privilege, but there are more that believe it is an advantage to be attractive (58%). Two-in-five say being a man (45%) and being born in Canada (42%) gives you a leg-up in this country:

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Do you think any of the following are sources of “privilege”?
(All respondents, n=3,016)



Three-in-five (59%) who identify as a visible minority feel being white is a source of privilege in Canada, a higher proportion than those who don't identify this way (49%).

Do you think any of the following are sources of “privilege”?				
	Total (n=3,016)	Race/Ethnicity		
		Indigenous (n=174)	Visible Minority (n=660)	Caucasian (n=2,181)
Being thought of as attractive	58%	53%	57%	58%
Being white	51%	45%	59%	49%
Being a man	45%	41%	49%	45%
Being born in Canada	42%	42%	45%	41%
Being Indigenous	14%	14%	14%	15%
Being a woman	13%	13%	16%	12%
Being Black	10%	12%	12%	9%
Being Asian	6%	8%	9%	6%
None of these	19%	20%	13%	21%

As western societies have explored and analyzed their institutions, processes and policies for systemic racism, a counter movement has developed which argues that movements such as [affirmative action in the United States](#) or [employment equity in Canada](#) are reverse racism against white people. This concept is perhaps evident in the views of the Defiant Objectors, who are more likely to say being Indigenous (31%) or Black (22%) is a privilege than being white (12%). They are also twice as likely to say women are privileged in society (23%) as to say men (11%):

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Do you think any of the following are sources of “privilege”?						
	Total (n=3,016)	Canadian Culture Mindsets				
		Zealous Activists (n=515)	Quiet Accommodators (n=794)	Conflicted Middle (n=541)	Frustrated Skeptics (n=566)	Defiant Objectors (n=600)
Being thought of as attractive	58%	78%	63%	53%	52%	42%
Being white	51%	91%	68%	49%	36%	12%
Being a man	45%	85%	59%	39%	34%	11%
Being born in Canada	42%	67%	50%	40%	35%	19%
Being Indigenous	14%	2%	8%	14%	17%	31%
Being a woman	13%	4%	8%	13%	17%	23%
Being Black	10%	1%	4%	11%	11%	22%
Being Asian	6%	4%	5%	6%	7%	11%
None of these	19%	4%	12%	21%	23%	36%

Employment equity

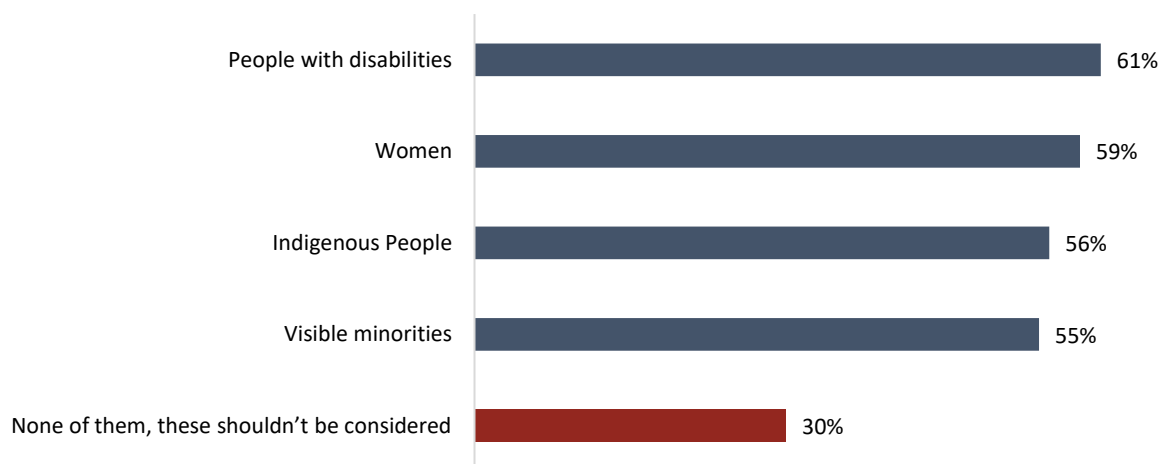
Canada’s Employee Equity Act, first passed in 1986, requires federally regulated employers – such as banks, airlines, railroads, and crown corporations – to actively attempt to increase representation among Indigenous People, women, people with disabilities and visible minorities.

Majorities say the groups designated in the act deserve special consideration when it comes to employment:

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**Employment Equity in Canada - should the following groups receive priority for hiring for new jobs?
(All respondents, n=3,016)**



Support for Employment Equity is higher among women compared to men by a significant margin. This is most true when comparing women's views with those of men between the ages of 35 and 54:

Employment Equity in Canada - should the following groups receive priority for hiring for new jobs?							
	Total (n=3,016)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=407)	35-54 (n=474)	55+ (n=585)	18-34 (n=396)	35-54 (n=494)	55+ (n=655)
People with disabilities	61%	56%	44%	57%	73%	68%	70%
Women	59%	48%	38%	51%	75%	70%	70%
Indigenous People	56%	49%	41%	47%	71%	64%	64%
Visible minorities	55%	49%	39%	48%	71%	63%	63%
None of them, these shouldn't be considered	30%	35%	48%	38%	14%	22%	24%

Part Three: Modern identities and appropriation

The Employment Equity Act also provides the definition of a visible minority in Canada. The act defines visible minorities as those who are non-Indigenous, “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. The term itself is in the process of being re-evaluated, as previously “visible minorities” become majority populations in some Canadian jurisdictions. Some feel it is too generalizing as it homogenizes disparate racial experiences into one sub-category.

