



## Good Intentions: An examination of attitudes on immigration and experiences of racial discrimination in British Columbia

### Highlights

Despite widespread support for immigration and multiculturalism in B.C., the results from a Vancity poll conducted in January 2017 reveal British Columbians may not be as tolerant as they say they are. The B.C. survey commissioned by Vancity and conducted by Insights West found:

- 70% of all survey respondents have experienced some form of discrimination, from hearing a racist comment in their presence to being the target of abuse because of their ethnic background.
- 82% of respondents who identify as members of a visible minority group say they have experienced some form of discrimination or racism. Of those surveyed who are visible minorities:
  - 57% say they believe people make assumptions about them because of their ethnic background.
  - 46% feel they face social disadvantages because of their ethnic background.
  - 33% say they have felt that they have been a target of abuse because of their ethnic background.
  - 29% believe they have faced discrimination based on their name.
  - 10% feel that they have faced disadvantages because of their religious affiliation.
  - 11% say the experience of discrimination has been traumatic enough to make them consider moving to a new location.
- 29% of all respondents say they believe that the prevalence of discrimination and racism will increase over the coming year.
- 82% of those surveyed said multiculturalism has been a “good” or “very good” policy for Canada.
- Three-quarters (76%) say they think the number of immigrants to Canada should remain the same (48%) or increase (28%).
- More than two-thirds (67%) say they think the number of refugees should remain the same (38%) or increase (29%).

## Introduction

International migration and the cultural diversity it brings have become two central issues of our time. In 2016, a wave of populist anger over immigration became a key factor in the UK's decision to sever its relationship with the European Union. Later in the year, Donald Trump's U.S. presidential campaign featured a promise to build a wall that would block clandestine migration from Mexico and a ban against Muslim visitors or immigrants. In the wake of his victory, anti-immigrant populist parties in Europe redoubled their electoral efforts, sensing an opportunity to benefit from this historic moment of doubt about immigration and the ability of diverse populations to coexist peacefully.

We have seen echoes of these disturbing developments in Canada. An Angus Reid Institute poll in February 2017 found that one in four Canadians believe that Canada should have adopted a similar policy to Trump's executive order which denied entry to citizens of seven Muslim-majority nations and banned Syrian refugees. We've also seen an increase in hate speech and the shocking murder of six men while they were praying at the Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre, in Quebec City.

But there are numerous signs pointing in the opposite direction. A few prominent examples illustrate this point. First, in 2015 Canadians elected the highest number of visible minority Members of Parliament ever, and there is an all-party political consensus that immigration and multiculturalism are both essential components of Canada's present and future. Second, Canada has recently raised its target for immigrants to 300,000 per year and is in the midst of admitting some 50,000 Syrian refugees, with about half that number expected to be sponsored by small groups of private individuals. Another 1,200 Yazidi refugees fleeing ISIS will be welcomed by year-end. Finally, in response to the terrorist attack in Quebec City, we have seen an outpouring of public sympathy for the victims and their families and a resolve to suppress hate speech and hate crimes across the country.

This report presents the results of a January 2017 Vancity survey of B.C. residents and brings in material from other relevant studies to consider whether we can detect changes in attitudes in immigration, refugees and the experiences of those who say they have experienced racial discrimination over time, and to compare results with other parts of Canada and beyond.

It's important to note that the Vancity survey did not cover the experience of First Nations communities and Indigenous people or attitudes towards them specifically. Vancity has embraced meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous people as one of its core values. While issues of discrimination and racism against Indigenous people and their First Nations

governments in Canada have been extensively studied, they are outside the scope of this report. Another important detail is that the most vulnerable members of visible minority groups – those not yet able to communicate in English – were not able to be represented despite the certainty that their experiences would be of great value.

We live in a time of mixed signals about the nature of intercultural relations in Canada and across the world. The results of the Vancity survey reflect that nuanced picture in the contradiction between stated attitudes towards multiculturalism and the experience of racial discrimination among visible minorities. This report explores the attitudes of British Columbians on immigration and multiculturalism and the experience of those who say they have faced discrimination during this time of increased attention on intercultural relations. Some recommendations are also offered to help combat racial discrimination in our communities.

## Immigration and refugee policies

Canadians generally, and B.C. residents in particular, are open to Canada's current level of immigration and more than a quarter of respondents to the Vancity survey believe it should be increased. Only 17% of respondents believe immigration should be reduced.

Moreover, this pattern of approval is relatively consistent across social groups. The attitudes of men and women hardly differ on this question, and results are consistent whether respondents are born in Canada or not, whether they identify with non-visible minority or visible minority origins, and whether they live in Metro Vancouver or some other part of the province.

This outcome of the survey may seem surprising, since we might expect that those who came to Canada as immigrants might be more inclined to support immigration than their Canadian-born counterparts. Similarly, we might expect residents of Metro Vancouver, the home of a large majority of immigrants living in B.C., to hold different views than those in parts of the province where immigrants are more scarce (immigrants make up 40% of Metro Vancouver's population, compared with nearly 14% in the other parts of B.C.).<sup>1</sup> Yet neither expectation is supported by the data. We can see some differentiation in support for immigration across the age spectrum, and by members of particular minority groups. For the most part, younger respondents disproportionately advocate an increased scale of immigration, compared with older age groups (See Table 1). Those who identify as South Asian are, by a considerable margin, the most supportive of increased immigration, while the majority of those from East and Southeast Asia would prefer to maintain the current level of immigration.

