

MOWAT RESEARCH #162 | MARCH 2018



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Portraits 2017

# Immigration & Diversity

BY ANDREW PARKIN

## Mowat Centre

ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY



School of Public Policy & Governance  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

# Acknowledgements

The Mowat Centre would like to thank a number of colleagues who provided advice on the methodology and the questionnaire, including Heather Marshall and Lucas Marshall (Mission Research), Keith Neuman (Environics Institute), Alain-G. Gagnon (Université du Québec à Montréal), Bob Wolfe (School of Policy Studies, Queen's University), Claire Durand (Université de Montréal), and Peter Loewen (School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto). We also thank Kiran Alwani for her research support, and Elaine Stam and Reuven Shlozberg for their roles in producing the report. Finally, we would also like to thank the report's anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

## Author

### ANDREW PARKIN

#### DIRECTOR

Andrew Parkin is the Director of the Mowat Centre. Andrew has previously held a variety of positions including Director General of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC), Associate Executive Director and Director of Research and Program Development at the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, and Co-Director of the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.



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The *Portraits 2017* survey was conducted with support from Alain-G. Gagnon, holder of the Canada Research Chair in Quebec and Canadian Studies and director at the Centre d'analyse politique: Constitution et Fédéralisme, based at UQAM.

## Portraits 2017

The Portraits 2017 series analyzes survey data from a comprehensive study of public opinion in Ontario and Quebec. The survey focused on a wide range of subjects, including federalism, the economy, social programs, international trade, immigration and diversity, and relations with Indigenous peoples. The data provides valuable new evidence about whether and how citizens' attitudes towards one another, to the federation and to Canada are evolving at a time of considerable change and uncertainty in the wider global political context.

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439 UNIVERSITY AVENUE  
SUITE 2200, TORONTO, ON  
M5G 1Y8 CANADA




School of Public Policy & Governance  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

©2018 ISBN 978-1-77259-062-3

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**It cannot be taken  
for granted that our  
society is becoming  
more and more open  
and tolerant over  
time, particularly  
when underlying  
economic conditions  
cause a number of  
citizens to feel less  
optimistic about  
their own future.**

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In its autumn 2016 cover story titled “Liberty Moves North,” *The Economist* highlighted how Canada appears to be bucking a number of alarming global trends. “In this depressing company of wall-builders, door-slamers and drawbridge-raisers,” the magazine argued, “Canada stands out as a heartening exception.”<sup>1</sup>

There are grounds to question whether this claim to exceptionalism is over-stated. A number of recent public opinion survey findings have suggested that Canadians are not quite as tolerant as the country’s official tag-line of “diversity is our strength” might suggest. Recent headlines from media coverage of these surveys include phrases such as “Canadians aren’t as accepting as we think”, “Canada is not immune to anti-immigration movements”, “Canadians divided when it comes to immigration” and “Canada’s immigration attitudes hardening.”<sup>2</sup>


Several specific incidents are equally alarming – most notably the shooting of worshippers at a Quebec City Mosque in early 2017. More generally, in recent years ethnic and religious minorities in Canada have spoken of an increase in hate-inspired incidents or, at the very least, an increased sense of apprehension on their part – suggesting that Canadians should not be so quick to assume that their society is so much more accepting of difference than others.<sup>3</sup>

This latest in the series of reports from the Mowat Centre’s *Portraits 2017* survey examines trends in attitudes relating to immigration and ethnic, racial and religious diversity. It does so by comparing the results of the November 2017 survey of 2,000 Ontarians with those from surveys conducted in the early 2000s. While the findings on the whole are largely reassuring, several specific trends

1 “Liberty Moves North: Canada’s Example to the World,” *The Economist* (October 29, 2016); <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21709305-it-uniquely-fortunate-many-ways-but-canada-still-holds-lessons-other-western>.

2 Angus Reid, “Canadians Aren’t as Accepting as We Think — and We Can’t Ignore It, Writes Angus Reid,” CBC News (October 4, 2016); [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/angus-reid-poll-canadian-values-immigration-1.3789223](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/angus-reid-poll-canadian-values-immigration-1.3789223); Sean Willet, “U of T Research Shows Canada Is Not Immune to Anti-immigration Movements,” *U of T News* (February 8, 2017) <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/u-t-research-shows-canada-not-immune-anti-immigration-movements>; Kamila Hinkson and Kalina Laframboise, “Canadians Divided When it Comes to Immigration, Poll Suggests,” CBC News (March 13, 2017); <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/canadian-immigration-poll-quebec-1.4022664>; The Canadian Press, “Canadians’ Attitudes Toward Immigration Hardening, Government Poll Shows,” *The Globe and Mail* (November 7, 2017); <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/canadians-immigration-attitudes-hardening-government-poll-suggests/article36864037/>.

3 See, for instance: Rachel Lau, “Hate Crimes Spike in Montreal After Quebec City Mosque Shooting,” *Global News* (January 31, 2017); <https://globalnews.ca/news/3216639/hate-crimes-spike-in-montreal-after-quebec-city-mosque-shooting/>; Saada Branker, “Minority Groups Are Seeing One of Their Greatest Fears Come True — They’re Becoming Targets at Home,” *CBC News* (Dec 21, 2016); <http://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/minority-targets-in-canada-1.3905882>.



suggest that it cannot be taken for granted that our society is becoming more and more open and tolerant over time, particularly when underlying economic conditions cause a number of citizens to feel less optimistic about their own future.

*This latest in the series of reports from the Mowat Centre's Portraits 2017 survey examines trends in attitudes relating to immigration and ethnic, racial and religious diversity. It does so by comparing the results of the November 2017 survey of 2,000 Ontarians with those from surveys conducted in the early 2000s.*

# 2

## CONTEXT: ONTARIO'S GROWING DIVERSITY

Ontario as a society is remarkably diverse, home to citizens who trace their origins to hundreds of different ethnic groups. The 2016 Census paints a vivid portrait: 29 per cent of Ontarians were born outside of Canada, and a similar proportion identify as a member of a visible minority. In Toronto, visible minorities now in fact form the majority, representing 51 per cent of the population.

The province's religious diversity is growing as well. In 2011, nine per cent of Ontarians identified as Muslim, Hindu or Sikh (the proportion in the Toronto metropolitan area was 16 per cent).<sup>4</sup>

No less remarkable than this demographic change has been the growing acceptance and indeed embrace of diversity, as measured by studies of public opinion. The landmark *New Canada* survey, conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC) in 2003, concluded that "in the first decade of the 21st century, tolerance is no longer a dream or a policy; it is a fait accompli for a rising generation that has never known a Canada that did not celebrate multiculturalism." The authors argued that "the comfort level with diversity is growing" and that "multiculturalism has become a source of pride for most Canadians... Rather than undermining Canadians' sense of identity, immigration and multiculturalism are solidifying it."<sup>5</sup>

The *New Canada* survey, however, is now more than 15 years old. It would be unwise to assume that public attitudes have remained unchanged or are inexorably evolving to become more and more tolerant with the passing of time. Events over the last decade – ranging from a deep economic recession, to the widening of conflict in the Middle East, to the emergence of a more overtly nativist political discourse in countries close to Canada, notably the United States and the United Kingdom – can be expected to have had an impact on public opinion in Canada, one way or another. In this context, it is wise to take a fresh look at public attitudes towards immigration and diversity.

