

The importance of our ancestral connections: The relationship between attachment to ethnic origin (s) and attachment to Canada

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Introduction: Summary of key findings

Nearly two-thirds of Canadians—64 per cent—say they are attached to their ethnic origins or ancestry, including 28 per cent who describe themselves as very attached. Attachment is relatively widespread across the country, reaching 67 per cent in both Quebec and Atlantic Canada, 66 per cent in British Columbia and 65 per cent in Ontario. Quebecers and British Columbians are the most likely to say they are very attached to their ancestry, at 33 and 32 per cent respectively. At the same time, national attachment remains considerably stronger. Eighty-two per cent of Canadians say they are attached to Canada, including 50 per cent who are very attached. Regional differences are nevertheless significant. Attachment to Canada reaches 92 per cent in Atlantic Canada, compared with 73 per cent in Quebec. Only 33 per cent of Quebecers say they are very attached to Canada, compared with 63 per cent in Atlantic Canada, 58 per cent in Alberta and 55 per cent in British Columbia. One of the most important findings concerns generational change. Canadians aged 18 to 24 are the age group most likely to say they are very attached to their ethnic origins, at 36 per cent. Yet 85 per cent of this same age group say they are attached to Canada. The youngest Canadians therefore appear comfortable holding both identities simultaneously. Their attachment to ancestry does not translate into rejection of the country. There is, however, a major age divide in the intensity of Canadian attachment. Only 40 per cent of Canadians aged 18 to 24 say they are very attached to Canada, compared with 62 per cent of those aged 55 to 64 and 69 per cent of those aged 65 and older. Younger Canadians are not necessarily detached from Canada, but their attachment is more likely to be qualified as “somewhat” rather than “very” strong. Immigrants are much more likely than non-immigrants to feel attached to their ethnic origins—78 per cent compared with 62 per cent—but they are also slightly more likely to feel attached to Canada, at 85 per cent compared with 81 per cent. Similarly, 75 per cent of racialized respondents report attachment to their ethnic origins, compared with 62 per cent of white respondents, while both groups report identical overall attachment to Canada, at 82 per cent. Among Canadians who say they are very attached to their ethnic origins, 89 per cent are also attached to Canada and 66 per cent are very attached to the country. Among those who are somewhat attached to their ancestry, 88 per cent are attached to Canada. By contrast, attachment to Canada falls to 67 per cent among those who are not at all attached to their ethnic origins. Language differences reveal another important dimension. Anglophones report a 22-point gap between attachment to Canada and attachment to their ancestry—84 per cent compared with 62 per cent. Among allophones, attachment is high on both measures: 89 per cent are attached to Canada and 84 per cent to their ethnic origins. Francophones also show only a five-point gap, but this is because attachment is lower on both measures: 70 per cent to Canada and 65 per cent to ethnic origins. Quebec produces one of the survey’s most counterintuitive findings. Quebecers aged 18 to 24 are more attached to Canada than Quebecers overall: 84 per cent of the youngest group report attachment to Canada, compared with 71 per cent across Quebec. Although only 37 per cent of young Quebecers say they are very attached, another 47 per cent say they are somewhat attached. This complicates assumptions that younger Quebecers are necessarily moving away from Canadian identification.

Methodology

The findings arise from a survey of Canadians conducted by the firm Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies between July 10-12, 2026. The survey was conducted with 1505 respondents in Canada. A margin of error cannot be associated with a non-probability sample in a panel survey for comparison purposes. A probability sample of 1505 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20.

Combined first and second generation population jumped from 14 to 19.5 million over 10 years (increase of nearly 40% compared with 3 gen plus 10%)

Year	Total Canadian population	First generation	Second generation	First + second generation	Share of population
2011	32.85M	7.21M	5.70M	12.91M	39.5%
2016	34.46 M	8.21 M	6.10M	14.31M	41.5%
2021	38.23 M	9.93 M	6.61 M	16.53 M	43.3%
2022	38.95 M	10.56 M	6.67 M	17.23 M	44.2%
2023	40.05 M	11.56 M	6.75 M	18.30 M	45.7%
2024	41.26 M	12.65 M	6.83 M	19.48 M	47.2%
2025	41.65 M	12.89 M	6.92 M	19.81 M	47.6%
2026, April	41.42 M	12.59 M	6.98 M	19.57 M	47.3%

Toronto and Vancouver have the lowest 3 Generation+ Population

2021	Total	1 st generation	2 nd generation	3 rd generation +	Combined % (Gen 1 & Gen 2)
Canada	37,000,000 *	9,606,595	6,393,310	20,328,565	46%
Toronto (CMA), Ont.	6,142,880	3,172,330	1,721,285	1,249,270	80%
Vancouver (CMA), B.C.	2,607,010	1,256,395	632,460	718,160	72%
Brooks (CA), Alta.	14,640	5,890	2,645	6,110	58%
Calgary (CMA), Alta.	1,465,175	504,270	313,300	647,610	56%
Abbotsford - Mission (CMA), B.C.	192,110	57,685	46,070	88,355	54%
Hamilton (CMA), Ont.	773,440	218,870	193,765	360,810	53%
Winkler (CA), Man.	32,215	9,420	7,505	15,295	53%
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo (CMA), Ont.	568,065	173,740	119,150	275,170	52%
Edmonton (CMA), Alta.	1,397,750	401,115	278,005	718,625	49%
Windsor (CMA), Ont.	415,505	111,385	88,560	215,560	48%
Oshawa (CMA), Ont.	411,405	98,605	99,150	213,650	48%
Ottawa	1,116,795	312,745	223,370	580,680	48%
Winnipeg (CMA), Man.	819,715	244,185	144,605	430,925	47%
Guelph (CMA), Ont.	163,485	41,365	35,955	86,165	47%
Squamish (CA), B.C.	23,960	5,900	5,225	12,835	46%
Montréal (CMA), Que.	4,206,450	1,221,425	721,360	2,263,675	46%
London (CMA), Ont.	535,775	140,255	106,535	288,990	46%