**Table 1: The scale of Canada's immigration program – the percentage who feel immigration should increase, remain the same, or decrease**

	Number of respondents	Per cent			
		Increase	Remain the same	Decrease	Not sure
Total	1207	28	48	17	6
Female	620	27	47	17	9
Male	587	29	49	18	3
Age 18-34	305	<b>34</b>	44	<b>13</b>	8
Age 35-54	432	27	48	19	6
Age 55+	470	26	50	19	5
Born in Canada	751	29	48	17	6
Born elsewhere	456	27	49	18	7
Non-visible minority	598	29	49	17	6
Visible minority	622	28	47	18	8
East Asia	216	27	51	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>
South Asia	172	<b>45</b>	32	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>
Southeast Asia	162	18	53	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>
Metro Vancouver	707	29	47	18	6

Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

## Immigration and economic growth

It seems the relatively favourable view of immigration held by British Columbians is associated with a sense that immigrants propel economic growth. The number of respondents agreeing with the statement that immigration creates new opportunities was almost two and a half times the number who believe that immigrants take jobs away from long-term Canadian residents, a view that is more strongly held by men and those over the age of 35. Immigrants themselves believe they are performing a vital economic role in British Columbia, with 75% of those born outside Canada agreeing with the statement that immigration creates economic opportunity. This is also true of the visible minority respondents to the survey (67% agreed). Once again, we see little differentiation between the views of respondents living in Metro Vancouver compared with those in other areas of B.C.; apparently, most people across the province see immigration as an important ingredient in maintaining economic growth.

**Table 2: Immigration and the economy – the percentage who feel immigration creates new opportunities vs. takes away jobs**

	Number of respondents	Per cent		
		Creates new opportunities	Takes away jobs	Not sure
Total	1207	62	27	11
Female	620	58	27	<b>15</b>
Male	587	<b>65</b>	26	8
Age 18-34	305	59	<b>30</b>	11
Age 35-54	432	65	24	11
Age 55+	470	61	28	12
Born in Canada	751	58	29	12
Born elsewhere	456	<b>75</b>	<b>19</b>	8
Non-visible minority	598	59	29	<b>13</b>
Visible minority	622	<b>67</b>	24	8
East Asia	216	<b>67</b>	22	10
South Asia	172	<b>73</b>	<b>18</b>	7
Southeast Asia	162	<b>65</b>	24	9
Metro Vancouver	707	64	26	10

Note: For the two main columns, respondents indicating 'definitely' and 'probably' were added together

Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

The level of support for refugees coming to Canada is fairly similar to that for immigration more generally, though a little less positive, and less certain (about one in 10 respondents were not sure how to answer this question). While the most prevalent response to the question on Canada's refugee policy was to maintain the current scale of the program (38%), there is also a degree of polarization on this issue, with just over a quarter of respondents believing that Canada should admit more refugees, versus nearly a quarter who believe that Canada is admitting too many. Women, young people, those born in Canada, and those identifying as a non-visible minority had more favourable attitudes toward refugee admission. In contrast, for those respondents who were male, at least 55 years old, born outside Canada, or members of visible minority groups, the number believing that Canada should accept fewer refugees outweighed the number calling for an increase to this program. At the same time, residents of Metro Vancouver and those in other areas of the province held relatively consistent opinions on this issue.

**Table 3: The scale of Canada's refugee program – the percentage who feel the number of refugees admitted to Canada should increase, remain the same, or decrease**

	Number of respondents	Per cent			
		Increase	Remain the same	Decrease	Not sure
Total	1207	29	38	24	9
Female	620	34	34	20	12
Male	587	24	41	29	5
Age 18-34	305	39	33	18	11
Age 35-54	432	27	41	22	9
Age 55+	470	25	37	31	7
Born in Canada	751	31	38	23	9
Born elsewhere	456	24	37	30	9
Non-visible minority	598	31	38	23	8
Minority	622	26	36	28	10
East Asia	216	27	36	25	12
South Asia	172	36	34	16	11
Southeast Asia	162	21	47	15	15
Metro Vancouver	707	31	37	23	9

Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

## Attitudes toward immigration and refugees: have they improved?

To get an understanding of how attitudes on immigration and refugees have evolved over time, it's worth looking at a 2001 survey<sup>2</sup> of Metro Vancouver respondents that covered similar questions to the January 2017 Vancity survey. Note that these comparisons should be treated with some caution since the circumstances and survey methodologies differed considerably.

### 2001 survey results on the subject of immigration (Metro Vancouver respondents only)

- Immigrants and refugees have a positive impact on Canada (71% agreed)
- Canada has a moral obligation to accept refugees (55%)
- Immigration levels are too high (35%)
- Immigrants take jobs from the Canadian-born (16%)

### 2017 Vancity survey results to similar questions (Metro Vancouver respondents only)

- Immigration creates new economic opportunities (64% agreed)
- The number of refugees admitted to Canada should stay the same or be raised (68%)
- The number of immigrants admitted to Canada should be reduced (18%)
- Immigration takes jobs from the Canadian-born (26%)

It seems that residents of Vancouver have become more convinced that immigration is necessary, and that Canada should admit refugees. At the same time, as the scale of immigration to Canada has increased, respondents in the new survey reveal a somewhat greater concern that newcomers may compete for jobs that long-term residents of Canada want.