4 2011 National Household Survey: Data Tables — Religion.

5 Andrew Parkin and Matthew Mendelsohn, *A New Canada? An Identity Shaped by Diversity*, CRIC Paper #11 (Montreal: Centre for Research and Information on Canada, 2003), p. 18.

**29 per cent of Ontarians were born outside of Canada, and a similar proportion identify as a member of a visible minority. In Toronto, visible minorities now in fact form the majority, representing 51 per cent of the population.**



# 3 KEY FINDINGS

Most Ontarians are comfortable with current levels of immigration and with the province's growing diversity.

- » Three in five Ontarians say that the number of immigrants coming to Canada should either be kept the same as it is now, or should be increased.
- » Four in five Ontarians agree that young Canadians today are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions.
- » Seven in ten Ontarians say they feel either very or somewhat comfortable when they hear languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets of Canada.
- » Four in five Ontarians agree that every Canadian has a responsibility to make sure that people from different races and cultures feel welcome in this country.
- » A majority of Ontarians say they would feel comfortable if a close relative, like a son or a daughter, were to marry someone who is a member of a visible or religious minority group, such as someone who is Black, Indigenous, Jewish or Muslim.

Several other findings, however, suggest that Ontarians' continued support for immigration and diversity cannot be taken for granted.

First, opinions on certain questions relating to immigration are more divided than the examples cited above. For instance:

- » While 44 per cent of Ontarians agree that Canada ought to be accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world that are experiencing major conflicts, a similar proportion (50 per cent) disagree.
- » About one in two Ontarians agree that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees, whereas 45 per cent disagree or say they don't know.
- » Just over one in two Ontarians (56 per cent) agree that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society.

Second, there is some evidence that attitudes towards Muslims are not as open as are attitudes towards other minority groups. For instance, 43 per cent of Ontarians say they would feel uncomfortable if a close relative were to marry someone who is Muslim, compared for example with only 17 per cent in the case of a marriage to someone who is Black. And only a minority of Ontarians (38 per cent) agree that they wished they knew more about the religion of Islam.

These results should be interpreted with some caution, however, as it is not clear whether Ontarians are expressing discomfort with one particular religion (Islam) or with religiosity itself. It is notable, for instance, that Ontarians are even less comfortable with a close relative marrying someone who is a fundamentalist Christian than they are with a close relative marrying someone who is Muslim. The issue, therefore, may have more to do with the place of religion in an increasingly secular society.

A third notable finding is that attitudes towards diversity, while on balance remaining positive, appear to have become slightly less positive over time. There is a consistent pattern across many questions showing a decline in what could be characterized as more open or tolerant responses. For instance, the proportion of Ontarians agreeing that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society increased from 47 per cent in 2003 to 56 per cent in 2017. Similarly, the proportion agreeing that, to reduce the threat of terrorism, we should prohibit people from Islamic countries from immigrating to Canada rose from 15 per cent in 2004 to 34 per cent in 2017.

Caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the changes in the results between earlier surveys and *Portraits 2017*, in part because the way the survey was conducted has changed – from a telephone survey to a survey conducted over the Internet. Recent evidence suggests that this change in survey “mode” may be particularly important when dealing with issues of immigration and diversity, since respondents to earlier telephone surveys may have been more likely to provide what were perceived as socially desirable responses. This means that the changes in survey results noted above may

at least in part reflect the change in the way the survey was conducted.<sup>6</sup>

While the survey shows some dampening in support for diversity over time, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that there is a growing polarization within Ontario society along ethnic lines. The evolution in attitudes we have charted is more likely related to changes in feelings of economic security, with changes in the economy over the past decade serving to somewhat dampen Ontarians’ comfort with immigration and diversity.

For instance, on the question of immigration levels, there is indeed a difference between the views of immigrants (with 31 per cent saying that Canada should accept fewer immigrants than it does now) and those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents (41 per cent of whom say that Canada should accept fewer immigrants). This 10-point difference, however, is overshadowed by the 41-point difference based on views about the shape of the national economy: among those who see an improvement in the economy, 20 per cent say immigration should be reduced; among those who see the economy worsening, the figure is 61 per cent.

This pattern is consistent across a number of questions relating to immigration and diversity. To the extent that there is a cleavage within Ontario society, it is not so much between members of different ethnic groups, or between immigrants and non-immigrants, as it is between those who are feeling more or less secure economically.

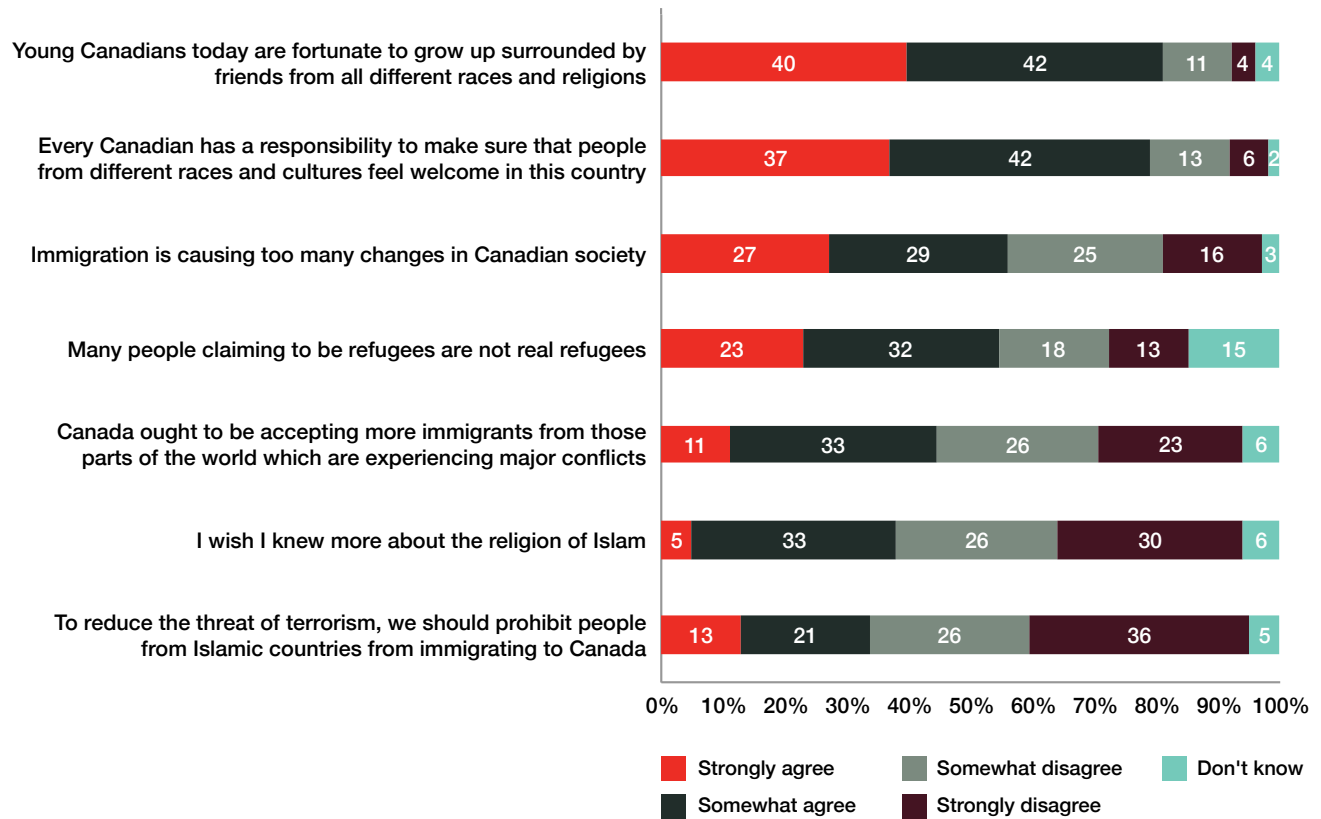
<sup>6</sup> See C. Breton, F. Cutler, S. Lachance, and A. Mierke-Zatwarnicki, “Telephone versus Online Survey Modes for Election Studies: Comparing Canadian Public Opinion and Vote Choice in the 2015 Federal Election,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2017), pp. 1022 ff.

