



*Confederation
of Tomorrow*



Reconciliation and relations with Indigenous Peoples

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The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established by Michael Adams in 2006 with a mandate to conduct in-depth public opinion and social research on the issues shaping Canada's future. It is through such research that Canadians can better understand themselves and their changing society.

Contact Us

environicsinstitute.org

info@environicsinstitute.org

701-33 Bloor Street East
Toronto, ON M4W 3H1

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Confederation of Tomorrow

The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys give voice to Canadians about the major issues shaping the future of the federation and their political communities. They are conducted annually by an association of the country's leading public policy and socio-economic research organizations.

The 2024 study consists of a survey of 6,036 adults, conducted between January 13 and March 4, 2024 (80% of the responses were collected between January 18 and 26); 95% of the responses were collected online. The remaining responses were collected by telephone from respondents living in the North or on First Nations reserves. All results are expressed as percentages

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Overview

It has now been almost a decade since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission laid out a path for the country to follow through on its 94 Calls to Action, directed at all levels of government, business, civil society and individuals to make concrete changes to address the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation. Many have taken up this call, and there has been considerable activity involving new initiatives and policies across the country. The last few years have also brought fresh trauma, with the discovery of unmarked graves at a number of sites where residential schools once operated.

How do Canadians today see relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and how the process of reconciliation is unfolding? Confederation of Tomorrow surveys have been addressing this topic since 2019, and the 2024 survey provides a fresh update on public attitudes from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, and how they have evolved over time.

This latest research reveals that, over the past year, there has been a small, but measurable, improvement in Canadians' perspectives on relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and reconciliation, building on a similar shift over the previous year.

An increasing proportion of Canadians describe relations between the two groups as good, which reflects the most positive assessment since 2020, when this question was first asked. Most Canadians continue to be optimistic about the future of reconciliation, in terms of seeing meaningful progress in their lifetimes. On these questions, Indigenous Peoples are notably more positive and optimistic than are non-Indigenous Canadians, and this gap has widened since 2023.

Most Canadians agree that a number of barriers stand in the way of realizing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this country, such as inadequate infrastructure available to people in remote communities, lack of political leadership to

implement real change, socio-economic inequalities, and a lack of knowledge about Indigenous culture and history. Indigenous Peoples are more likely to place significance on each of these barriers, but as matter of emphasis rather than a fundamentally different perspective from that of non-Indigenous people.

A plurality of Canadians continues to say that governments in this country have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. This view has softened a bit in each of the past two years, although there is no comparable increase at the national level in the belief that governments have done too much. As before, Indigenous Peoples (especially First Nations people living off-reserve) are more likely than others to say that governments have to do more. Canadians also look to themselves collectively, as individuals, to play a role in making reconciliation a reality, as they have expressed consistently each year since 2020.



Key Findings

- Canadians' view of current relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has improved for the second consecutive year, especially among Indigenous Peoples, who are now significantly more positive about relations than are non-Indigenous Canadians.
- Canadians are more likely to say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation than they are to say that governments have gone too far, although the gap between the two views has narrowed over the past two years.
- While Indigenous Peoples have become more positive in their views on current relations, they remain much more likely than non-Indigenous people to say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation.

- Most continue to believe that individual Canadians have a role to play in advancing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Indigenous Peoples are more likely than non-Indigenous Canadians to feel strongly that individuals have a role, but very few in either group expresses the opposite view (that individual Canadians do not have a role in reconciliation).
- Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians alike consider each of eight barriers to be moderate, if not major, obstacles to reconciliation. Inadequate infrastructure in remote communities and socio-economic inequalities top the list, but almost as many apply this assessment to the other barriers, including lack of political leadership willing to implement real change, inadequate Indigenous control over their land and resources, and different worldviews or values.
- A clear majority of Canadians continues to feel optimistic that meaningful progress toward reconciliation will happen in their lifetime. Such optimism is more widely expressed by Indigenous Peoples, and this sentiment has strengthened over the past year.
- Non-Indigenous Canadians' perspectives about relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and reconciliation are related to the extent of their personal contact with Indigenous Peoples. The small group of non-Indigenous people who say they have many Indigenous friends have a more positive view of the current state of relations between the two groups, feel more strongly that they have a personal role to play in advancing reconciliation, and are more optimistic about the prospects for reconciliation over the coming years.



