

MOWAT RESEARCH #184 | FEBRUARY 2019



Portraits 2017

# Regional Differences in Ontario

BY KIRAN ALWANI & ANDREW PARKIN

## Mowat Centre

ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY

**munkschool**  
OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS & PUBLIC POLICY



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# Acknowledgements

The Mowat Centre would like to thank a number of colleagues who provided advice on the methodology and the questionnaire, including Heather Marshall and Lucas Marshall (Mission Research), Keith Neuman (Environics Institute), Alain-G. Gagnon (Université du Québec à Montréal), Bob Wolfe (School of Policy Studies, Queen's University), Claire Durand (Université de Montréal), and Peter Loewen (School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto). The authors would also like to thank Khuong Truong, Brad Seward and Deepti Kapadia for conducting additional data analysis for this report, as well as Elaine Stam and Reuven Shlozberg for their roles in producing this report. Finally, we would like to thank the report's anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.



The *Portraits 2017* survey was conducted with support from Alain-G. Gagnon, holder of the Canada Research Chair in Quebec and Canadian Studies and director at the *Centre d'analyse politique: Constitution et Fédéralisme*, based at UQAM.

## Authors

### KIRAN ALWANI

Policy Associate

Kiran joined the Mowat Centre in October 2017, and has since contributed to a variety of social and economic policy projects. Previously, she has worked in a range of research and policy analysis roles, including with the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, the Canada-ASEAN Business Council, and the Conference Board of Canada. Prior to her Master's, Kiran worked in communications, public engagement, and development at the Institute for Canadian Citizenship. She holds a Master of Public Policy and Global Affairs degree from the University of British Columbia.

### ANDREW PARKIN

Director

Andrew Parkin is the Director of the Mowat Centre. Andrew has previously held a variety of positions including Director General of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC), Associate Executive Director and Director of Research and Program Development at the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, and Co-Director of the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.

## Portraits 2017

The *Portraits 2017* series analyzes survey data from a comprehensive study of public opinion in Ontario and Quebec. The survey focused on a wide range of subjects, including federalism, the economy, social programs, international trade, immigration and diversity, and relations with Indigenous peoples. The data provides valuable new evidence about whether and how citizens' attitudes towards one another, to the federation and to Canada are evolving at a time of considerable change and uncertainty in the wider global political context.

## Mowat Centre

ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY

The Mowat Centre is an independent public policy think tank located at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto. The Mowat Centre is Ontario's non-partisan, evidence-based voice on public policy. It undertakes collaborative applied policy research, proposes innovative research-driven recommendations, and engages in public dialogue on Canada's most important national issues.