# 4 DETAILED ANALYSIS

## Attitudes Towards Diversity

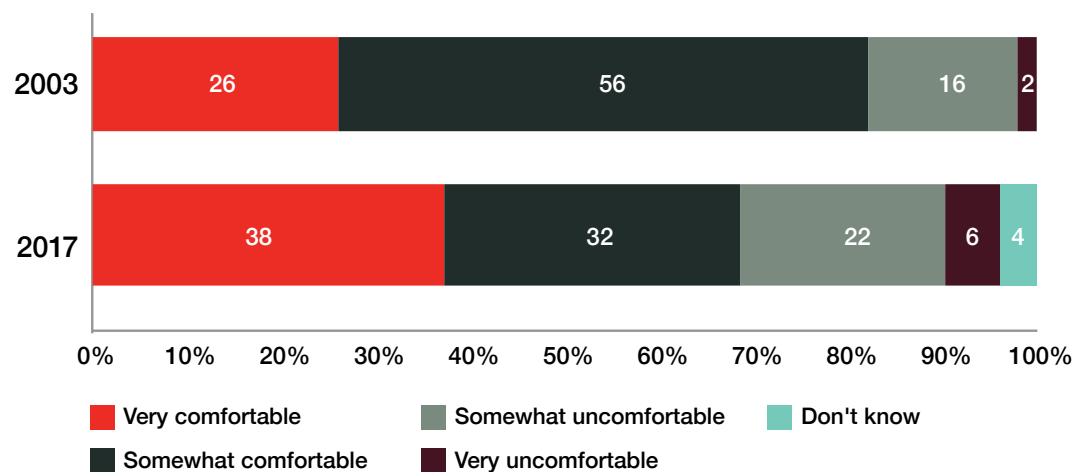
Ontarians retain a very positive attitude towards ethno-cultural diversity. Four in five Ontarians agree that young Canadians today are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions. A similar proportion agree that every Canadian has a responsibility to make sure that people from different races and cultures feel welcome in this country.

**FIGURE 1**  
Attitudes towards diversity and immigration



## FIGURE 2

### Comfortable hearing other languages spoken on the streets on Canada



### Questions

2017: When you hear languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets of Canada, how do you feel? Very comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Somewhat uncomfortable; Very uncomfortable.

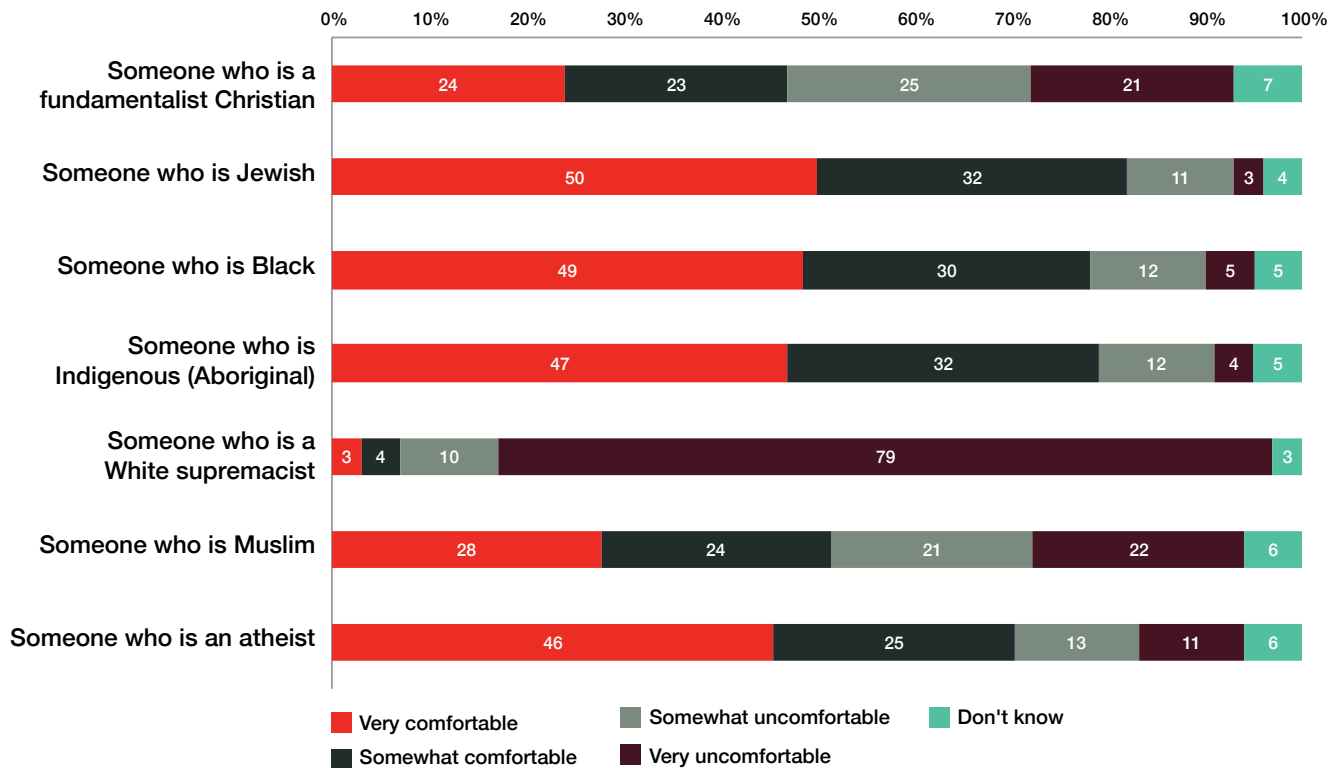
2003: When you hear languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets in Canada, do you feel very comfortable, comfortable, uncomfortable or very uncomfortable?