Current relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people

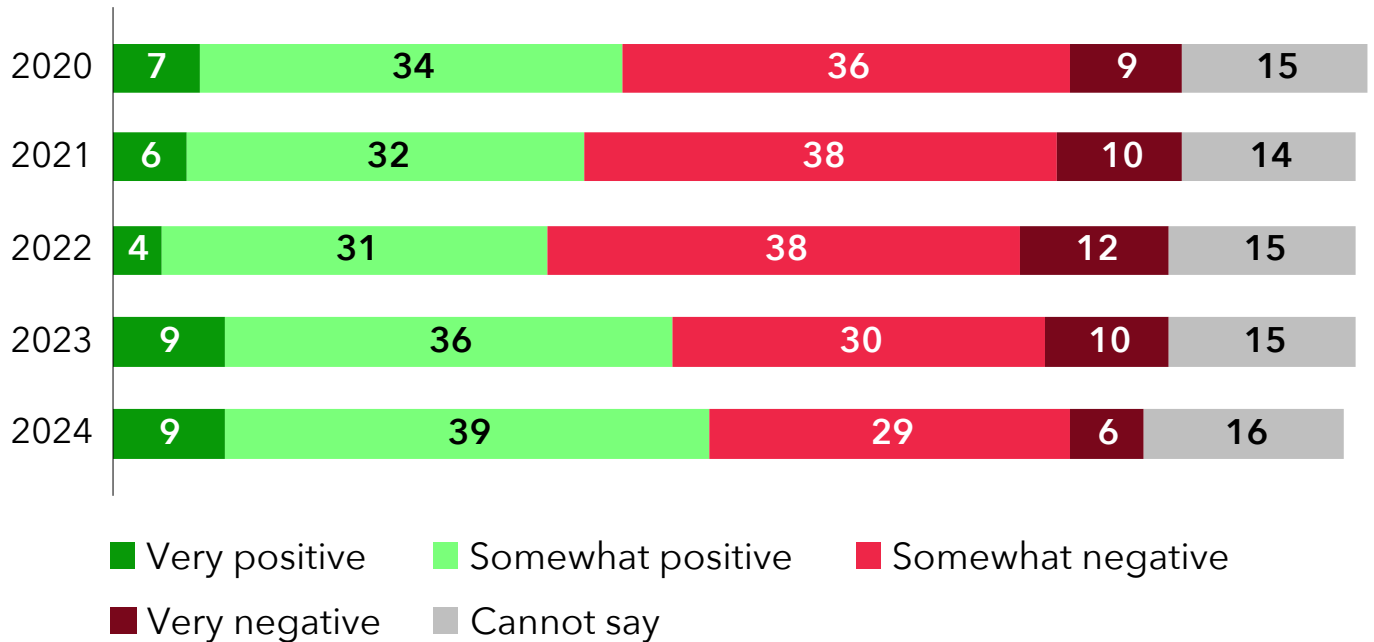
Canadians' view of current relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has improved for the second consecutive year, especially among Indigenous Peoples, who are now significantly more positive about relations than are non-Indigenous Canadians.

How do Canadians as a whole view relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in this country today? There is no public consensus, but opinions have improved modestly for the second consecutive year, and now reflect the most positive assessment since 2020, when this research was launched. Close to half of Canadians now describe such relations as very (9%) or somewhat (39%) positive (up 3 points from 2023), compared with just over one-third who say they are somewhat (29%) or very (6%) negative (down 5 points). One in six (16%) do not offer an opinion on this question.

Canadians' view of current relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has improved for the second consecutive year, especially among Indigenous Peoples, who are now significantly more positive about relations than are non-Indigenous Canadians.

FIGURE 1

Current state of relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada, 2020 - 2024

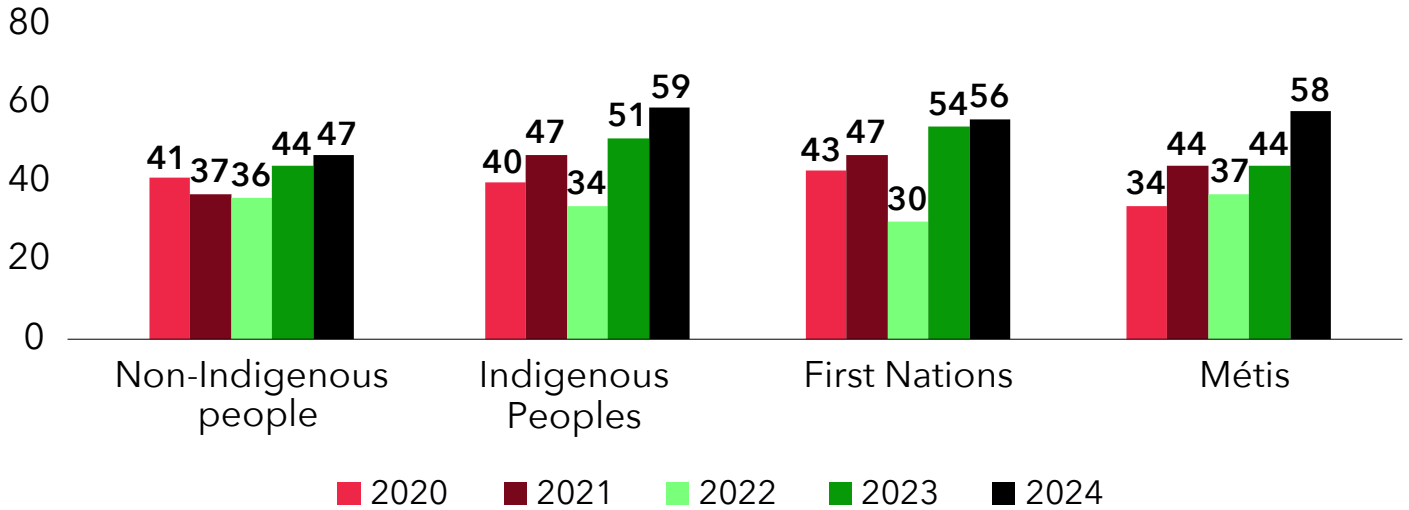


Q34. Would you describe the current relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada today as very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative or very negative?