MOWATCENTRE.CA

 @MOWATCENTRE

439 UNIVERSITY AVENUE  
SUITE 2200, TORONTO, ON  
M5G 1Y8 CANADA

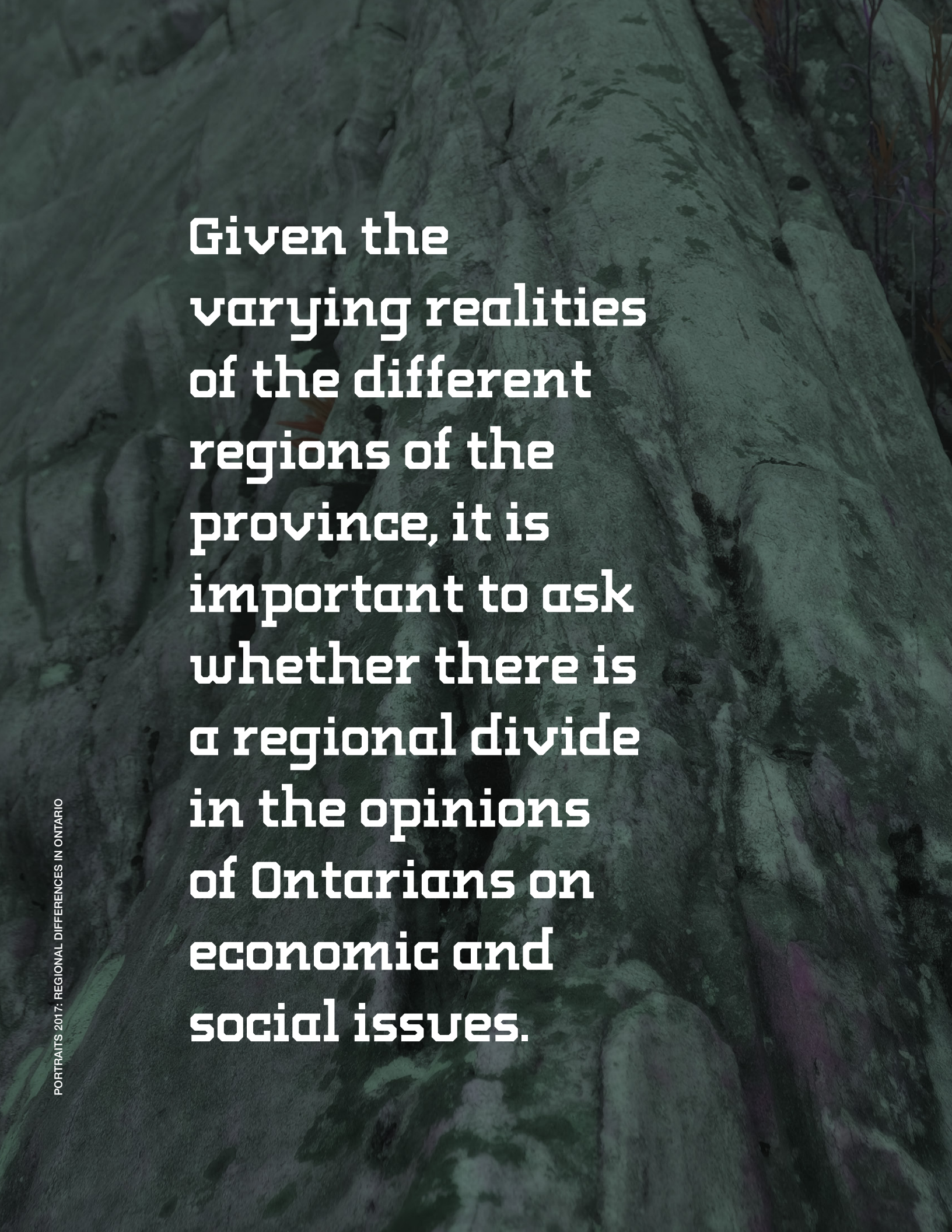
**munk school**  
OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS & PUBLIC POLICY



©2019 ISBN 978-1-77259-085-2

# **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Values</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Economic Outlook</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>International Trade</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Impact of Governments</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Immigration and Diversity</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Policy Priorities</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Attachment</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendix: Methodology</b>	<b>23</b>

A dark, textured background of a rock face with a person climbing. The text is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**Given the  
varying realities  
of the different  
regions of the  
province, it is  
important to ask  
whether there is  
a regional divide  
in the opinions  
of Ontarians on  
economic and  
social issues.**

# Introduction

Ontario is Canada's largest province in terms of population, and the second largest in terms of territory. Every facet of the province is diverse, from its landscape, ranging from the northern lowlands to the rocky Shield to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence floodplain, to its people, with origins spanning every region and culture of the globe, to its economy, combining resource extraction, high-tech manufacturing and globalized financial services.