Internationally, the most extensive survey of attitudes to immigration and refugees was completed by Gallup in late 2015 on behalf of the International Organization for Migration, with an enormous sample of 183,000 respondents across 140 countries.<sup>3</sup>

Results showed 22% of respondents believe that immigration should be increased, but the corresponding figure for respondents from Canada is 45% (the only other western country with a higher level of agreement on this question was Germany at 49%). In contrast, 34% believe the level of immigration to their country should fall (30% for Canadian respondents).

## Multiculturalism or melting pot?

Respondents to the Vancity survey were also asked about their expectations for immigrants who settle in Canada, encouraging them to state a preference for a “melting pot” process, where newcomers adopt pre-existing Canadian customs, vs. a cultural mosaic approach, where newcomers retain their cultural distinctiveness. About one in 10 respondents were unable to choose. Of those who did, 37% advocate assimilation, while 55% favour a pluralist version of cultural integration. Women, who tend to bear more of the responsibility for teaching children about their cultural origins, are more inclined to pluralism. This is also true of younger respondents. Older respondents to the survey, those 55 or more, were the only group with the largest number in the assimilationist category. Respondents who identified as a non-visible minority in origin were slightly more prone to favour assimilation, while those in the visible minority category preferred the pluralist approach. This pattern was especially true for those indicating East or Southeast Asian cultural origins. Interestingly, the answers to this question given by respondents born in Canada vs. those who came as immigrants are virtually identical. There was also no appreciable difference in attitudes about integration between respondents from Metro Vancouver and those living elsewhere in B.C.

In the 2001 survey, the vast majority of respondents said that cultural differences should be accepted, wished to retain their own cultural distinctiveness, and felt that their culture was accepted by other Canadians. At the same time, they felt a sense of attachment to Canada and expected immigrants to adapt to Canadian culture. These apparently contradictory

responses are reconcilable. Respondents generally believed that cultural pluralism is compatible with common values and that individuals are able to feel connected to a specific culture as well as Canadian culture more broadly.

Overall, Canadians, and British Columbians in particular, believe that multiculturalism has been a positive ingredient in Canada's political culture: more than 80% believe it has been good for Canada, as opposed to just 10% believing it has been a bad policy.

These findings are supported by a 2015 survey by the Environics Foundation,<sup>4</sup> which asked respondents whether they agree with the statement that multiculturalism is an important element of Canadian identity. Nationally, 87% agreed with this view and the figure for B.C. was 89%. At the same time, 75% indicated their expectation that immigrants should blend into Canadian society (77% for B.C. respondents).

Not only has Environics suggested that British Columbians are more supportive of immigration than the residents of other provinces, it also concludes that Canadians are more positive about immigration than they were a generation ago. The proportion believing immigration to be economically beneficial rose to 80% from 56 between 1993 and 2016.

Given such a high level of public enthusiasm for multiculturalism in the Vancity survey, the differences between social groups tend to be modest. Once again, women, immigrants and young people are more favourably inclined to multicultural policy. This is also true of residents of Metro Vancouver and those who identify as minorities – particularly the Asian-origin groups identified in Table 5. However, it is well worth emphasizing that these differences are muted; for example, respondents aged 55 and over were least supportive of multiculturalism but, even so, the policy was still supported by 76% of that population, and only seen in a negative light by only 14%.

**Table 4: Preferred pathways of immigrant integration – the percentage who feel immigrants should assimilate vs. those who feel Canada should be a cultural mosaic**

	number of respondents	per cent		
		assimilate	a mosaic	not sure
Total	1207	37	55	9
Female	620	31	59	10
Male	587	42	50	8
Age 18-34	305	27	69	4
Age 35-54	432	31	55	14
Age 55+	470	48	45	7
Born in Canada	751	37	55	9
Born elsewhere	456	36	54	9
Non-visible minority	598	39	52	9
Visible Minority	622	32	61	7
East Asia	216	25	70	5
South Asia	172	36	57	7
Southeast Asia	162	12	79	9
Metro Vancouver	707	35	57	9

Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

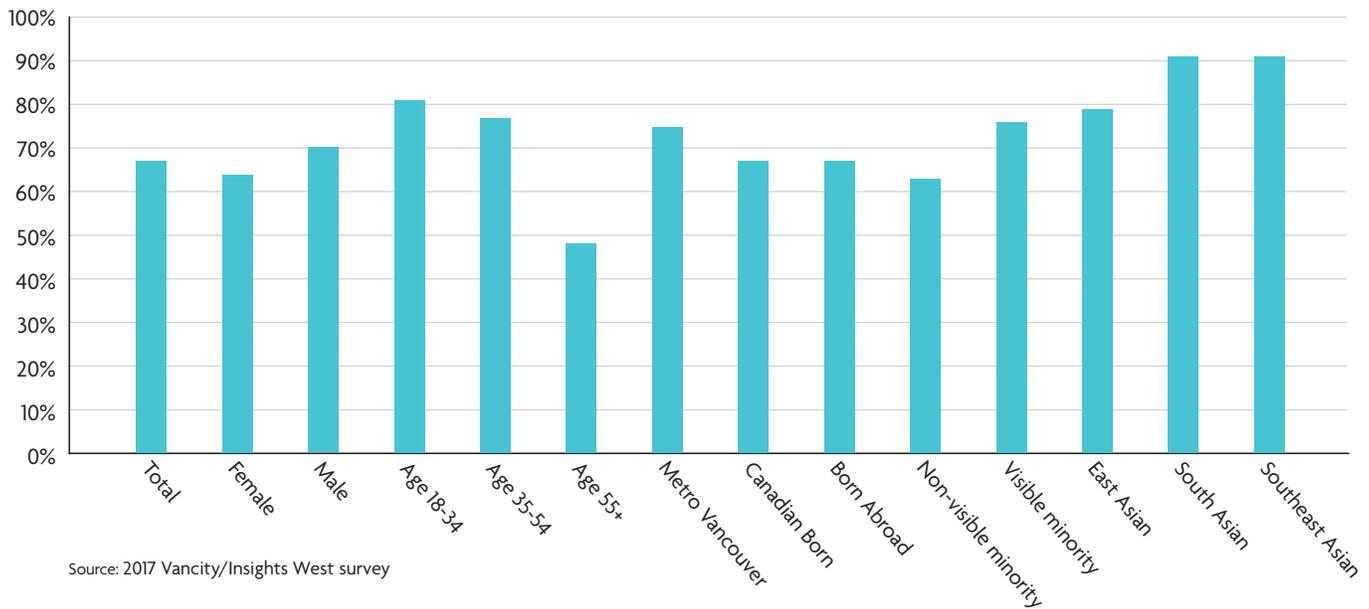
**Table 5: Views on multiculturalism – the percentage who feel multiculturalism has been a “good” vs. “bad” policy for Canada**

	number of respondents	per cent		
		good	bad	not sure
Total	1207	82	10	7
Female	620	83	8	9
Male	587	81	13	6
Age 18-34	305	89	5	6
Age 35-54	432	84	10	6
Age 55+	470	76	14	10
Born in Canada	751	81	10	9
Born elsewhere	456	84	12	4
Non-visible minority	598	80	11	8
Visible Minority	622	87	7	6
East Asia	216	89	6	4
South Asia	172	100	0	0
Southeast Asia	162	97	0	0
Metro Vancouver	707	85	10	6

Note: For the two main columns, respondents indicating 'very good' and 'good' were added together, as were those indicating 'very bad' and 'bad'.

Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

**Table 6: Percentage who have either dated or had a relationship with someone from another cultural group (or considered doing so)**



## Ethnicity and relationships

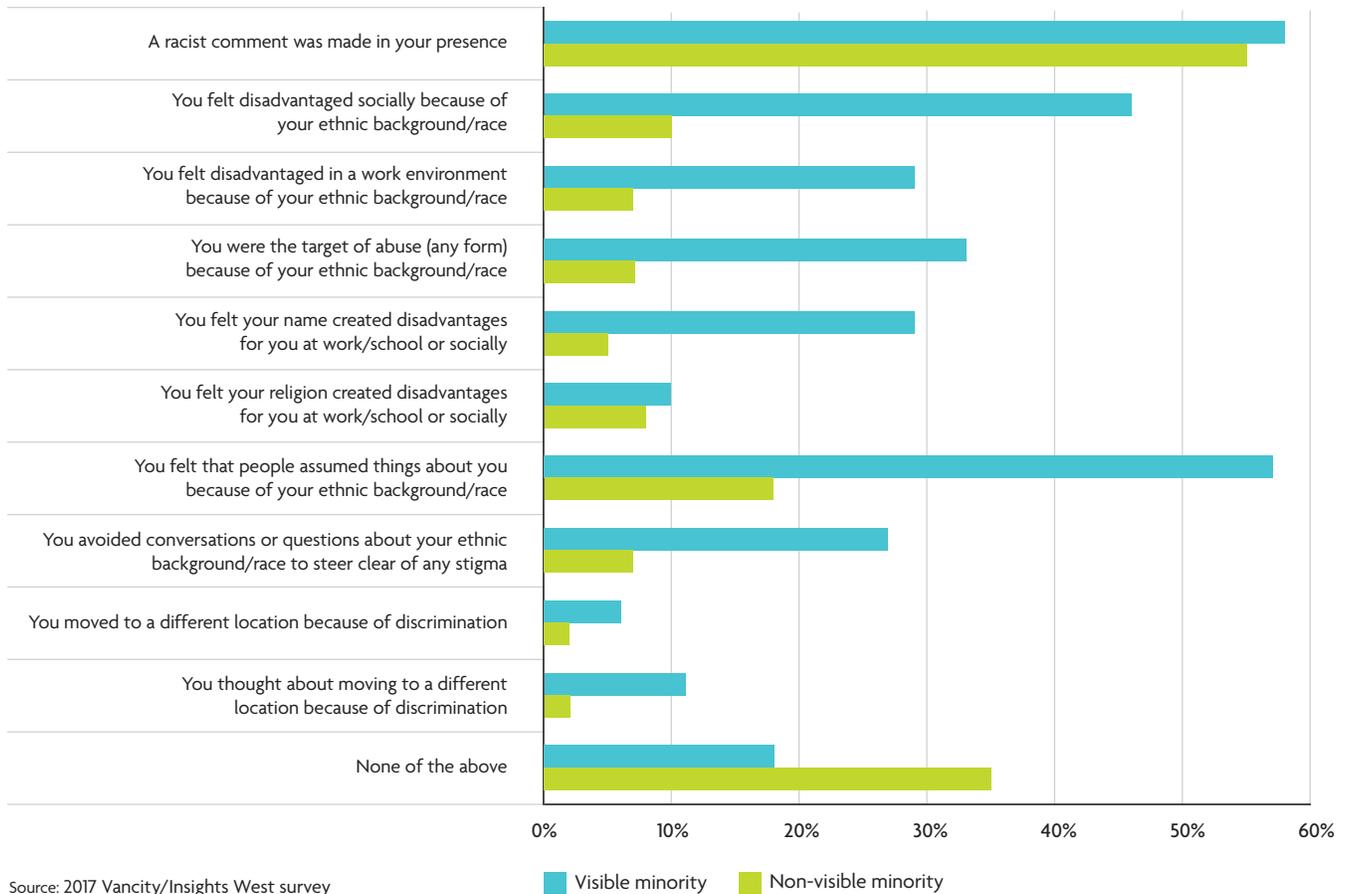
The relative openness to diversity is echoed in respondents' attitudes about personal relationships. They were asked whether they had ever dated or formed a long-term relationship (common-law or marriage) with someone from a different ethnic or racial background, and whether they have ever considered doing so. Two-thirds of respondents answered "yes" to at least one of these questions. The proportion who are open to romantic relationships outside of their ethnic group was highest for men, young people, those living in Vancouver, and members of visible minority groups (with exceptionally high figures for those indicating South or Southeast Asian heritage). There was no difference in the responses on this question from those who were born in Canada vs. immigrants.