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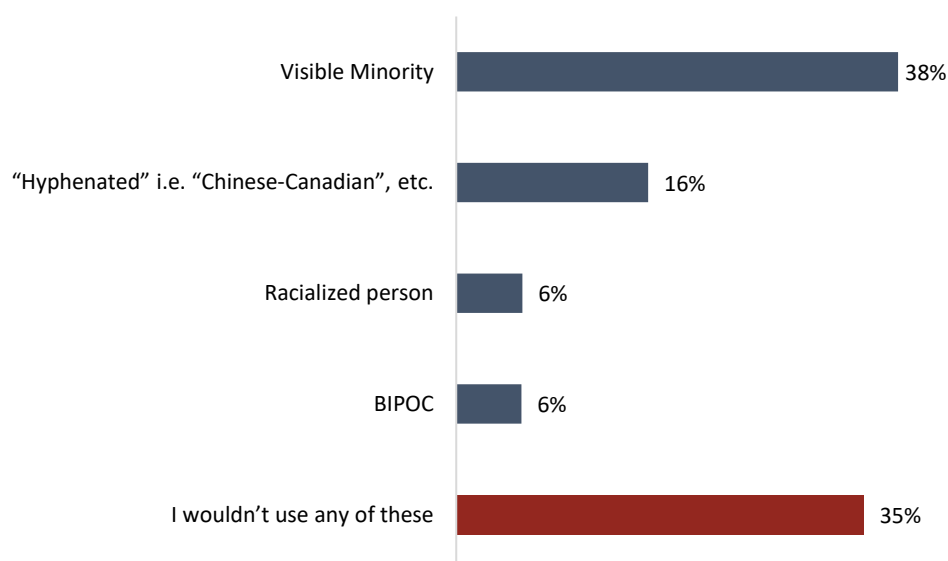
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What would visible minorities prefer to be called?

Though two-in-five (38%) who identify as a visible minority say that is their preferred term, more would choose something else. One-in-six (16%) say they prefer to be identified with a hyphen, i.e. Chinese-Canadian. Emerging terms such as “racialized person” and BIPOC (i.e. Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) are selected by one-in-20 each. More than one-third (35%) eschew these common terms.

The Angus Reid Institute mirrors Statistics Canada’s use of the term visible minority, as census data is used to weight samples to reflect the Canadian population.

Which of the following terms would you use to describe yourself to others when talking about your own demography/ background? (Visible minority, n=660)



Views on cultural appropriation

A CBC documentary [titled “The Pretendians”](#) found that while Indigenous art has become a valuable market in Canada, many of pieces sold as Indigenous art are made by non-Indigenous artists. One study found 75 per cent of the art in tourist shops in Vancouver’s Gastown neighbourhood appeared to be inauthentic.

This is just one example of “cultural appropriation”, [broadly defined](#) as when a cultural group, usually white or Western, takes practices, dress, art or food from another cultural group, usually non-Western or non-white, typically in an exploitive fashion. Cultural appropriation has been discussed in academia as far back as the [the 1980s](#) but has become a more colloquial term in recent years as Western countries [reckon with structural racism, historic discrimination and past colonialism](#).

There are many areas where some argue [that cultural appropriation does not exist](#), saying that throughout human history, cultures have borrowed and exchanged concepts and practices. However, others point out that the groups typically having their culture mimicked or borrowed were historically

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discriminated against for those same cultural practices and markers, which makes uses by members outside of those historical cultures feel like “a slap in the face.”

