CANADA 2067: GENERATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES APPEAR WHEN IDENTIFYING FUTURE PRIORITIES

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Canada's 150th anniversary is now behind us. The anniversary gave rise to some reflection about 150 years of accomplishments and failures. But for the most part, Canadians engaged in what might described as a stock-taking of where things currently stood and to a lesser degree how things might evolve in the years ahead. Statistics Canada offered projections to 2036 that pointed to the continued changes to the composition of the population and the growing importance of the share of persons of non-European descent. Otherwise, there was not considerable speculation about what Canada's future might hold.

Nobel Laureate Nils Bohr once remarked that "prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future." That's true. And to be fair, given the difficulty in predicting the impact of technologies on our lives, accurate forecasting is increasingly a challenge. Of course, that doesn't prevent us from asking about the future. In this edition of *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens*, we chose to inquire into what Canadians think the country's priorities will be in 50 years as Canada commemorates the country's 200th anniversary.

To determine how Canadians envision future priorities, the Association for Canadian Studies commissioned the firm Leger Marketing to ask them to rank some 14 concerns by selecting the top ones

in order of importance (the precise question was as follows: Please rank in order the issues that you think will be the principal challenges facing Canada fifty years from now, in 2067). The survey of 1,501 people was conducted online between Oct. 10-14, 2016 with a probabilistic margin of error of 3.9 points, 19 times out of 20.

It is important to note that when asking citizens to project ahead, their responses tend to reflect the things they currently regard as most important to them. The data presented below analyze the priorities selected first by Canadians. Undoubtedly, many of the concerns are intertwined. As such, an effort is made to group the 14 issues listed into the following five categories: social, economic, security, environment and identity.

That which follows offers breakdowns for priorities based on age cohort/generation, language of origin and province of residence. The difference in the selection of priorities often reflects the way in which the issues are understood and framed. In other words, several social and economic concerns are clearly related, but someone may choose to articulate them differently depending on how and by whom such things are interpreted for them. These distinctions are not without importance.

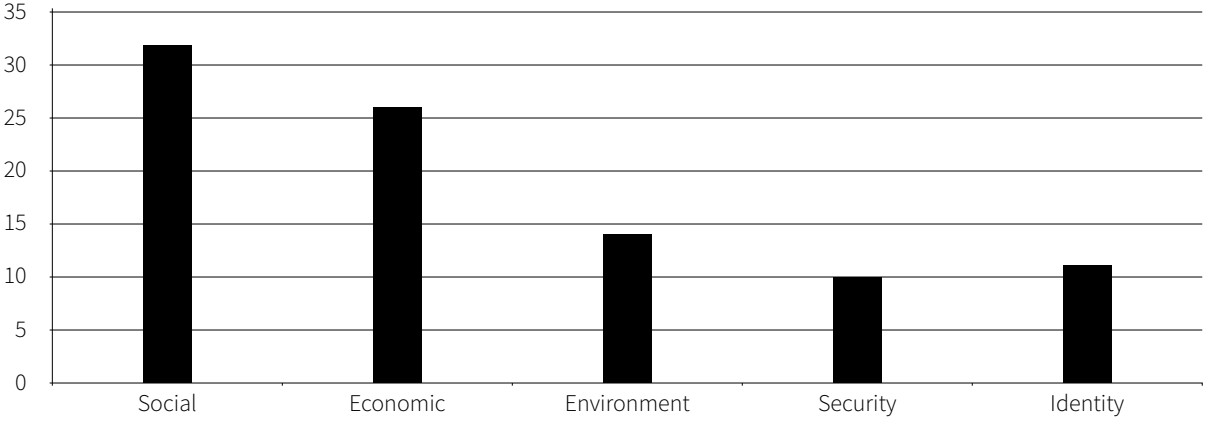
CONCERNS IN 2067

When situated within 'our' selected categories, most Canadians frame their biggest concern as social, with the economic preoccupations landing second on the prescribed list. Thus, the concerns that are expressed can be described as generic or global and, in that regard, not specific to Canada. As we'll observe, there are important age/generational as well as linguistic and regional differences. The concerns around the group of issues that get situated within the category labelled "identity" are chosen by about one in 10 Canadians.