**Rounded*

Source: IRCC Open Data & Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security

Some two thirds of Canadians say that they are attached to their ethnic origins/ancestries (the country or countries from where their ancestors originate). Those who are very attached are most likely to live in Quebec (33%) and BC (32%)

Your ethnic origins or ancestry (the country or countries from where your ancestors originate) -	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
(NET) ATTACHED	64%	67%	67%	65%	57%	57%	66%
Very attached	28%	29%	33%	25%	25%	21%	32%
Somewhat attached	37%	38%	35%	40%	32%	35%	34%
(NET) NOT ATTACHED	30%	15%	28%	30%	36%	34%	33%
Not very attached	19%	9%	23%	18%	18%	27%	19%
Not at all attached	10%	6%	5%	12%	18%	7%	15%
I don't know	5%	15%	4%	4%	6%	8%	0%
I prefer not to answer	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%

Canadians aged 18-24 are more likely to say they're very attached to their ethnic origins and ancestry

Your ethnic origins or ancestry (the country or countries from where your ancestors originate) -	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
(NET) ATTACHED	63%	59%	65%	63%	68%	67%
Very attached	36%	22%	23%	24%	34%	30%
Somewhat attached	27%	37%	42%	39%	34%	38%
(NET) NOT ATTACHED	29%	30%	29%	33%	29%	29%
Not very attached	22%	22%	18%	24%	18%	16%
Not at all attached	7%	9%	11%	9%	11%	13%
I don't know	4%	9%	6%	3%	2%	4%
I prefer not to answer	4%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%

More than eight in ten Canadians say they are attached to Canada with Quebecers lowest at 73% and considerably lower than other Canadians when asked whether they re very attached (33%)

Canada	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
(NET) ATTACHED	82%	92%	73%	82%	88%	84%	88%
Very attached	50%	63%	33%	53%	49%	58%	55%
Somewhat attached	32%	29%	39%	29%	39%	27%	33%
(NET) NOT ATTACHED	16%	6%	25%	15%	11%	13%	12%
Not very attached	11%	4%	19%	10%	8%	9%	10%
Not at all attached	4%	2%	6%	5%	3%	5%	2%
I don't know	2%	0%	2%	3%	1%	1%	0%
I prefer not to answer	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%

Amongst those very attached to Canada there is a large difference between Canadians over 55 and those below that age

Canada	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
(NET) ATTACHED	85%	78%	81%	74%	83%	89%
Very attached	40%	36%	38%	38%	62%	69%
Somewhat attached	44%	42%	42%	36%	21%	19%
(NET) NOT ATTACHED	13%	16%	18%	24%	16%	9%
Not very attached	9%	12%	13%	17%	12%	7%
Not at all attached	4%	3%	5%	7%	4%	2%
I don't know	1%	4%	2%	2%	1%	2%
I prefer not to answer	2%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%

As regards overall attachment to Canada compared with attachment to ethnic origins the widest gap is in the youngest and oldest cohorts where Canada dominates most

NET ATTACHED	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
Canada	85%	78%	81%	74%	83%	89%
Your ethnic origins or ancestry (the country or countries from where your ancestors originate) -	63%	59%	65%	63%	68%	67%
Difference	22	19	16	11	15	22

Amongst the youngest cohort the gap between those very attached to Canada and to their ethnic origins is by far the widest across the age spectrum

Very Attached	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
Canada	40%	36%	38%	38%	62%	69%
Your ethnic origins or ancestry (the country or countries from where your ancestors originate) -	36%	22%	23%	24%	34%	30%
Difference	4	14	15	14	28	39

Francophones and allophones have the narrowest gap between attachment to Canada and ethnic origins though the similar gap is attributable to weaker attachment on both amongst francophones

NET ATTACHED	French	English	A language other than French or English	Indigenous	Non- Indigenous
Canada	70%	84%	89%	88%	84%
Your ethnic origins or ancestry (the country or countries from where your ancestors originate) -	65%	62%	84%	76%	65%
Difference	5	22	5	10	19

Not surprisingly visible minorities and immigrants have higher rates of attachment to ethnic origins

NET ATTACHED	Not White	White	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant
Canada	82%	82%	85%	81%
Your ethnic origins or ancestry (the country or countries from where your ancestors originate) -	75%	62%	78%	62%
Difference	7	20	7	19

Those with stronger attachments to ethnic origins are more attached to Canada

Canada - Do you feel very attached, somewhat attached, not very attached or not at all attached to the following...?	Your ethnic origins or ancestry (the country or countries from where your ancestors originate) - Do you feel very attached, somewhat attached, not very attached or not at all attached to the following...?			
	Very attached	Somewhat attached	Not very attached	Not at all attached
Net Attached	89%	88%	72%	67%
Very attached	66%	44%	38%	43%
Somewhat attached	23%	44%	34%	24%
Net Not Attached	11%	12%	27%	31%
Not very attached	7%	10%	21%	18%
Not at all attached	4%	2%	6%	13%
I don't know			1%	2%
I prefer not to answer				
Total	100%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Youngest Quebecers are more attached to Canada than other Quebecers

Attached to Canada (Quebec)	Quebec Total	18 and 24	25 and 34	35 and 44	45 and 54	55 and 64	65 and 69	70 or older
Total Attachment	71%	84%	66%	74%	69%	68%	73%	71%
Very attached	32%	37%	22%	14%	27%	43%	45%	45%
Somewhat attached	39%	47%	42%	60%	42%	25%	28%	26%