

Survey Summary

Introduction/Rationale

- This research was commissioned to take a snapshot of Ontarians' attitudes and perceptions towards immigrants, ethnic minorities and religious groups in particular, with a focus on racialized immigrant groups including Muslims and Syrian refugees, and to enhance the effectiveness of OCASI's public education campaign and provide a benchmark.
- Fieldwork took place from May 11th to 16th, 2016.
- The survey was conducted by MARU/VCR&C.

Target Audience

- This study had n=1009 participants, representative of the general population of Ontario.
- Results weighted to census by age, gender, and region.
- Margin of error: -/+ 3%

Key Findings

1. Three-in-five (58%) Ontarians already support the government's decision to accept Syrian refugees. Interestingly, acceptance of Syrian refugee immigration is correlated with their perceived place in society as "productive".
2. An equal number of Ontarians feel that Canada allows too many immigrants (46%) as allow the right amount (45%). This suggests anti-racism messaging needs to be written to appeal to both groups.
3. Less educated and rural Ontarians over-index on feelings that Canada accepts too many immigrants.
4. It is acknowledged that immigrants play a valuable role in society (72%). Similarly, most feel that immigrants are an important part of our cultural identity (71%).
5. Despite these benefits, most agree that we need focus on taking care of people "here" instead of spending resources on refugees (74%).
6. Taken together, this suggests that Ontarians see non-immigrants as more *entitled* to social care. This sense of entitlement is, interesting given the inherent value that immigration offers.
7. Only a third (32%) of Ontarians have a positive impression of Islam, and more than half (55%) feel its mainstream doctrines promote violence (an anomaly compared to other religions).
8. These sentiments are echoed with Syrian refugees in Ontario where acceptance often coincides with acceptance of Islam.

Attitudes Towards Immigration

1. Acceptance is split; an equal number of Ontarians feel that the current level of immigration is just right (45%) as do those who feel it is excessive (46%). Sentiments, however, are slightly more positive than negative. The majority of Canadians are either accepting of the level or wish to see it increased (9%).
2. Higher and lower levels of acceptance are associated with distinct demographic profiles. Less educated Ontarians more often feel that Canada accepts too many immigrants.
3. The attitude that Canada needs to accept more immigrants is higher among 1st generation and Canadians with more education. Millennials are more likely to feel that Canada accepts just the right amount of immigrants.
4. Most Ontarians see racism as *somewhat* prominent in the province. Outward perceptions that Ontario is a racist place and inward acceptance of immigration are not necessarily related.
5. Nearly two-in-three feel that racism is somewhat or very prominent in Ontario.
6. It is unanimous that Ontarians perceive racism to exist at some level. However, only 9% see it as being “Very prominent”.
7. Those who feel racism is somewhat prominent in Ontario are no more or less likely to be accepting of immigrants, and belief in racism elsewhere does not correspond with acceptance of immigrants.

Interpretation of Immigration Presently

Immigrants are perceived as being valuable but less worthy than those who already live here and less deserving of our resources.

72% - Immigrants play a valuable role in society here in Ontario, but

74 % - We need to focus on taking care of the people here instead of spending resources to bring in refugees.

70% - Refugees often become productive members of society, but

71% - If more refugees continue to settle in Ontario, our infrastructure and public services will be severely strained.

Immigration is aligned with our core values, especially when bringing in similar values.

71% - Immigration is a core value of our cultural identity, but

53% - Only allow immigrants from countries that have similar values to our own.

58% - It is part of our responsibility to bring in refugees, but

74% - We need to be more strict about what kinds of immigrants we accept.

Islam is perceived quite negatively and likely affected perceptions of immigrants.

1. Ontarians clearly have an unfavourable opinion about Islam (53%). There is a high degree of uncertainty about Sikhism, with 24% responding 'Not sure'.
2. More than half of Ontarians believe Islam encourages violence, twice as many as any other religion.
3. Three-quarters of Ontarians feel that Muslim immigrants have fundamentally different values. Only 22% agree that Muslim values are in line with Canadian values of gender equality.
4. More than half feel Muslim women who live in Ontario should not cover their hair or face with the hijab or the niqab.
5. Two-thirds of Ontarians feel Muslims living in Ontario contribute to society in a positive manner.

Beliefs About Immigration from the Past

Ontarians think about people they know who have immigrated in the past 20 years as being limited and even threatening in some ways.

Attitudes towards immigrants from the past 20 years:

1. Are valuable members of society - 43%
2. Tend to integrate well into our society - 34%
3. Are unlikely to be proficient in English - 41%
4. Take resources away from other Canadians - 35%
5. Take jobs away from other Canadians - 33%

There is widespread acknowledgment that progress has been made in the acceptance of immigrants.

1. 75% - Ontarians today are more accepting of immigrants in comparison to 60 years ago
2. 80% - Ontario has come a long way in terms of eliminating racist attitudes since the 1950's

The impact of immigration galvanizes at the macro level, but few have been personally impacted, suggesting that Ontarians perceptions are formed and shaped through observations rather than specific interactions.

Expectations for Immigration in the Future (impact of Syrian refugees)

1. Three-in-five Ontarians support bringing Syrian refugees to Canada.
2. Interestingly, “strong” support and “strong” opposition have similar proportions. Taken together this shows that about half of Canadians are sharply divided in the matter. (58% support, 42% oppose).
3. Opposition to Syrian refugees is higher among those with unfavourable impressions of Islam.
4. Opposition is also higher among those who feel racism is NOT prominent in Ontario.

Reasons for supporting or opposing Syrian refugees in Canada can be broadly summarized in terms of:

1. Support for Syrian refugees stems from principles that we must help and support those in need.
2. There were also a number of concerns voiced about lack of resources, and that Canadians should come first. These concerns are similar to the reasons for opposing immigration.
3. Opposition is mainly because of concerns that more Syrian immigration will mean less help for those who are here.
4. Those opposed see Canadians as needing support first and foremost. Homelessness is specifically referenced as a concern that is more deserving of help.

Other observations regarding Syrian refugees

1. Perceptions of Syrians as having skills to become productive members of society are muted.
2. Syrians being perceived as productive members of society has a particularly high correlation with acceptance.
3. One-fifth of Canadians have participated in welcoming Syrians to Canada in some manner, and most have donated money or items.
It is widely acknowledged that the impact of Syrians will be felt more at the macro level in Ontario (economic, cultural) than at a personal level.
4. Ontarians expect the impact of refugees to be at a relatively macro level vs. a personal or community level.