TABLE 1

	Total
Social (Aging and Health)	32
Economic (Employment Opportunities, Owning a Home, Reducing Poverty and Cost of Education)	26
Protecting the Environment	14
Security (Terrorism and Conflict with other nations)	10
Identity (Immigrant Integration, Preserving my language and culture, Relations with Canada's Indigenous Peoples, Accommodating Religious Diversity)	11

CHART 1



When extracting the specific items that fall within categories, it is observed that concerns about the aging of the population is the number one choice across the plurality of responses that are offered by Canadians. Access to health care is second, with the protection of the environment third. A variety of identity issues are cited on the lower end of the priorities. A distinction might be made between what might appear to be "perpetual" concerns (ones that seem less easy to resolve) as opposed to those that are "punctual" (ones that seem cyclical).

THE AGE/GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

In examing perceptions on the basis of age/generation, the three groups below have been identified for purposes of analysis:

Born: 1946-1965 Boomers

Born: 1966-1976 Gen X

Born: 1977-1994 Gen Y or millennial

As observed in the data, the biggest difference in the priorities chosen by Millenials over Baby Boomers is the relatively lesser consideration they assign to social issues (aging and health) in marked difference with the importance they attribute to economic matters. Indeed, the Millenials assign a similar level of importance to environmental concerns as they do to social ones. All this in stark contrast with the importance that the Boomers attribute to social matters, which is nearly 25 points greater than that of Millenials.

On nearly all the issues, the generation Xers fall somewhere between the Millenials and Boomers. They are closer to the Boomers on the social concerns while somewhat closer to the Millenials on the economic ones.

TABLE 2

	Total
Aging of the Population	17%
Access to Health Care	15%
Protecting the Environment	14%
Employment Opportunities	11%
Owning a home	7%
Terrorism	7%
Reducing Poverty	6%
Immigrant Integration	4%
Preserving my language and culture	3%
Conflicts with other nations	3%
Relations with Canada's Indigenous Peoples	2%
The cost of post-secondary education	2%
Meaningful Participation in our Democracy	2%
Accommodating Religious Diversity	2%