## Experiences of discrimination

A key finding of the Vancity survey was the indication that more than 82% of minority respondents have been exposed to some form of discrimination (See table 7 showing the contrast in experiences of visible minorities to those of non-visible minorities). More than half of those answering the survey (56%) said they had been exposed to racist or discriminatory comments and this ratio was fairly consistent regardless

of ethnic background. Nearly 30% reported that people made assumptions about them because of their cultural background. This finding is crucial as it shows that the majority support we express for the idea of diversity and inclusion may not be playing out in our day-to-day lives and experiences, especially when it comes to visible minorities. As one might expect, respondents from minority groups were much more prone to recall this form of discrimination (57%) compared to those identifying themselves as European-Canadian (18%). Nearly half (46%) of minority respondents to the survey believe that their ethnic/racial origin has been associated with some form of disadvantage and 33% have felt that they have been a target of abuse. The same number (29%) believe they have faced discrimination based on their name, while 10% feel that they have faced disadvantages because of their religious affiliation. This should raise significant questions about how we are practicing inclusion, especially when we look to how minority respondents answered survey questions. About a quarter of the minority respondents to the survey have adopted a strategy of avoidance, steering clear of elements of conversations that might expose them to racism or discrimination. Finally, 11% of minority respondents have considered moving to a different location because of racism/discrimination, and 6% indicate that they had already done so.

**Table 7: Experiences of discrimination, by type and cultural group (%)**



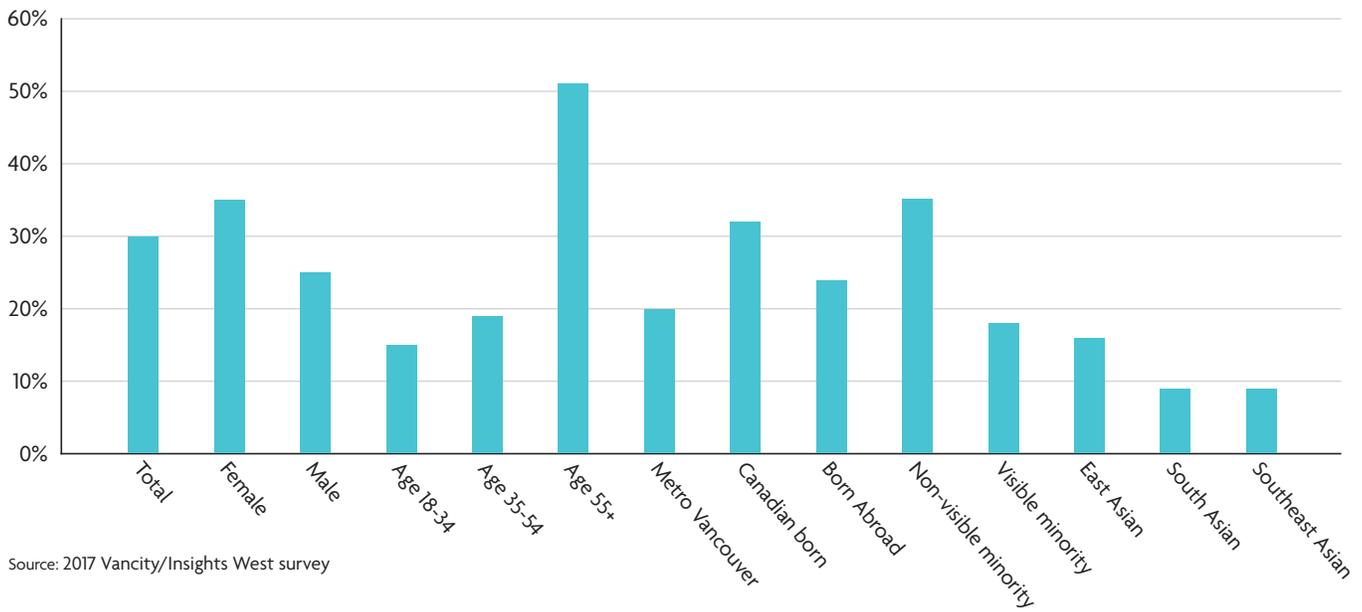
Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