This diversity means that no two regions of the province are alike. Population and economic growth across the regions, for instance, have varied significantly over the years. Between 2011 and 2016, the population of Ontario's four largest metropolitan areas — Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge — experienced the fastest growth at 5.9 per cent, while smaller communities grew at less than half this pace and some hardly grew at all.<sup>1</sup> In fact, some census divisions in the North, Southwest and East have experienced a decline in their populations.<sup>2</sup> The patterns of population aging are also starkly uneven, with smaller communities aging faster than others. The Greater Toronto Area is the only one of the province's six regions that currently has more children (age 14 and under) than seniors.<sup>3</sup>

Ontario's regions have had different experiences of employment and income growth. From 2003 to 2017, the Greater Toronto Area and Central Ontario accounted for more than 93 per cent of the new jobs created in the province. During the same time period, Northern Ontario saw its employment decline by 23,600 net jobs.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, some cities in Southwestern Ontario and in the arc surrounding the Greater Toronto Area have seen sharp declines in employment income, mainly due to the loss of manufacturing jobs.<sup>5</sup>

The make-up of the Ontario population also varies greatly from one region to another. For instance, while 51.4 per cent of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) population identifies as visible minorities, visible minorities make up only about four per

1 Andrew Parkin (2018) "A Different Ontario: Population." Mowat Centre. [https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/172\\_ADO\\_population.pdf](https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/172_ADO_population.pdf).

2 Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017) "2016 Census Highlights: Factsheet 1." <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-1.html>.

3 Andrew Parkin (2018) "A Different Ontario: Population." Mowat Centre. [https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/172\\_ADO\\_population.pdf](https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/172_ADO_population.pdf).

4 Ontario Ministry of Finance (2018) "Chapter II: Economic Outlook." In Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/fallstatement/2018/chapter-2.html>.

5 Andrew Parkin (2018) "A Different Ontario: Income & Employment." Mowat Centre. [https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/173\\_ADO\\_income\\_and\\_employment.pdf](https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/173_ADO_income_and_employment.pdf).

cent of the populations of Greater Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Belleville.<sup>6</sup> The majority (70.2%) of Ontario’s immigrant population resides in the Toronto CMA.<sup>7</sup> Educational attainment also varies among regions, with the highest proportion of adults with a university degree residing in urban areas such as Ottawa, Toronto and Guelph.<sup>8</sup>

Given the varying realities of the different regions of the province, it is important to ask whether there is a regional divide in the opinions of Ontarians on economic and social issues.<sup>9</sup> Of particular interest is the question of whether there are significant differences between the faster growing and more diverse urban regions, and the province’s more rural and remote regions. While pollsters typically report aggregated opinions across all regions of Ontario, it would be unwise to assume that their figures are as representative of Ontarians living in Mississauga or Hamilton as they are of those in Belleville or Elliott Lake.

To explore this, we analyze data from the Mowat Centre’s *Portraits 2017* public opinion survey in this report, which had an unusually large sample size for the province (n=2,000). This sample allows the *Portraits 2017* study to look at opinions in Ontario across the following eight regions:<sup>10</sup>

- » Toronto 416 (n=234)
- » Greater Toronto Area (GTA) 905 (n=261)
- » Ottawa Belt (n=246)
- » Hamilton-Niagara region (n=250)
- » 401 Corridor (n=265)
- » East (n=245)
- » North (n=253)
- » Southwest (n=242)

6 Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017) “2016 Census Highlights: Factsheet 9.” <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-9.html>.

7 Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017) “2016 Census Highlights: Factsheet 8.” <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-8.html>.

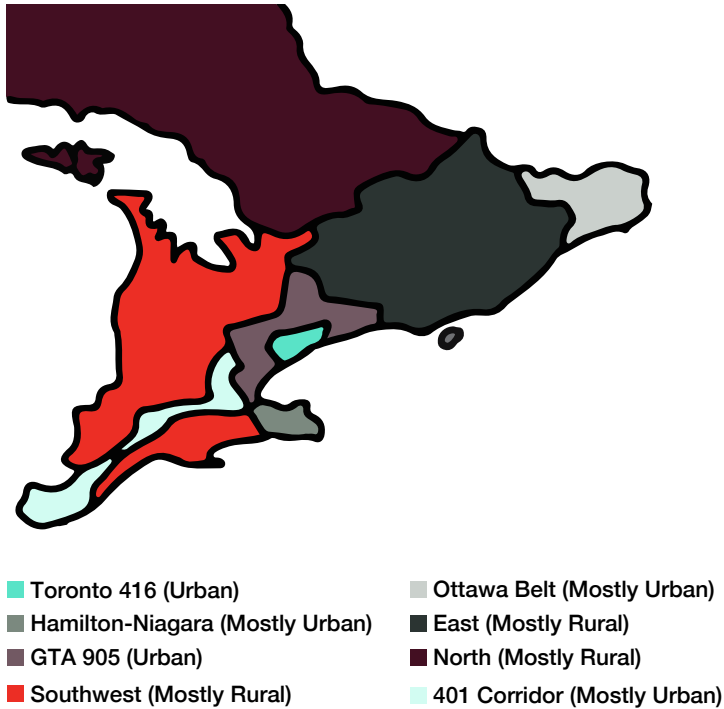
8 Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017) “2016 Census Highlights: Factsheet 12.” <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-12.html>.