In the run-up to the UK’s referendum on membership in the European Union, the leader of the UK Independence Party famously lamented the fact that languages other than English were too often heard spoken on London trains. He reflected: “Does that make me feel slightly awkward? Yes it does... I don’t understand them ... I don’t feel very comfortable in that situation and I don’t think the majority of British people do.”<sup>7</sup> Ontarians, by contrast, certainly don’t share this discomfort. Seven in ten (69 per cent) Ontarians say they feel either very or somewhat comfortable when they hear languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets of Canada. Only six per cent say they feel very uncomfortable in these situations.

Perhaps the most important way in which someone can signal their comfort with diversity is to welcome it as part of their own family. A majority of Ontarians are comfortable with this form of diversity as well, with most saying they would feel comfortable if a close relative, like a son or a daughter, were to marry someone who is a member of a visible or religious minority group. Comfort levels are particularly high in the case of marrying someone who is Jewish (81 per cent), Indigenous (79 per cent), or Black (78 per cent). In the case of a son or a daughter marrying someone who is Muslim, only 52 per cent are comfortable, slightly more than the 47 per cent who would be comfortable with their son or daughter marrying someone who is fundamentalist Christian. Racists, however, are almost uniformly rejected – only seven per cent would be comfortable if their son or daughter were to marry a white supremacist.

7 Andrew Sparrow, “Nigel Farage: Parts of Britain are ‘Like a Foreign Land,’” *The Guardian* (February 28, 2014); <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/feb/28/nigel-farage-ukip-immigration-speech>.

**FIGURE 3**  
Diversity within the family



**Question**

*How comfortable would you feel if a close relative, like your son or daughter, was going to marry the following?*

## Attitudes Towards Immigration

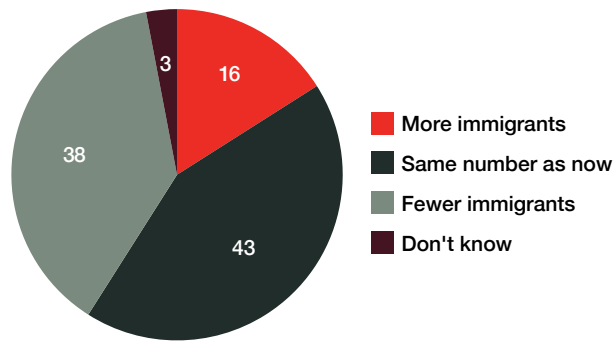
It is of course possible to place a high value on the multicultural nature of our society and at the same time raise questions about the number or types of immigrants who are currently gaining admission. Currently, however, a plurality of Ontarians (43 per cent) think that we are admitting about the right number of immigrants. And a smaller proportion (16 per cent) say that Canada should accept even more immigrants than it does now. Only a minority (38 per cent) say that immigration levels should be reduced.

These results are not too different from those in the past, though responses to this question tend to differ significantly from survey to survey depending on the immediate political context. Previous CRIC surveys showed that the

proportion of Ontarians looking to reduce the intake of immigrants varied from a low of 26 per cent just before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, to a high of 47 per cent just afterwards.

That said, it is the case that, on certain questions relating to immigration, opinions are divided. For instance, just over one in two Ontarians (56 per cent) agree that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society, while a smaller proportion (41 per cent) disagree. Views are also split as to whether Canada ought to accept more immigrants from those parts of the world that are experiencing major conflicts, with just under half (44 per cent) agreeing and a similar proportion (50 per cent)

**FIGURE 4**  
More or fewer immigrants?



### Question

*Do you think Canada should accept more immigrants, fewer immigrants, or about the same number as we accept now?*

disagreeing.<sup>8</sup> And just over one in two Ontarians (55 per cent) agree that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees, whereas 30 per cent disagree and 15 per cent say they don't know.

It is fair to say, then, that Ontarians' acceptance of the province's ethno-cultural diversity is accompanied by a more cautious approach to immigration. A plurality is comfortable with the current number of immigrants accepted by Canada and only a minority wish to see an increase. A majority have concerns about how immigration is changing the country. And roughly one in two Ontarians have doubts about the validity of many refugee claims and the need to do even more to take in those fleeing conflict. As will be noted below, however, this pattern of opinion is not new; in fact, in some cases it reflects the fact that Ontarians have become more and not less open to immigration over time.

<sup>8</sup> Note that this question specifically asks whether Canada should accept more of these types of immigrants. Someone may disagree with this statement because they think Canada should accept less of these types of immigrant or because they think Canada's current intake is about right. Thus the fact that someone disagrees with this statement (indicating they are against raising the number) does not necessarily mean that they do not approve of current efforts to resettle refugees fleeing conflict.

## Religion: A Special Case?

Diversity is an imprecise term – there are many types of diversity, including diversity defined in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation and values. Comfort with one form of diversity often – but not always – goes hand in hand with comfort with other forms.

As noted above, Ontarians are less likely to say they would feel comfortable if a close relative were to marry someone who is Muslim, compared with marrying someone from other minority groups. For instance, while only 14 per cent would be uncomfortable with a marriage to someone who is Jewish, and only 17 per cent would feel similarly in the case of someone who is Black, 43 per cent of Ontarians say they would feel uncomfortable if a close relative were to marry someone who is Muslim.

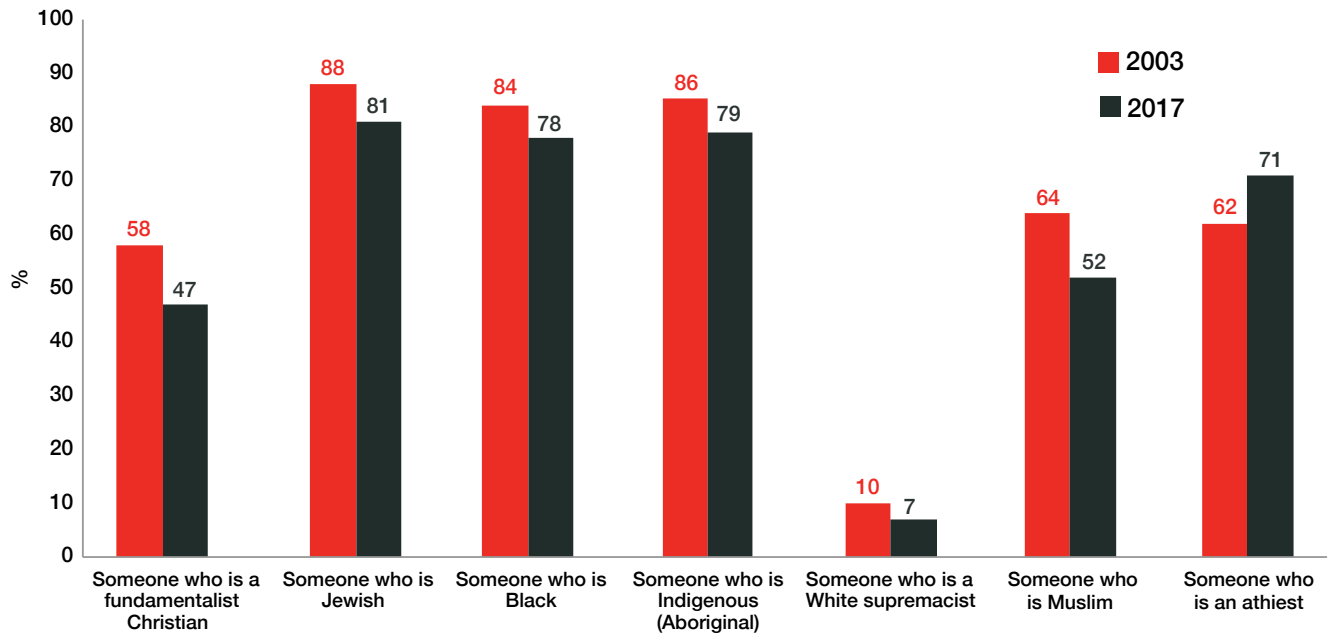
The survey asked two other questions about the religion of Islam. Only a minority of Ontarians (38 per cent) agree that they wished they knew more about the religion of Islam, while 56 per cent disagree. At the same time, one in three (34 per cent) agrees that, to reduce the threat of terrorism, we should prohibit people from Islamic countries from immigrating to Canada, while almost twice as many (62 per cent) disagree.