Table 8 on the next page illustrates the degree of discrimination encountered by people in different social categories. Note that the height of the bars is actually inverse to the degree of discrimination, since they indicate the proportion of the particular group that answered “none of the above” for all forms of discrimination. In aggregate, 30% of respondents gave this answer (meaning that about 70% have experienced one form of discrimination or another), but there are many important patterns embedded in the data. The highest rates of “none of the above” answers are associated with women, older people, those born in Canada and those who identified as non-visible minority. Age appears to be the most striking variable in this instance. Younger respondents were far more likely to have experienced some form of discrimination (85%), while those 55 or more years old indicated the least exposure to discrimination (roughly half the population of this group). Data for the three visible minority groups highlighted in the table are also worth mentioning, with only 16% answering “none of the above” among East Asian respondents, and less than 10% for South and Southeast Asian respondents. Finally, given the fact that most immigrants and members of visible minority groups in B.C. live in Metro Vancouver, it should come as no surprise that respondents in that part of the province reported a

greater exposure to discrimination than those living elsewhere (that is, only 20% answered “none of the above” compared with the provincial average of 30%).

The survey added another layer of depth on this issue by asking respondents how often they experienced discrimination personally and how often they witnessed it directed toward others. Even a single instance of discrimination can be traumatic, but exposure to discrimination on a regular basis is particularly harmful. This issue was investigated in four specific contexts: in everyday social interactions (such as restaurants, public transit, and while walking); in the education system; at work; and when using social media and the internet more generally. The data from this part of the survey are highly complex, and are summarized in the table by contrasting the experiences of respondents who identified themselves as members of visible minority groups vs. those who do not. Note that there was an important distinction associated with age. Older respondents were far more likely to report that they had never experienced discrimination than those in the youngest category. Patterns in the data were less clear for men vs. women, and those in Vancouver vs. elsewhere in B.C. Respondents born outside Canada (who are predominantly

**Table 8: Percentage indicating they have experienced no discrimination (answered “none of the above”)**



Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

**Table 9: Percentage who have personal experience of discrimination or racism**

	per cent			
	many times	some times	once	never
<b>Non-visible minority respondents</b>				
Day-to-day social interactions	8	43	8	40
At school	6	26	7	61
At work	7	32	9	53
On social media/online	23	27	2	48
<b>Visible minority respondents</b>				
Day-to-day social interactions	10	49	14	27
At school	11	43	11	35
At work	8	36	14	42
On social media/online	15	34	9	41

Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

of visible minority origin) tended to report higher rates of discrimination than those born in Canada.

As one might expect, rates of reported discrimination – both direct and indirect – are consistently higher for respondents who identified as members of visible minority groups. In the first part of the table, dealing with direct personal discrimination, the unweighted average for the “never experienced discrimination” category (across the

**Table 10: Percentage who have witnessed discrimination/ racism toward others**

	per cent			
	many times	some times	once	never
<b>Non-visible minority respondents</b>				
Day-to-day social interactions	11	54	8	28
At school	9	31	6	54
At work	7	39	6	48
On social media/online	29	35	3	34
<b>Visible minority respondents</b>				
Day-to-day social interactions	22	53	11	14
At school	14	44	9	33
At work	13	39	11	38
On social media/online	34	40	5	21

Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

four social contexts) for Non-visible minorities was 50%, as opposed to nearly 34% for visible minorities. The discrepancy between the two types of respondents was about the same in the table 10, with those who are a non-visible minority about 15% more likely to report that they had not encountered any discrimination in these contexts. Moreover, those in the visible minority category were more likely to have experienced and witnessed discrimination repeatedly (“many times”).