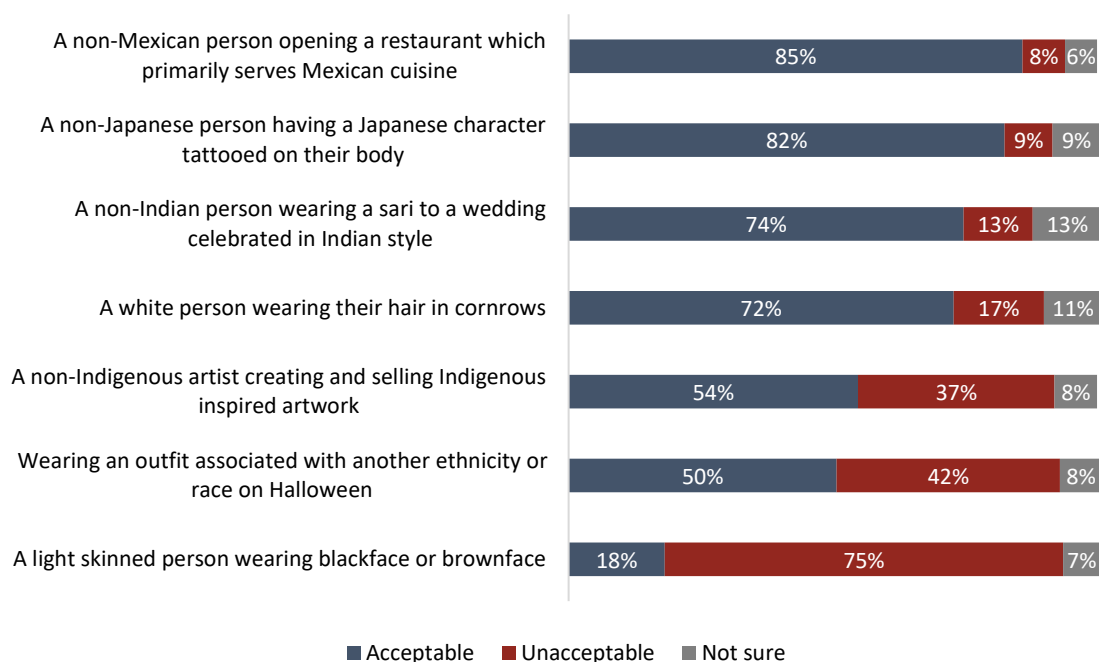
Respondents were offered a series of examples which could be viewed as cultural appropriation and then asked if they found them acceptable or not. Majorities of Canadians believe it is acceptable to sell the cuisine of another culture that isn’t your own (85%), be tattooed in foreign languages as a non-native speaker (82%), wear a sari as a non-Indian to an Indian wedding (74%), and for white people to wear their hair in cornrows (72%).

There is more disagreement over concepts such as non-Indigenous people profiting from Indigenous art (54% say acceptable) and wearing a cultural outfit on Halloween (50%), but still at least half of Canadians find these to be acceptable.

Blackface and brownface is widely viewed (75%) as unacceptable by Canadians. This comes after a cultural reckoning in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, when streaming services removed scenes or whole episodes of sitcoms such as Golden Girls, The Office, 30 Rock, and Scrubs due to characters appearing in blackface.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized in 2019 after videos and photos emerged of him wearing blackface and brownface prior to his career in politics, who said he “didn’t think it was racist at the time, but now I see it was a racist thing to do.”

**For each of the following, tell us whether you personally feel each is acceptable or unacceptable?
(All respondents, n=3,016)**



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Those who identify as Indigenous or visible minority offer different views on the examples. Indigenous people are more likely (45%) than those who don't identify that way to believe it is unacceptable for non-Indigenous artists to profit from Indigenous-inspired artwork though half (49%) disagree.

More who identify as visible minorities (20%) say it is unacceptable for white people to wear their hair in cornrows than those who don't describe themselves that way (16%).

However, it is Canadians who don't identify as visible minorities who are most likely to view blackface and brownface unacceptable (77%):

Percentage who say the following are totally or mostly <u>unacceptable</u>				
	Total (n=3,016)	Race/Ethnicity		
		Indigenous (n=174)	Visible Minority (n=660)	Caucasian (n=2,181)
A light skinned person wearing blackface or brownface	75%	68%	70%	77%
Wearing an outfit associated with another ethnicity or race on Halloween	42%	46%	44%	41%
A non-Indigenous artist creating and selling Indigenous inspired artwork	37%	45%	38%	37%
A white person wearing their hair in cornrows	17%	14%	20%	16%
A non-Indian person wearing a sari to a wedding celebrated in Indian style	13%	17%	12%	13%
A non-Japanese person having a Japanese character tattooed on their body	9%	10%	12%	8%
A non-Mexican person opening a restaurant which primarily serves Mexican cuisine	8%	12%	12%	7%

For nearly all the examples, Zealous Activists are the most likely Canadian Culture Mindset to believe they are unacceptable. They are the only group who believe a non-Indigenous artist profiting from Indigenous-inspired art is unacceptable at a majority level. Zealous Activists are also the only group who find themselves divided over whether a white person wearing cornrows is acceptable. And though majorities disagree, they are more than four times as likely to feel it is inappropriate for non-Mexican people to open Mexican restaurants (20%) and non-Japanese people to have Japanese characters tattooed on their body (21%) as Defiant Objectors (3% and 5% respectively):

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A light skinned person wearing blackface or brownface	75%	92%	77%	72%	70%	65%
Wearing an outfit associated with another ethnicity or race on Halloween	42%	78%	52%	40%	28%	14%
A non-Indigenous artist creating and selling Indigenous inspired artwork	37%	73%	42%	35%	27%	14%
A white person wearing their hair in cornrows	17%	44%	16%	12%	10%	6%
A non-Indian person wearing a sari to a wedding celebrated in Indian style	13%	15%	12%	16%	13%	9%
A non-Japanese person having a Japanese character tattooed on their body	9%	21%	10%	7%	5%	5%
A non-Mexican person opening a restaurant which primarily serves Mexican cuisine	8%	20%	8%	7%	6%	3%

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

For detailed results by Canadian Culture Mindsets, [click here](#).

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