Opinions about Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations have improved since 2023 across most of the population, but this shift is most significant among Indigenous Peoples, who are now significantly more positive than are non-Indigenous Canadians. Six in ten Indigenous (59%) people now describe current relations as very or somewhat positive, compared with 47 percent among non-Indigenous people. In 2022, little more than one-third of each group expressed this view (34% and 36%, respectively).

FIGURE 2

Very or somewhat positive: current state of relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people, 2020 - 2024, by Indigenous identity



Q34. Would you describe the current relations between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada today as very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative or very negative?

First Nations and Métis people share a similar perspective on this question, but it is among the latter where opinions have improved most noticeably over the past year (increasing by 14 percentage points). In the previous year (2022 to 2023), it was among First Nations Peoples where a positive opinion of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people grew substantially (up 24 points). First Nations people living on-reserve (74%) are significantly more positive in their assessment than are those living off-reserve (48%), but this gap is now a bit smaller, as on-reserve people are less apt to describe relations as very positive (down 17 points since 2023).

Across the population, a positive view of current relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is most common among residents of the territories (65%) and Atlantic Canada (59%), people aged 18 to 24 (57%) and newcomers to Canada (63%). This view is least apt to be shared among residents of the Prairie provinces (42%), although this reflects a noticeably improvement since 2022. Only in Manitoba does a majority describe current relations as negative (54%).

The impact of friendship connections

Perspectives about relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are influenced by various things, but among them is personal contact with people in the other group.

Among non-Indigenous Canadians, one in three report to have either many (5%) or some (27%) close friends who are Indigenous. The impact of such personal connections is reflected in the finding that the small group with many such friends are among the most likely to say they have a very positive view of relations between the two groups (33%), compared with those who have some (10%) or no (5%) Indigenous friends.

Most Indigenous Peoples have close friends who are non-Indigenous, given they are a small minority within the broader population; more than half (56%) report having many close non-Indigenous friends, compared with only one in ten (10%) who have none or cannot say. For Indigenous Peoples (including each of the main identity groups, but in particular First Nations people living on-reserve), having many close friends who are non-Indigenous also makes some positive difference in how they view relations between the two groups.

Perspectives about relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are influenced by various things, but among them is personal contact with people in the other group.



Responsibility for reconciliation

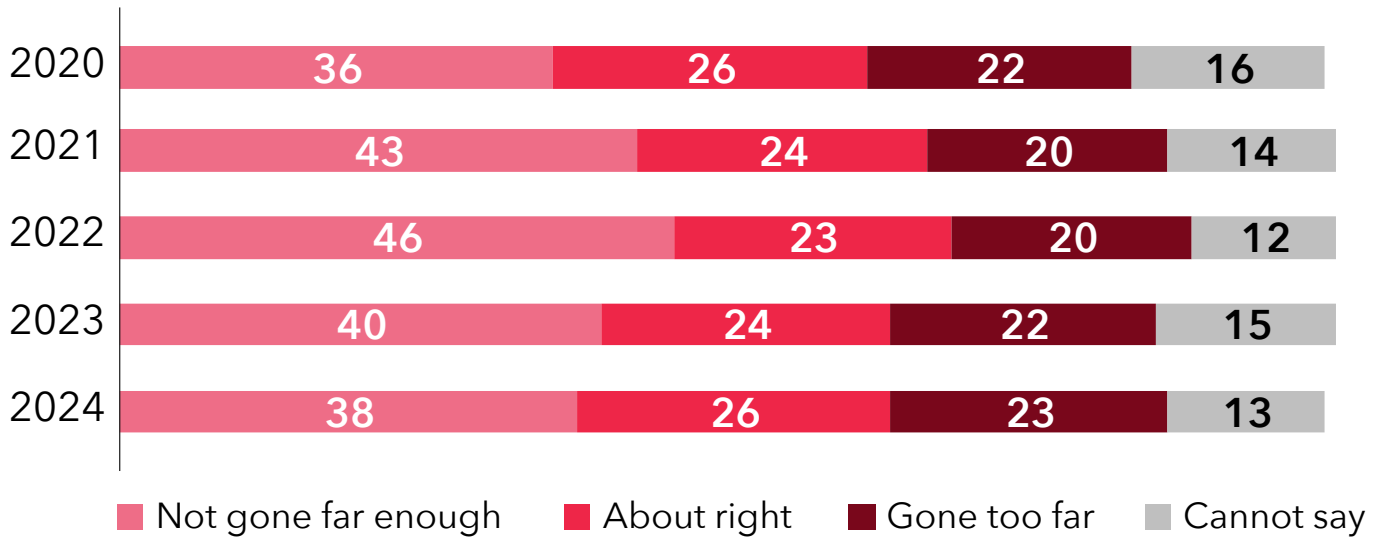
Canadians are more likely than not to say that governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation, although this view has softened over the past year. Seven in ten believe that individual Canadians have a role to play, with half feeling strongly about this issue.

Have governments done enough to advance reconciliation?