CHART 2

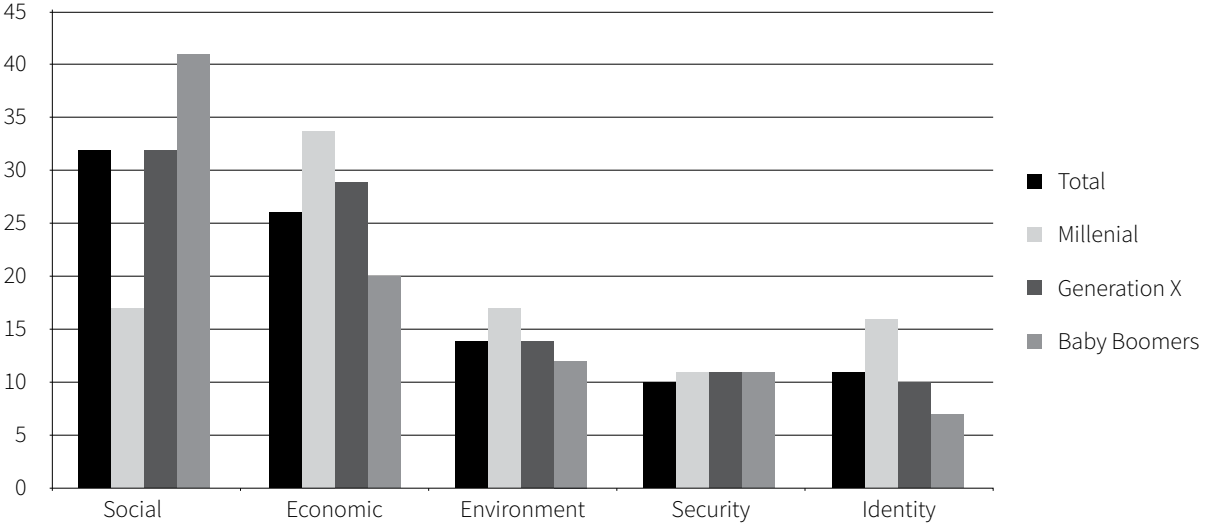


TABLE 3

	Millennial	Gen X	Boomers
Demographic (Aging and Health)	17	32	41
Protecting the Environment	17	14	12
Economic (Employment Opportunities, Owning a Home, Reducing Poverty and Cost of Education)	34	29	20
Security (Terrorism and Conflict with other nations)	11	11	11
Identity (Immigrant Integration, Preserving my language and culture, Relations with Canada's Indigenous Peoples, Accommodating Religious Diversity)	16	10	7

When looking at the specific items chosen on the basis of the age/generational breakdown, it is observed that younger Canadians are less concerned with population aging and access to health care than others. They are more concerned about environmental protection and home ownership.

LANGUAGE DIVIDE

When it comes to language background, the social concerns are most pronounced amongst francophones, who put them well above the economic considerations. For anglophone Canadians, the social and economic concerns are roughly equal. For their part, the allophones put the economic concerns on top while appearing much less preoccupied by the environmental future.

When looking at the specific issues on the basis of the linguistic background of the survey participants, it is observed that there are significant gaps between francophones and allophones on such things as environmental protection and employment opportunities. Francophones also tend to cite the preservation of language and culture to a greater degree than do others. Yet with 7% of respondents putting it first on their list of priorities, it doesn't rank as high as issues classified as social and economic. This does not imply that francophones do not regard the preservation of language and culture as vital. A recent Leger-Association for Canadian Studies survey revealed that nearly six in 10 francophones were worried about the next generation abandoning their language and culture (18% were very worried and 40% were somewhat worried). Overall, some 42% of Canadians were worried about the next generation abandoning their language and culture. As important as such concerns

TABLE 4

	Total	Millennial (18-34)	Gen X (35-54)	Boomers (55 +)
Aging of the Population	17%	17%	11%	23%
Access to Health Care	15%	15%	6%	18%
Protecting the Environment	14%	14%	17%	12%
Employment Opportunities	11%	11%	13%	8%
Owning a home	7%	7%	10%	6%
Terrorism	7%	7%	7%	8%
Reducing Poverty	6%	6%	6%	5%
Immigrant Integration	4%	4%	6%	2%
Preserving my language and culture	3%	3%	3%	3%
Conflicts with other nations	3%	3%	4%	3%
Relations with Canada's Indigenous Peoples	2%	2%	3%	1%
The cost of post-secondary education	2%	2%	5%	1%
Meaningful Participation in our Democracy	2%	2%	2%	2%
Accommodating Religious Diversity	2%	2%	4%	1%