A significant minority of Ontarians therefore express discomfort both with the notion of having a close family member who is Muslim and with allowing more Muslims into Canada. What's more, this discomfort seems to have been growing over time – both the proportion saying that they would be uncomfortable with a son or daughter marrying someone who is Muslim, and the proportion favouring restrictions on immigration from Islamic

## FIGURE 5

### Diversity within the family – changes over time

Figure shows the % saying they are very or somewhat comfortable



### Questions

2003: *Would you feel very comfortable, comfortable, uncomfortable or very uncomfortable if a close relative, like your sister or daughter, was going to marry...*

2017: *How comfortable would you feel if a close relative, like your son or daughter, was going to marry the following?*

countries, is higher than it was in 2003. And fewer Ontarians are curious to learn more about the religion of Islam.

These results should be interpreted with some caution, however, as it is not clear whether Ontarians are expressing discomfort with one particular religion (Islam) or with religiosity itself. Importantly, Ontarians are even less comfortable with a close relative marrying someone who is a fundamentalist Christian than they are with a close relative marrying someone who is Muslim.

Moreover, not only are a majority of Ontarians (71 per cent) comfortable with a close relative marrying someone who is an atheist, but atheists were the only group among the seven mentioned in the survey that attracted a higher level of comfort compared with the results from the *New Canada* survey in 2003. Without wanting to minimize the importance of recognizing and confronting the presence of Islamophobia within Ontarian and Canadian society, it is possible that Ontarians are wrestling with the place of religion (and particularly religious conviction, as opposed to heritage) in an increasingly secular society and not only with one expression of faith.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A more complete discussion of this issue, however, would also need to make sense of the finding that a large majority of Ontarians would be comfortable with a son or daughter marrying someone who is Jewish.

## Changes Over Time

One of the main purposes of this report is to determine whether Ontarians are becoming more or less open to diversity over time. To determine this, the results of the *Portraits 2017* survey can be compared with those from similar surveys conducted roughly 15 years ago by CRIC.

Caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the changes in the results between earlier surveys and *Portraits 2017*, however, in part because the way the survey was conducted has changed – from a telephone survey to a survey conducted over the Internet.<sup>10</sup> Recent evidence suggests that this change in survey “mode” may be particularly important when dealing with issues of immigration and diversity, since respondents to earlier telephone surveys may have been more likely to provide what were perceived as socially desirable responses. This means that changes in survey results may in part reflect the change in the way the survey was conducted.<sup>11</sup>

Even with this caveat in mind, the comparison over time is telling in its complexity. In the first instance, there is a consistent pattern across an important group of questions showing a decline in what could be characterized as more open or tolerant responses. For instance:

- » The proportion of Ontarians agreeing that every Canadian has a responsibility to make sure that people from different races and cultures feel welcome in this country fell from 91 per cent in 2002 to 79 per cent in 2017.
- » The proportion agreeing that young Canadians today are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions fell from 96 per cent in 2004 to 81 per cent in 2017.
- » The proportion saying they feel comfortable when they hear languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets of Canada decreased from 82 per cent in 2003 to 69 per cent in 2017.
- » The proportion of Ontarians agreeing that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society increased from 47 per cent in 2003 to 56 per cent in 2017.
- » The proportion agreeing that, to reduce the threat of terrorism, we should prohibit people from Islamic countries from immigrating to Canada rose from 15 per cent in 2004 to 34 per cent in 2017.
- » The proportion agreeing that they wished they knew more about the religion of Islam fell from 56 per cent in 2004 to 38 per cent in 2017.

The proportion saying they would be comfortable if a close relative married a person from a given minority group mentioned in the survey has also generally declined. In the case of a marriage to a person who is Indigenous, Jewish or Black, the decline was relatively small, and should perhaps be disregarded given

<sup>10</sup> Not only does this represent a change in how survey responses were collected, but in many cases it necessitated small changes in the wording of questions, as questions read on-screen must sometimes be structured differently than questions read orally by a telephone interviewer. Respondents also may be more reluctant to tell a telephone interviewer that they do not know or have no answer to a question than they are to select this option on an online survey.

<sup>11</sup> See Breton, Cutler, Lachance, and Mierke-Zatwarnicki, “Telephone versus Online Survey Modes for Election Studies,” pp. 1022 ff.



the change in survey method.<sup>12</sup> The decline was somewhat larger in the case of a marriage to a person who is Muslim or a fundamentalist Christian, while the proportion who are comfortable rose in the case of a marriage to someone who is atheist.<sup>13</sup>

But there are also some exceptions to this trend. The proportion agreeing that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees declined from 76 per cent in 2001 to 55 per cent in 2017, while the proportion agreeing that Canada ought to be accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world experiencing major conflicts rose from 34 per cent to 44 per cent over the same period.

It is difficult to neatly sum up these different changes to form an overall assessment of whether Ontarians have become more or less comfortable with their society's profound diversity over time. At a minimum, it seems clear that it is a mistake to simply assume that attitudes will inexorably become more open or tolerant with the passing of the generations. A comparison of the results for several of the questions asked in *Portraits 2017* with those from earlier surveys suggests that Ontarians have in fact become somewhat less comfortable with diversity. But this finding should not be overstated given that Ontarians' support for diversity remains high and given the

need for caution due to the change in survey method, explained above. This clearly merits being revisited in future surveys.

Furthermore, attitudes towards diversity and attitudes towards immigration and refugees are moving in opposite directions: the drop in the level of comfort with diversity has been accompanied by an increase in the proportion of Ontarians who support opening the country's doors to those fleeing conflict. This latter result is perhaps linked to the focus in recent years on the plight of refugees from Syria as well as others undertaking perilous journeys across the Mediterranean in the hopes of gaining entry to Europe.