What do Canadians think about the intentions and actions of their governments in advancing reconciliation? As in previous years, a plurality believes that governments have not gone far enough (38%), but this proportion has ebbed slightly for the second consecutive year, down from the 46 percent who expressed this view in 2022. About one in four (23%) continues to say that governments have gone too far (up 3), while others maintain their efforts are about right (26%, up 3) or have no opinion to offer (13%, up 1).

FIGURE 3

Have governments gone too far or have they not gone far enough to advance reconciliation? 2020 - 2024



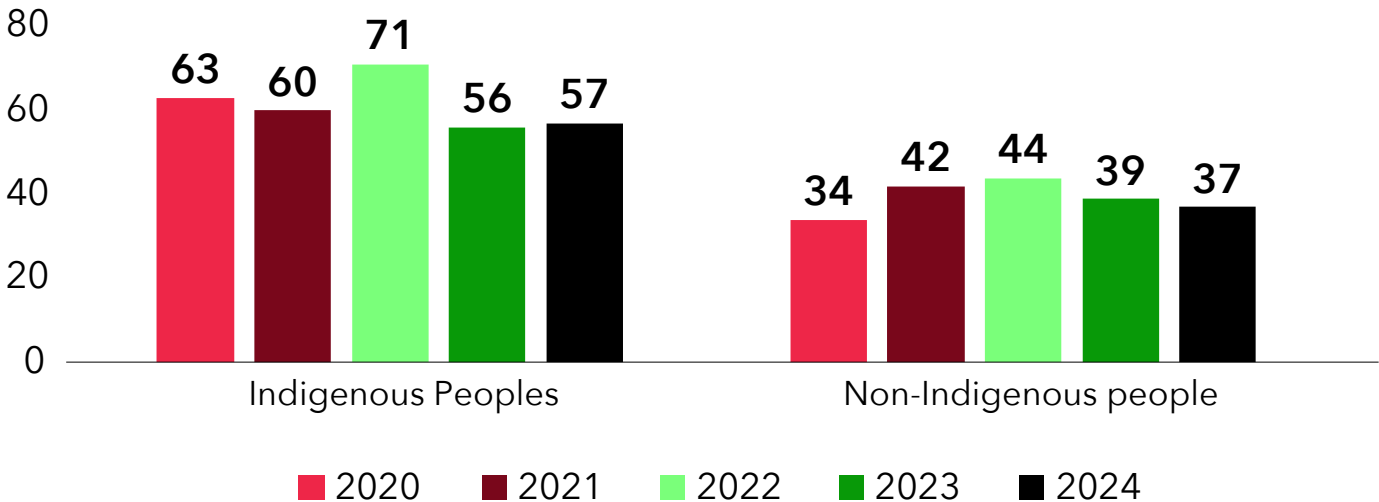
Q36. In your opinion, have governments in Canada gone too far or have they not gone far enough in trying to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples?

As on past surveys, Indigenous Peoples (57%) are more likely than non-Indigenous people (37%) to say that governments in Canada have not gone far enough in advancing reconciliation; the proportion holding this view reaches 60 percent among First Nations people, including 66 percent among First Nations people living off-reserve. Views among First Nations people overall have held steady over the past year, but there is some change - specifically among First Nations people on-reserve, who are somewhat less likely than in 2023 to say that governments have gone too far (down 10 points), and somewhat more likely to say that governments have been doing about the right amount (up 8 points) or not gone far enough (up 7 points).

Métis people are now a bit more likely than before to describe governments in Canada as having gone too far (29%, up 4 points). Those living on-reserve are more likely than those living off-reserve to say that governments have gone too far (32% versus 18%), but this gap has shrunk over the past year. These different dynamics point to the need to understand more about the different perspectives of specific Indigenous identity groups and communities about the effectiveness of policies aiming to advance reconciliation.

FIGURE 4

Governments have not gone far enough to advance reconciliation, 2020 - 2024, by Indigenous identity



Q36. In your opinion, have governments in Canada gone too far or have they not gone far enough in trying to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples?

While opinions about government actions on reconciliation have changed little at the national level, some change has taken place over the past year in specific regions. Notably, residents of Manitoba, B.C. and the territories are now more likely than before to say that governments have gone too far, while less apt to believe they have not gone far enough.

Across the population, the view that governments have not gone far enough to promote reconciliation is most widely voiced by residents of the territories (50%), Canadians aged 18 to 24 (50%) and those who would support the federal NDP (55%). Those who take the opposite view – that governments have gone too far – include residents of Manitoba (36%) and supporters of the federal Conservative Party (35%).

Do individual Canadians have a role in reconciliation?