### Hiding behind the screen

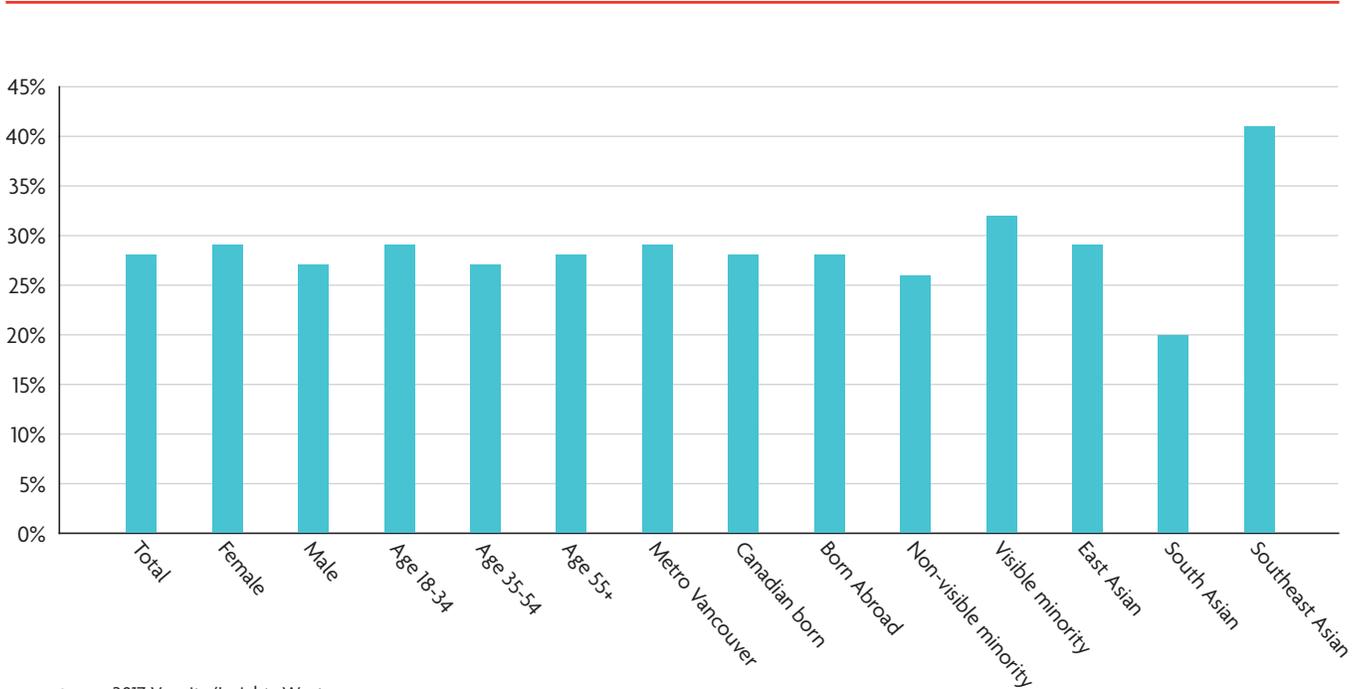
It is interesting to note that the context of discrimination has apparently evolved in recent years. In tables 9 and 10, the number reporting, experiencing or witnessing discrimination online or on social media “many times” was larger than any other category. This is a form of discrimination that was not possible a generation ago – yet now it seems to be the dominant setting for this harmful behaviour.

The reasons for this are unclear but may be a combination of the ability for like-minded people to connect online and the anonymity of many online environments. In January 2017, the CBC reported that Canadians appear to be more hateful online and that the use of hateful language (for example racist, Islamophobic, sexist or otherwise intolerant language) grew by 600% over last year.<sup>5</sup> Speculation over the cause was directed to those sharing these views potentially feeling more emboldened because of larger and troubling racial sentiments being expressed in the United States.

### Racial discrimination yesterday, today and a year from now

When asked to consider whether discrimination and racism have become more prominent over the past year, a majority of respondents (51%) believed that this was not the case, while 11% believe racism has declined, vs. 28% who believe it has increased. Generally speaking, this pattern of responses was quite consistent across social groups, though respondents identifying as visible minorities were slightly more prone to see increases in racism and discrimination than their non-visible minority counterparts (see Table 11 below). Respondents gave very similar answers when asked if they believe that the prevalence of discrimination and racism will change over the coming year (29% expressed a belief that it would increase, 48% that it would remain the same, and 11% that it would decline). Once again, these views were highly consistent across social groups.

**Table 11: Percentage who believe there is more racism today than a year ago**



Source: 2017 Vancity/Insights West survey

## Discussion

There is widespread support for immigration in Canada and among residents of British Columbia. This positive view reflects a perception that immigrants contribute to the economy and, at the same time, do not threaten the labour-market prospects of most long-term Canadian residents. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these statements are based on the average response rates seen in the Vancity survey. Attitudes on these matters vary from highly positive to highly negative – but with the positive predominating. There is, then, a minority of respondents who believe that Canada accepts too many immigrants and that they compete for a scarce number of jobs, reducing opportunities for individuals already in Canada.

The survey was taken a little more than a year after the government of Canada initiated a program to admit some 50,000 Syrian refugees to Canada, and heightened media attention associated with this decision. In general, respondents voiced support for refugees, but with a little more reluctance than is seen in their views on the immigration system as a whole. There is a significant minority of respondents who are skeptical of Canada's refugee program, and a small fraction who firmly oppose it.

The same dynamic is apparent in attitudes about multiculturalism and diversity. A majority of respondents believe that newcomers are entitled to retain their cultural distinctiveness. At the same time, however, more than a third of them hold the opposite view, expecting newcomers to assimilate to pre-existing Canadian culture. Most respondents approve of multiculturalism in broad terms, although some believe immigrants should assimilate (while most do not). Finally, despite the general enthusiasm for multiculturalism, there is a minority who believe it is the wrong policy for Canada.

The questions on experiences of discrimination enable us to see “the other side” of Canadian society in clearer terms. That is, while most British Columbians support immigration and multiculturalism, members of visible minority groups have been exposed to a wide variety of forms of discrimination. More than half of respondents (regardless of their cultural origin) have witnessed racist comments in conversations, and more than 82% of visible minority respondents have felt some form of discrimination targeting them. Visible minority respondents noted that they have been subjected to discrimination based on their ethnicity, name and religion. This discrimination has taken place in a variety of settings such as work, school and in other daily interactions. Many say they have experienced this prejudice repeatedly and many visible minority respondents manage their conversations with others carefully – avoiding subjects

that could expose racist attitudes. Sadly, more than one in 10 have contemplated moving to a new location to escape discrimination, and 6% have actually done so.