Finally, it is important, when comparing survey results from different points in time, to recognize that the context in which the questions are asked may have also shifted. In this case, the past decade has seen a deepening of ethno-cultural and religious diversity, an increase in the number of immigrants and refugees the government intends to admit to Canada each year, and the onset of a significant economic recession with lingering effects. The recession in particular is likely to have affected public opinion towards a number of issues, as will be discussed in the next section of this report.

12 It is also notable that the proportion who said they were very comfortable rose significantly, but was offset by a greater decline in the portion who said they were somewhat comfortable – resulting in a slight decline in the total who said they were either very or somewhat comfortable.

13 A recent Canadian study of the effect of switching from telephone to Internet surveys reported that the problem of “social desirability bias” is most notable in the case of feminists and Muslims (Breton, Cutler, Lachance, and Mierke-Zatwarnicki, “Telephone versus Online Survey Modes for Election Studies,” p. 1025). While that could mean that the change over time relating to views on Muslims could be less than suggested here, it nonetheless serves to confirm the finding that Ontarians' attitudes towards Muslims differ from those towards other ethno-cultural and religious minorities.

# Factors Affecting Attitudes towards Immigration and Diversity

Attitudes towards immigration and diversity vary significantly among Ontarians from different backgrounds.

## GENDER

Gender is an important factor. Women, for instance, are much less likely than men to agree that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees, and are also more likely to agree that young Canadians today are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions. On many other questions, the differences in the views of men and women are not as large, but the direction of the difference is always the same: women are consistently more open or tolerant than men.

## AGE

Age, perhaps surprisingly, is not a consistent factor. Younger Ontarians are less likely to agree that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees, but in the case of most of the other questions asked in the survey, differences between age groups are small. While there may be an assumption that young people are more comfortable with diversity than their parents, the proportion saying they would be comfortable with a close relative marrying someone who is Black, Indigenous or Jewish is similar across age groups.

Importantly, this is not because young people are less accepting than might have been assumed – it is because their parents and grandparents are just as open. For instance, 80 per cent of those under the age of 24 would be comfortable with a close relative marrying someone who is Black, as would the exact same proportion of those who are middle-aged,

and nearly the same proportion (76 per cent) of those over the age of 55.<sup>14</sup> Only in the case of a potential family union with someone who is Muslim are young Ontarians (57 per cent) significantly more comfortable than those over the age of 55 (46 per cent).

## EDUCATION

Education, like gender, is consistently important, with those with a postsecondary and especially a university education more comfortable with diversity and supportive of immigration than those who did not continue their education past high school. Almost one in two (49 per cent) Ontarians without a postsecondary education say that Canada should accept fewer immigrants, compared with only 29 per cent of those with a university education. Three in five (63 per cent) Ontarians without a postsecondary education agree that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society, compared with 48 per cent of those with a university education. This pattern continues across many other questions.

## RACE & IMMIGRATION STATUS

It is natural to assume that visible minorities and immigrants will be more comfortable with diversity and supportive of immigration. This is certainly the case – however, it is important not to conclude that this suggests there is a significant divide within Ontario society along these lines.

<sup>14</sup> It is the case, however, that younger Ontarians are more likely to say they would be very comfortable rather than somewhat comfortable.

For instance, 41 per cent of those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents say that immigration levels should be reduced; however, 31 per cent of immigrants agree. In the case of both immigrants and non-immigrants, therefore, the pattern is the same: a majority says that immigration levels should either stay the same or should be raised, while an important minority prefer a reduction.

Similarly, immigrants (50 per cent) are more likely than Canadians born in Canada to Canadian-born parents (44 per cent) to agree that Canada ought to accept more immigrants from conflict zones, but each group is more or less evenly split on the issue. Immigrants are more comfortable hearing languages other than English or French spoken on the streets of Canada, but the proportion of non-immigrant Canadians who are comfortable still outnumbers the proportion that is uncomfortable by more than two-to-one. What's more, immigrants are more likely than non-immigrants to agree that many people claiming to be refugees and not real refugees, and are slightly more likely to agree that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society.

There is no basis, therefore, to conclude that there is a significant divide in attitudes on immigration between immigrants and non-immigrants in Ontario.

A similar pattern holds when comparing the views of those who do and do not identify as part of a visible minority group. Non-visible minorities are only slightly more likely than visible minorities to want to see immigration levels reduced. Visible minorities are more likely to agree that Canada should accept more immigrants from conflict zones (56 per cent, compared with 42 per cent for non-visible

minorities) and are more comfortable hearing languages other than English and French spoken on the streets of Canada (82 per cent compared with 67 per cent).

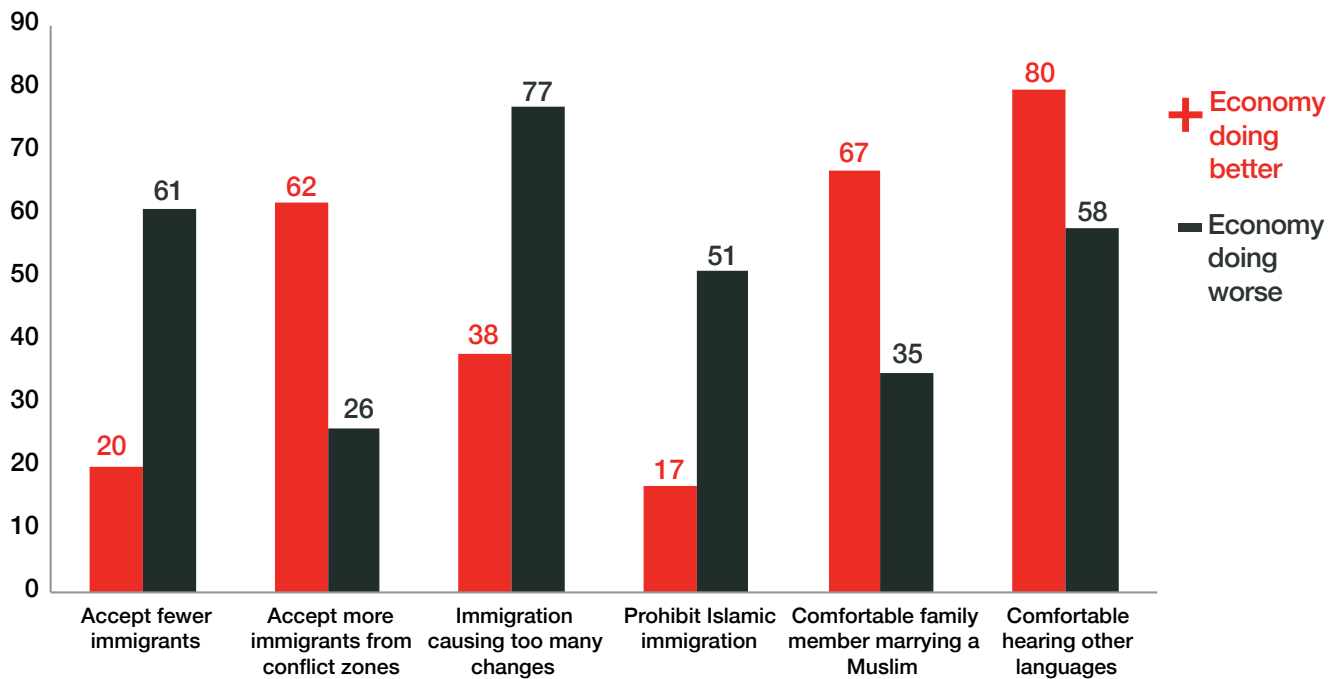
But on other questions, there are no differences between the two groups: four in five of both those who are and are not visible minorities agree that every Canadian has a responsibility to make sure that people from different races and culture feel welcome, and similar proportions of both groups agree that young Canadians are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions. And interestingly, those who identify as part of a visible minority group are more and not less likely to agree that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society, while non-visible minorities are slightly more comfortable with a close family member marrying someone who is Black than are visible minorities.<sup>15</sup>

This complicated mix of results defies a simple summary, but in this context, this is precisely the point: there is no consistent significant cleavage between visible minorities and non-visible minorities across the full range of survey questions under consideration.