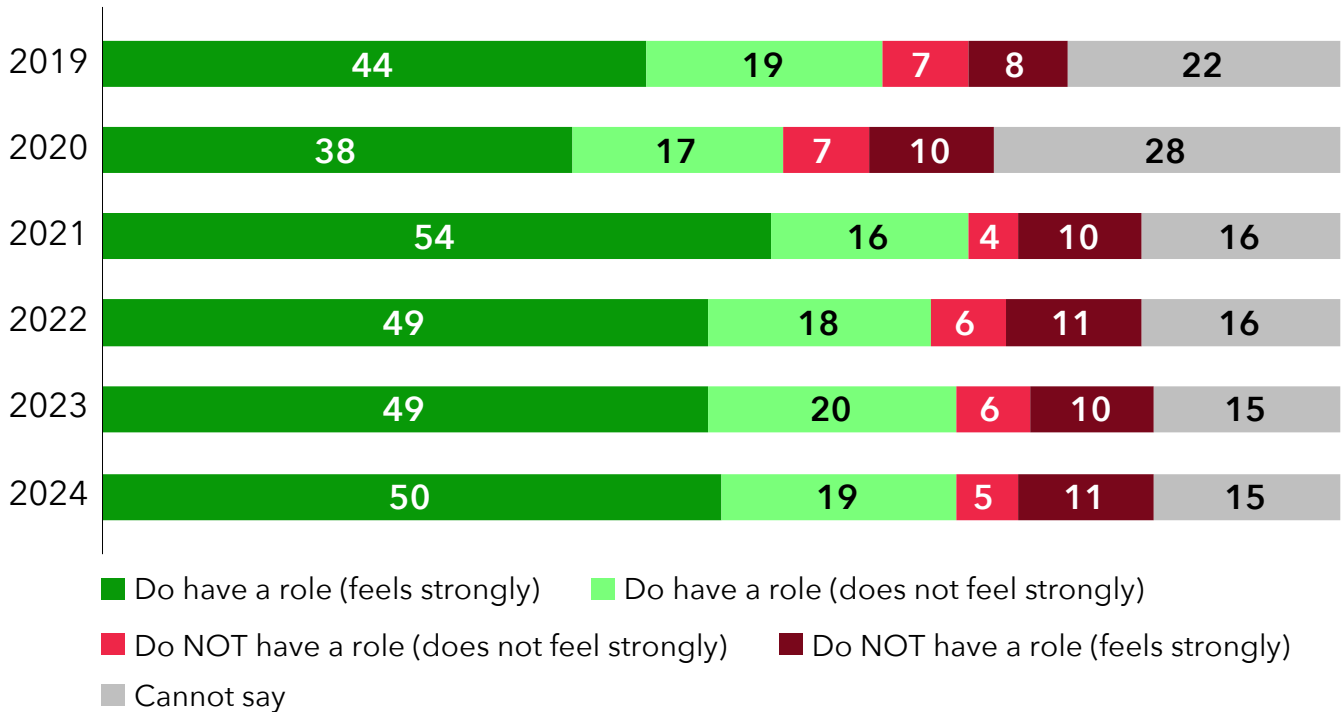
Much of the focus on reconciliation has centred on government policy and reparations for harms past and present, but the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made it clear that reconciliation must involve all parts of society, including individuals.

As on previous surveys dating back to 2019, most Canadians recognize and acknowledge this responsibility. Seven in ten say they believe either strongly (50%) or not strongly (19%) that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Just one in ten strongly disagrees (11%) with this sentiment, while another 15 percent who have no opinion either way. These findings are essentially unchanged since 2023.

Seven in ten say they believe either strongly or not strongly that individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

FIGURE 5

Role of individual Canadians in reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, 2019 - 2024



Q38. Do you believe that individual Canadians do, or do not, have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?

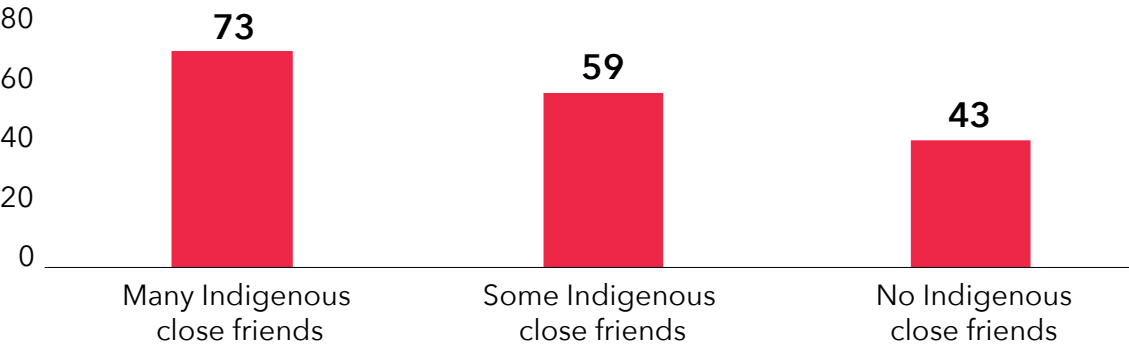
Strong belief in the role of individual Canadians in reconciliation is more widely held among Indigenous Peoples (69%) than non-Indigenous people (49%), but an equal minority in both groups express the opposite view (11% feel strongly that individual Canadians do not have a role in reconciliation). Perspectives are now roughly the same between Indigenous Peoples living on-reserve and off-reserve, reflecting a sharp increase among the latter group since 2023 in the strong belief that individual Canadians have a role to play (up 12 points).

Public opinion on the role of individual Canadians in advancing reconciliation is largely similar across the country, with a clear majority in agreement and a much smaller minority adopting the opposite view. A strong viewpoint is most evident among residents of the territories (66%) and newcomers to Canada (65%), and least evident in Quebec (42%). No more than one in five in any identifiable group maintains that individual Canadians do not have a role in reconciliation.