CHART 3

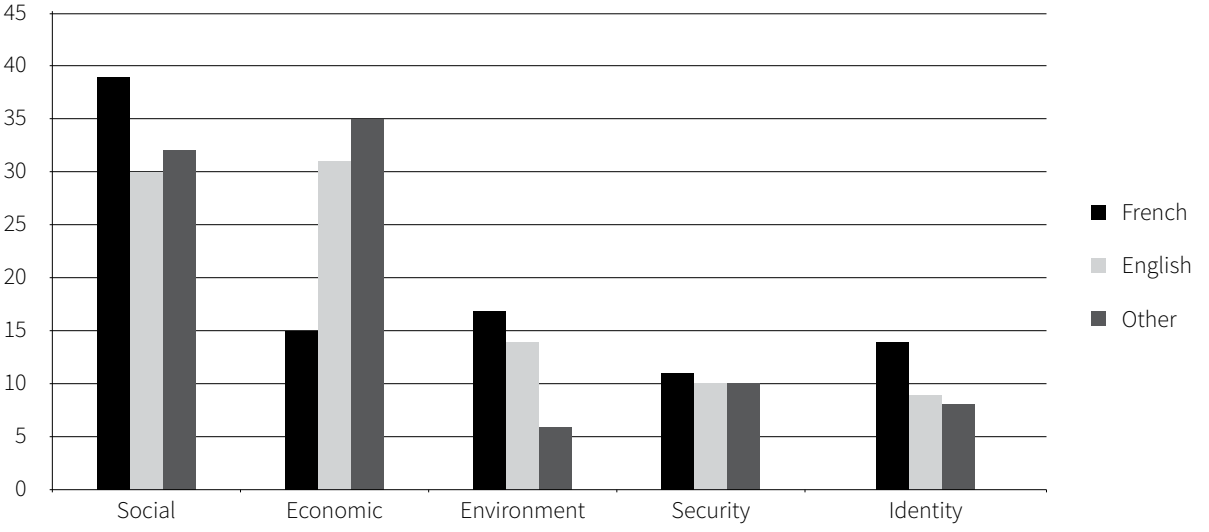


TABLE 5

	Total	French	English	Other
Social	32%	39%	30%	32%
Protecting the Environment	14%	17%	14%	6%
Economic	26%	15%	31%	35%
Security	10%	11%	10%	10%
Identity	11%	14%	9%	8%

are when standing on their own, in terms of relative importance, they are outweighed by people's social and economic considerations.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

When considering the views of the provinces and regions, the social concerns are most often expressed in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. For their part, the residents of Manitoba and Saskatchewan chose social over economic concerns, whereas British Columbians, Ontarians and Albertans choose economic over demographic considerations. Environmental concerns are more likely to be selected in Quebec and British Columbia. Security concerns get somewhat more traction in Alberta, as do issues of identity in Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

TABLE 6

	Total	French	English	Other
Aging of the Population	17%	21%	16%	15%
Access to Health Care	15%	18%	14%	17%
Protecting the Environment	14%	17%	14%	6%
Employment Opportunities	11%	5%	13%	17%
Owning a home	7%	2%	9%	7%
Terrorism	7%	10%	6%	8%
Reducing Poverty	6%	6%	6%	8%
Immigrant Integration	4%	4%	3%	5%
Preserving my language and culture	3%	7%	2%	0%
Conflicts with other nations	3%	1%	4%	2%
Relations with Canada's Indigenous Peoples	2%	1%	2%	1%
The cost of post-secondary education	2%	2%	3%	3%
Meaningful Participation in our Democracy	2%	0%	2%	2%
Accommodating Religious Diversity	2%	2%	2%	2%