15 Of course, this is largely because the “visible minority” category combines people from many backgrounds. Further analysis shows that those from Black, African or Caribbean backgrounds are very comfortable with a family member marrying someone who is Black, those who do not identify with a visible minority group are quite comfortable, and those who identify as Chinese or South or South-east Asian are only somewhat comfortable. The degree of affinity therefore does vary by ethnicity or race, but it is a variation in the degree of comfort that is not reducible to a simple cleavage between majority and minority groups.

## FIGURE 6

Attitudes to immigration and diversity, by economic outlook



## ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

The most significant factor relating to attitudes on these questions is economic outlook: those who say the economy or their own financial situation have been getting worse are much less comfortable with diversity and much less supportive of immigration than those who say they have experienced an improvement. For instance, those who say that the national economy has been doing worse over the past five years are three times more likely to say that Canada should accept fewer immigrants than are those who say that the economy has been doing better (61 per cent compared with 20 per cent); they are also less than twice as likely to agree that Canada should accept more immigrants from parts of the world experiencing major conflicts (26 per cent compared with 62 per cent). Similarly, more than three in four (77 per cent) of those who say that the national economy has been doing worse agree that

immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society, compared with only 38 per cent of those who say that the economy has been doing better.

The importance of economic outlook as a factor relating to attitudes to immigration and diversity, compared with other factors, is illustrated in Table 1. For each of the questions listed, a difference in the views of immigrants and non-immigrants can be observed (see column A). For instance, 67 per cent of immigrants say that immigration levels should either stay the same or should be increased, compared with 56 per cent of third-generation-plus Canadians. Immigrants are also 13 percentage points more likely than third-generation-plus Canadians to say they are comfortable hearing languages other than English or French spoken on the streets of Canada.

In each of these cases, however, the differences within each group according to economic outlook are far greater (compare columns B and D). For example, the 11-point difference between third-generation-plus Canadians and immigrants on the question of immigration levels is overshadowed by the 46-point difference between third-generation-plus Canadians who feel the economy is improving and their counterparts who feel the economy is getting worse (with the same pattern holding across the range of questions).

Indeed, what is striking about Table 1 is how similar the views of immigrants and non-immigrants appear once their economic outlook is taken into account. Considering only those who feel the economy is improving (column B), for instance, there is no difference in views between immigrants and non-immigrants on the questions of immigration levels or the level of comfort with hearing different languages.

This leads to two important conclusions. The first is simply that, while public opinion is split on a number of questions relating to immigration and diversity, it is important not to assume that this reflects a cleavage within Ontarian (or indeed Canadian) society along ethnic or racial lines. It is much more likely that it reflects a division between those experiencing different degrees of economic security.<sup>16</sup>

The second conclusion is that, in considering the dampening of support in some cases for diversity between the 2017 survey and the earlier ones cited in this report, it is important to take the changing underlying conditions into account. The early 2000s preceded the financial crisis and economic recession, while the current period follows it. The evidence suggests that this simple fact on its own has played an important role in shaping how open citizens feel.<sup>17</sup>

16 Further analysis, beyond the scope of this first presentation of results, may find that some of the factors discussed here, such as economic outlook and educational attainment, are interrelated. Some of these factors may thus appear more or less significant when controlling for the effect of others.

17 This emphasis on the connection between a changing mood about the economy and attitudes towards immigration and diversity is consistent with the findings of other recent comprehensive studies of public opinion in Canada, most notably the investigation of “Northern populism” undertaken by EKOS Research Associates. EKOS has argued that it is “economic malaise that is one of the critical ingredients of populism” in Canada (EKOS Research Associates, *Canada 150: The National Mood and the New Populism* (June 24, 2017); <http://www.ekospolitics.com/index.php/2017/06/canada-150-the-national-mood-and-the-new-populism/>), and that “the northern populism at play in Canada seems far less connected to attitudes on immigration than it is to class status and anti-elite sentiment” (Stephanie Levitz, “New Research Suggests Rob Ford’s Populist Appeal Could Be Duplicated Across Canada,” *The Globe and Mail* (February 4, 2018); <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/new-research-suggests-rob-fords-populist-appeal-could-be-duplicated-across-canada/article37849081/>). It also echoes earlier conclusions reached by Jeffrey Reitz. Using data from 2010, Reitz documented the relationship between economic outlook and attitudes towards immigration. He noted that “the significance of economic factors to support for immigration in Canada suggests that an economic downturn would undermine such support” – although he also emphasized that this does not appear to have been the case in the 1990s. See Jeffrey G. Reitz, *Pro-Immigration Canada: Social and Economic Roots of Popular Views* (Montreal: IRPP, October 2011), pp. 13-14.

**TABLE 1****Attitudes to immigration and diversity, by immigration status and economic outlook**

Question	Response	Immigration status*	Total (A)	Economic outlook		
				NATIONAL ECONOMY GETTING BETTER (B)	NATIONAL ECONOMY THE SAME (C)	NATIONAL ECONOMY GETTING WORSE (D)
Do you think Canada should accept more immigrants, fewer immigrants, or about the same number as we accept now?	More or same	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	56	78	57	32
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	65	77	80	46
		Immigrant	67	79	70	50
Many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees	Disagree	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	32	49	29	17
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	32	51	33	14
		Immigrant	23	31	21	16
Canada ought to be accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world which are experiencing major conflicts	Agree	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	44	62	45	24
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	41	65	29	29
		Immigrant	50	61	57	32
Every Canadian has a responsibility to make sure that people from different races and cultures feel welcome in this country	Agree	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	78	91	78	66
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	79	95	69	70
		Immigrant	83	88	88	74
Immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society	Disagree	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	41	62	42	18
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	47	69	36	35
		Immigrant	36	51	28	26
To reduce the threat of terrorism, we should prohibit people from Islamic countries from immigrating to Canada	Disagree	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	61	81	57	45
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	65	89	67	41
		Immigrant	62	77	57	54
I wish I knew more about the religion of Islam	Agree	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	37	53	35	22
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	43	59	43	29
		Immigrant	40	53	48	21
Young Canadians today are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions	Agree	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	80	93	76	69
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	82	97	76	71
		Immigrant	86	95	89	75
When you hear languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets of Canada, how do you feel?	Comfortable	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation plus	66	79	65	52
		2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	75	80	68	75
		Immigrant	79	81	71	75

\* 3<sup>rd</sup> generation plus = born in Canada and at least one parent born in Canada (n = 1,447); 2<sup>nd</sup> generation = born in Canada and both parents born outside of Canada (n = 198); immigrant = born outside of Canada (n = 342). Note that these definitions differ somewhat from those used by Statistics Canada.