Finally, views on the role of individual Canadians in advancing reconciliation is related to the extent of personal contact with Indigenous Peoples. Non-Indigenous Canadians who have many Indigenous friends (a group that makes up 5% of the total non-Indigenous adult population) are much more likely to feel strongly that individual Canadians have a role (73%), compared with those who have some (59%) or no (43%) Indigenous friends.

FIGURE 6

Feel strongly that individual Canadians have a role to play to advance reconciliation, 2024, non-Indigenous Canadians, by friendship status



Q38. Do you believe that individual Canadians do, or do not, have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples?



Barriers to reconciliation

Each of eight barriers is seen by most Canadians to be a moderate, if not major, obstacle to reconciliation, all roughly to the same degree. Indigenous Peoples are more likely to see these barriers as major, but their perspective is not fundamentally different from that of non-Indigenous Canadians.

What do Canadians see as the barriers to achieving reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people? The survey presented a list of eight types of barriers, as potentially major, moderate or minor obstacles to reconciliation.¹

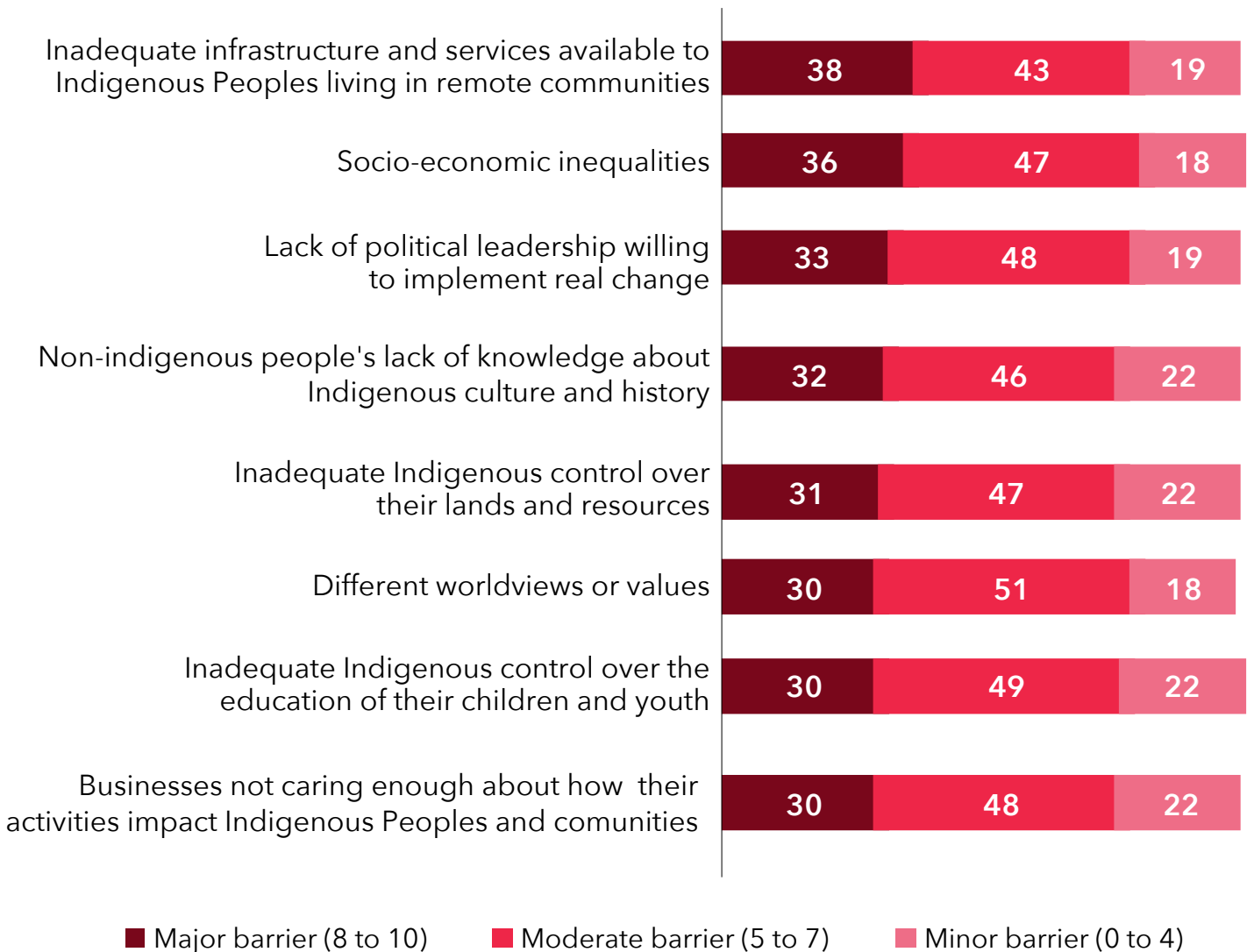
Across the population, all eight barriers are considered by roughly eight in ten Canadians to pose a moderate, if not major, barrier to reconciliation, by roughly equal measure. In all but one case, a plurality labels each barrier as moderate (in proportions ranging from 43% to 51%). What is most likely to be identified as a major barrier to reconciliation is inadequate infrastructure and services available to Indigenous Peoples living in remote communities (38% identify as a major barrier), followed by socio-economic inequalities (36%).