CHART 4

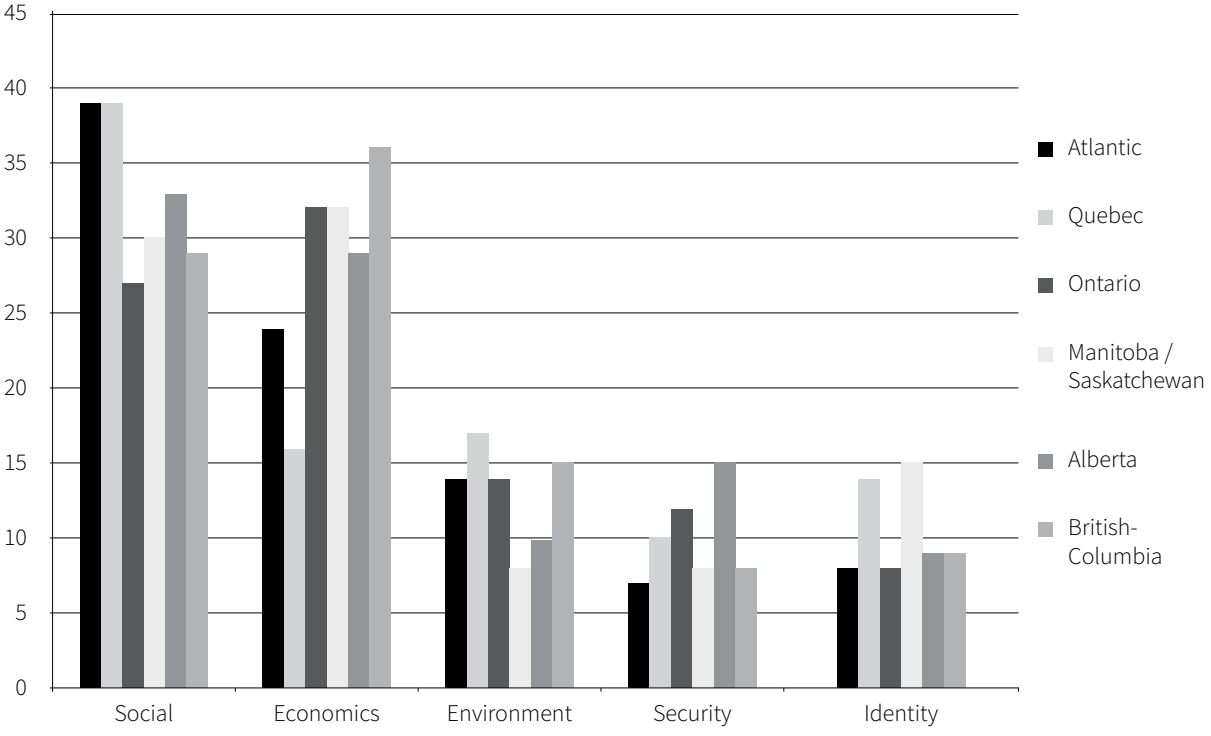


TABLE 7

	Total	Atlantic	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Social	32%	39%	39%	27%	30%	33%	29%
Protecting the Environment	14%	14%	17%	14%	8%	10%	15%
Economic	26%	24%	16%	32%	32%	29%	36%
Security	10%	7%	10%	12%	8%	15%	8%
Identity	11%	8%	14%	8%	15%	9%	9%

TABLE 8

	Total	Atlantic	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Aging of the Population	17%	23%	21%	14%	10%	22%	15%
Access to Health Care	15%	16%	18%	13%	20%	11%	14%
Protecting the Environment	14%	14%	17%	14%	8%	10%	15%
Employment Opportunities	11%	11%	6%	14%	9%	16%	11%
Owning a home	7%	7%	3%	9%	8%	9%	12%
Terrorism	7%	7%	8%	7%	5%	12%	5%
Reducing Poverty	6%	4%	5%	6%	10%	4%	10%
Immigrant Integration	4%	2%	4%	3%	6%	5%	3%
Preserving my language and culture	3%	3%	7%	2%	0%	4%	3%
Conflicts with other nations	3%	0%	2%	5%	3%	3%	3%
Relations with Canada's Indigenous Peoples	2%	0%	1%	1%	5%	0%	3%
The cost of post-secondary education	2%	2%	2%	3%	5%	0%	3%
Meaningful Participation in our Democracy	2%	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%	2%
Accommodating Religious Diversity	2%	3%	2%	2%	4%	0%	0%

Turning to the specifics, population aging resonates to a greater extent in the Atlantic, Quebec and Alberta. Owning a home is a slightly greater concern in B.C. than elsewhere. Environmental protection is cited more often by Quebecers, while Ontarians are a bit more inclined to select employment opportunities as a concern than are respondents from other provinces.

CONCLUSION

Albert Einstein stated that he never thinks of the future, as "it comes soon enough." Indeed our survey results suggest that when asked about future priorities, the natural inclination is to transfer current preoccupations onto the future and not take into account the type of change that might occur and result in a shift in the importance of things to come.