## Ontario and Quebec

The *Portraits 2017* survey was conducted in both Ontario and Quebec. A comparison of results and trends between the two provinces affords some additional insight into public attitudes in each.

In terms of comfort with diversity, attitudes in the two provinces are similar. Quebecers and Ontarians are more or less just as likely to agree that every Canadian has a responsibility to make sure that people from different races and cultures feel welcome in this country, and that young Canadians today are fortunate to grow up surrounded by friends from all different races and religions. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of Quebecers are comfortable when they hear languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets in Canada, as are 69 per cent of Ontarians (and the figures are almost identical when comparing the views of only non-immigrants with Canadian-born parents in both provinces). In both provinces, four in five persons would be comfortable if a close relative were to marry someone who is Black.

Ontarians are somewhat more open to immigration than Quebecers, although the differences are very modest.<sup>18</sup> Quebecers are slightly more likely to say that Canada should accept fewer immigrants (43 per cent, compared with 38 per cent for Ontario), and slightly less likely to agree that Canada ought to be accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world which are experiencing major conflicts (39 per cent, compared with 44 per cent for Ontario). More Quebecers (62

per cent) than Ontarians (55 per cent) agree that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees. However, Quebecers are not significantly more likely than Ontarians to agree that immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society (58 per cent of Quebecers agree, as do 56 per cent of Ontarians).

Considerable attention has been paid recently to the question of attitudes in Quebec to Muslims and the Islamic religion. *Portraits 2017* does suggest that views in Quebec differ from Ontario. Quebecers are more likely to agree that, to reduce the threat of terrorism, we should prohibit people from Islamic countries from immigrating to Canada (42 per cent of Quebecers agree, compared with 34 per cent of Ontarians), and are less likely to agree that they wished they knew more about the religion of Islam (30 per cent, compared with 38 per cent). Quebecers are also less comfortable with the prospect of a close relative marrying someone who is Muslim (39 per cent, compared with 52 per cent).<sup>19</sup>

Finally, in terms of changes over time, a key observation is that in almost all cases, the direction of the change in the two provinces is the same – in other words, if Ontarians have become somewhat less comfortable with diversity over time, so too have Quebecers, suggesting the factors driving the change are not unique to any one province.

<sup>18</sup> The pattern holds when comparing the views of only non-immigrants with Canadian-born parents in both provinces, although in some cases the small differences between the two provinces reported here narrow by a couple of additional percentage points (meaning that the provinces appear even more similar).

<sup>19</sup> Again, this pattern holds when comparing the views of only non-immigrants with Canadian-born parents in both provinces, and therefore is not a product simply of the fact that Ontario's immigrant population is larger than that of Quebec.



The magnitude of the change in each province, however, is not always the same. In one notable case, the magnitude is much greater in Ontario: the proportion agreeing that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees fell by 21 points in Ontario between 2001 and 2017, but by only three points in Quebec. While in 2001, Ontarians were more likely than Quebecers to agree that many refugee claimants are not genuine, in 2017 the reverse is true.

In the case of comfort with a family member marrying someone who is Muslim, however, the magnitude is greater in Quebec: there was a 23-point drop in the proportion saying they would be comfortable in that province, compared with a 12-point drop in Ontario. While comfort levels were similar in the two provinces in 2003, in 2017 Ontarians appear more comfortable (despite the fact that the proportion saying they would be comfortable with such a marriage dropped in Ontario as well).



**The most significant difference in attitudes towards immigration and diversity is between those who are feeling more or less secure economically.**

# 4 CONCLUSION

This report set out to determine whether Ontarians are as supportive of diversity and immigration as many would like to believe, and whether attitudes to these issues have been changing over time. The results offer both reasons to be reassured and some grounds for concern.

Overall, most Ontarians remain comfortable with current levels of immigration and embrace the province's growing diversity. While it is the case that attitudes on some questions relating to refugees and the intake of those fleeing conflicts are more divided, this is because Ontarians have become more and not less welcoming over time.

On other questions relating to diversity, though, the change has been in the opposite direction: while attitudes towards diversity on balance remain positive, in some cases they have become slightly less positive than they were prior to the last economic recession (although there is a need for some caution in advancing this conclusion due to the change over time in the way that surveys are conducted).

Importantly, however, differences of opinion within Ontario on these questions do not speak to any significant cleavage between members of different ethnic groups, or between immigrants and non-immigrants. Rather, the most significant difference in attitudes towards immigration and diversity is between those who are feeling more or less secure economically. This suggests that developments such as the changing nature of the labour market in the wake of continuing technological disruption should be closely monitored, not only in terms of their impact on employment and income, but also in terms of their implications for social attitudes and relations as well.

Finally, the survey results suggest that attitudes towards Muslims are not as open as are attitudes towards other minority groups. While this lesser degree of openness may be related to feelings about religiosity in general, it nonetheless points to an area where it would be a mistake to take Canada's reputation for openness and tolerance for granted.

# APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

*Portraits 2017* is a public opinion survey undertaken by Mission Research on behalf of the Mowat Centre. Survey data were collected between November 1 and November 14, 2017 from within randomly-selected, representative samples of residents of Ontario (n=2,000) and Quebec (n=1,000) aged 18 and older.

Sample frames were drawn from opt-in market research panels and hence cannot be technically characterized as random probability samples. Still, as a guideline, appropriate margins of error for traditional samples of the sizes of the Ontario and the Quebec samples are +/- 2.2% and +/-3.1% respectively, 19 times out of 20. For the overall sample (n=3,000) the corresponding margin of error is +/- 1.8%, with a 5% error rate. All data are weighted according to the most recent Census figures for age, gender and region;<sup>20</sup> in turn, findings from the survey are representative of the adult population aged 18 and older in both Ontario and Quebec.

To assess whether attitudes have changed over time, the survey drew extensively from previous studies. In particular, the survey questionnaire drew from the studies conducted between 1998 and 2006 by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC), including the *Portraits of Canada* annual series and the landmark *New Canada* study of Canadian identity in the context of growing diversity.<sup>21</sup> In comparing data between the earlier surveys and the current one, readers should note the evolution in survey mode (from telephone to Internet), which in turn often entails small adjustments to question wording and format. Readers should also note that the Ontario sample for other national surveys is typically much smaller than the sample of 2,000 Ontarians surveyed in *Portraits 2017*.

20 The sample in Quebec is also representative in terms of language spoken at home.

21 The CRIC surveys used for comparison in this report include: *Portraits of Canada 2001* (Ontario n=403); the 2002 survey on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Ontario n=400); the 2003 *New Canada* survey (Ontario n=400); *Portraits of Canada 2003* (Ontario n=403); and the 2004 national issues survey (Ontario n=456).