¹ Survey participants were asked to rate each barrier on a scale from 0 ("not a barrier at all") to 10 ("major barrier"). For analysis purposes, the results were then grouped into three categories: major (8 to 10), moderate (5 to 7) and minor (0 to 4).

The remaining six barriers are all labelled as major obstacles to reconciliation by one-third of the population, with the remainder split between responses of being a moderate or minor barrier by a two-to-one ratio.

FIGURE 7

Barriers to reconciliation, 2024

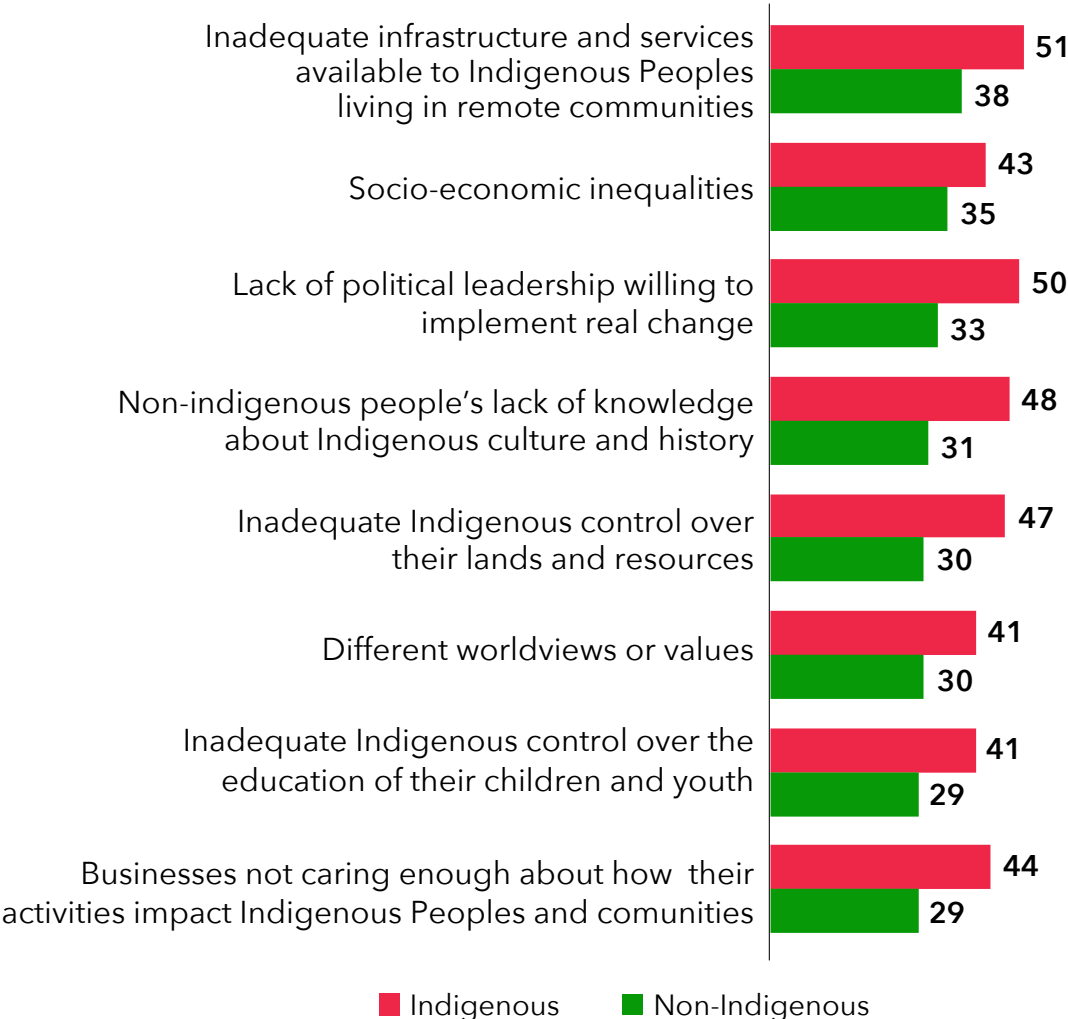


Q37. To what extent do you think each of the following presents a barrier to achieving reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada? To answer, please use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "not a barrier at all," and 10 means "major barrier."

As would be expected, Indigenous Peoples are more likely to identify all of these barriers as major obstacles to reconciliation. The most noticeable gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewpoints relate to the lack of political leadership willing to implement real change (a gap of 17 percentage points), non-Indigenous peoples' lack of knowledge about Indigenous culture and history (17 points), and inadequate Indigenous control over their lands and resources (17 points).

FIGURE 8

Major barrier to reconciliation, 2024, by Indigenous identity



Q37. To what extent do you think each of the following presents a barrier to achieving reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada? To answer, please use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "not a barrier at all," and 10 means "major barrier."



Across the country, views about barriers to reconciliation are similar across regions and demographic characteristics.