Taken together, the majority of British Columbians express cosmopolitan world views that are open to immigration and diversity, but many harbour negative sentiments around these issues and crave cultural conformity. Members of minority groups bear the brunt of discrimination associated with these attitudes and many believe that their opportunities to contribute to Canadian society are lessened.

The differences between female and male respondents to the survey were, by and large, minimal; however the relationship between age and social values is much more clear. Younger respondents value Canada's immigration and refugee systems the most, and are also more cosmopolitan, particularly when compared with respondents who are 55 or older. At the same time, younger respondents are also concerned that newcomers might represent added competition for jobs. They also report higher levels of exposure to discrimination. Academic researchers have suggested that this may be a product of a learning effect – that young people have been educated in an era when issues of racism and discrimination are openly discussed in the education system, and so may be more attentive to these forms of behaviour than their older counterparts.

The survey data also enable us to consider whether there is a relationship between geography, demographics and the formation of social attitudes. For instance, the demographic profiles of Metro Vancouver and the rest of British Columbia are very different. Immigrants comprise 40% of the Metro Vancouver population, vs. less than 14% in the other parts of the province and more than 45% of Metro Vancouver's residents identify with a visible minority group, vs. just over 7% elsewhere in B.C. We might expect this highly varied social geography to translate to different attitudes around the desirability of immigration, refugee settlement, and diversity more generally, but this turns out to be a false assumption. For all three of these issues, neither Vancouver nor the rest of B.C. should be seen as more open or cosmopolitan in inclination. Given that the ratio of visible minorities is so much higher in Vancouver, we see higher instances of discrimination in that part of B.C., but this does not appear to reflect markedly different value structures.

One of the most remarkable findings of the survey is that immigrants and those born in Canada share common values around immigration, refugees, multiculturalism, and the nature of cultural diversity.

While the differences between immigrants and those who were born in Canada may be muted, we see more distinct

patterns when contrasting the attitudes and, especially, the experiences of Canadians who are non-visible minorities vs. a visible minority descent. Visible minority respondents were more likely to express support for multiculturalism and the right of groups to retain their identities. As we have seen repeatedly in the report, they were also much more likely to report experiencing discrimination themselves and/or witnessing discriminatory behaviour toward others. More than anything else, this aspect of the survey reveals a gap between the way Canadians prefer to think of themselves (as open to diversity) and the realities of social life for members of visible minority groups in Canada.

## Recommendations

In February 2017, Vancity took part in a community forum on immigration and racial discrimination hosted by S.U.C.C.E.S.S. (a multicultural agency that assists newcomers to Canada through a variety of services). The forum discussed the contributions of immigrants to our communities and discussed racial discrimination and reconciliation, bringing together those working in academia, politics, medicine and education, representatives from Reconciliation Canada and beyond.

The following recommendations largely came from ideas and discussions generated as part of conversations Vancity has helped to convene on this issue aimed at government, businesses, institutions and individuals to help reduce prejudice and racial discrimination.

### Government (all levels)

- Pursue refugee settlement policies that maximize intercultural engagement.

### Businesses

- Actively recruit from diverse ethnic groups to maximize opportunities for people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to interact and learn from each other.

### Institutions

- Schools and universities should champion the benefits of mixed settings where positive interaction between diverse ethnic groups can occur.

### Individuals

- Act on our moral responsibility to speak up when we see examples of discrimination in public or in the actions of friends and colleagues.

- Recognize our subconscious bias and resolve to combat it
- Make friends with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Reach beyond our comfort zone and find something in common with people who have opposing views.
- Accept that everybody has a right to be heard – dialogue leads to greater understanding, which in turn leads to stronger relationships.

## Authorship and survey methodology

Daniel Hiebert is a Professor of Geography at The University of British Columbia who has led research projects on immigration and cultural diversity in Canada. He has participated in advisory positions in the Canadian government, including the Deputy Minister's Advisory Council of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), and the IRCC Research Advisory Committee. He worked with the B.C. government when it held jurisdiction over settlement and integration services in the province, is a member of the City of Vancouver Mayor's Working Group on Immigration, and has worked closely with non-profit organizations that provide services to immigrants and refugees in Vancouver.

Vancity commissioned Insights West to conduct a survey on immigration, refugees, and diversity. The survey was conducted between January 9-13, 2017, and included 1,207 adult British Columbians (550 respondents identified themselves as either East, South, or Southeast Asian in origin). Survey data were statistically weighted according to 2011 Canadian census figures for age, gender and region. Respondents were statistically representative of the B.C. population. The margin of error of survey data is +/- 2.8 percentage points. Results should be qualified by the fact that respondents were asked to specify their ethnic origin and to choose whether or not they identify as a member of a visible minority group and there was sometimes a mismatch between the answers given to these two questions. In this report note that the 657 respondents in the non-visible minority group includes about 35 individuals who specified an Indigenous heritage (sometimes in combination with other ancestries).

Finally, the survey was conducted exclusively in English, meaning that up to 15.8% of British Columbians could not participate or may have experienced difficulty in doing so.

## Suggested additional reading

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[www.environicsinstitute.org/institute-projects/completed-projects/focus-canada-2016-immigration-and-citizenship](http://www.environicsinstitute.org/institute-projects/completed-projects/focus-canada-2016-immigration-and-citizenship)
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