These differences notwithstanding, the perspectives of both groups are not fundamentally different, but one of degree. These barriers to reconciliation are identified as major by no more than half of Indigenous Peoples and by no fewer than three in ten non-Indigenous Canadians. Moreover, the differences in viewpoint between these groups are essentially the same in terms of the proportions that consider such barriers as minor; non-Indigenous Canadians are no more likely than their Indigenous counterparts to dismiss such obstacles to reconciliation as insignificant.

The views of First Nations and Métis people are largely the same in terms of identifying these barriers as major obstacles to reconciliation. First Nations people living off-reserve are more likely than those living on-reserve to identify these barriers as major, except in the case of inadequate control over education of children and youth (where opinions of the two groups are the same).

Across the country, views about barriers to reconciliation are similar across regions and demographic characteristics. In some cases, but not all, barriers are a bit more likely to be labelled as major by Quebecers and Ontarians, older Canadians, those who have a university degree, and those who place themselves on the left of the political spectrum.

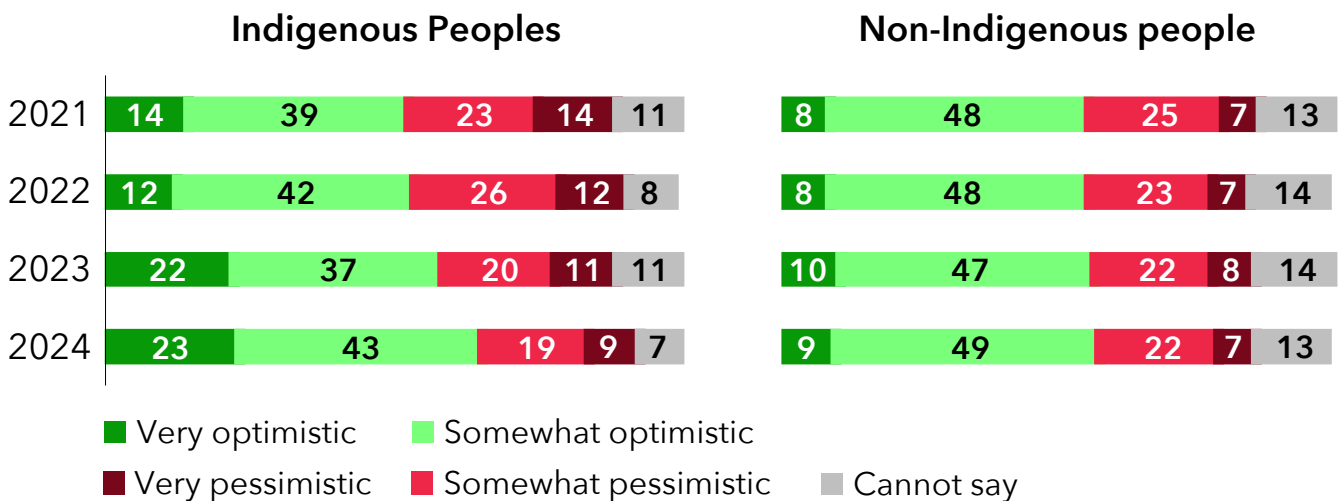
Future outlook

A clear majority of Canadians continue to feel optimistic that meaningful progress toward reconciliation will happen in their lifetime. Such optimism is more widely expressed by Indigenous Peoples, and this sentiment has strengthened over the past year.

How do Canadians feel about the prospects for meaningful progress on reconciliation? The current barriers and unkept promises notwithstanding, the public remains cautiously optimistic rather than pessimistic by a two-to-one margin. About six in ten say they are very (10%) or somewhat (48%) optimistic that there will be meaningful progress on reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in their lifetime. Three in ten are somewhat (21%) or very (7%) pessimistic about the future, with another 13 percent who do not offer an opinion. These results are essentially unchanged from 2023.

FIGURE 9

Will we make meaningful progress toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people? 2021 - 2024



Q39. Thinking about Canada over the next decade, are you very optimistic, somewhat optimistic, somewhat pessimistic or very pessimistic that we will make meaningful progress towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?

As before, Indigenous Peoples are more likely to express strong optimism about the future of reconciliation (23%, versus 9% among non-Indigenous Canadians), and their overall feeling of optimism has strengthened over the past year (66%, up 7 points). Strong optimism about the future continues to be more widespread among Indigenous Peoples living on-reserve (38%, versus 17% among those living off-reserve), but somewhat less so than in 2023 (down 12 points).

Across the population, outlook on reconciliation over time does not vary noticeably by region, but as before is most widespread in the territories and least evident in Manitoba.

Across the population, outlook on reconciliation over time does not vary noticeably by region, but as before is most widespread in the territories (69% very or somewhat optimistic, up 5 points since 2023) and least evident in Manitoba (50%, down 11 points). Notably, those who identify on the political right continue to be more likely to be either strongly optimistic or strongly pessimistic about the future outlook of

reconciliation, compared with those on the political left or in the centre. Non-Indigenous Canadians who have many Indigenous friends are also somewhat more likely to be very or somewhat optimistic about the prospects for reconciliation (68%), compared with those who have some (63%) or no (56%) Indigenous friends.



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