9 This question recently has been explored at the national level by others including: Michael Adams and David Jamieson (2019) “Urban and Rural Canada May be Closer than We Think,” *iPolitics* (January 10, 2019), <https://ipolitics.ca/2019/01/10/urban-and-rural-canada-may-be-closer-than-we-think/> and Sean Speer (2018) “Growing Disconnect between Urban and Rural Canada,” *The Toronto Star* (August 3, 2018), <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2018/08/03/growing-disconnect-between-urban-and-rural-canada.html>.

10 Sample sizes are unweighted.

## FIGURE 1

### Ontario regions referred to in this study



Source: Mission Research

The regional sub-samples of around 250 respondents, while relatively small, are large enough to allow for results to be compared across these eight regions, with the caveat that, as the margin of error is larger,<sup>11</sup> relatively small differences between regions should be disregarded.

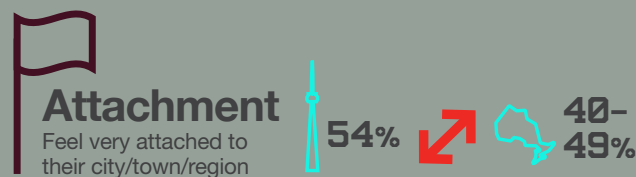
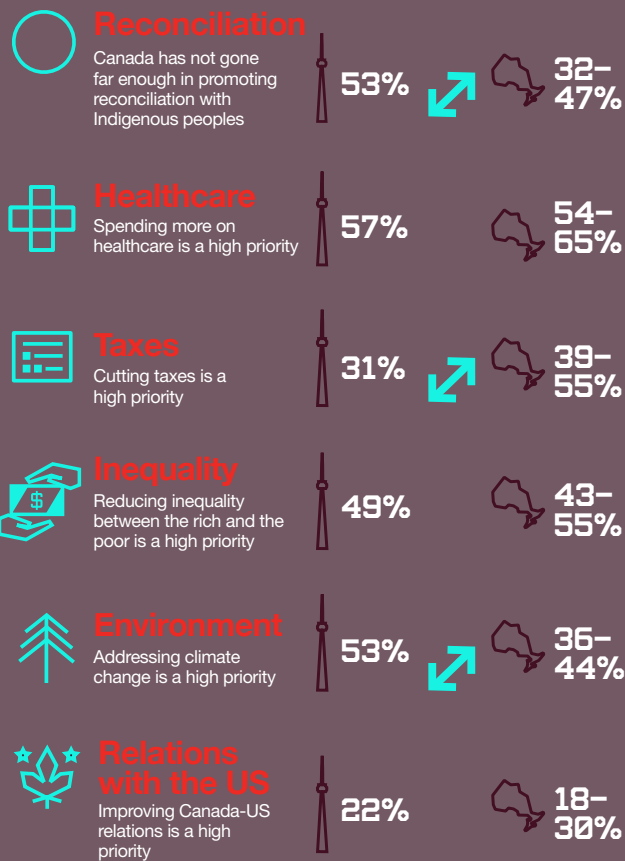
This report explores whether and how the opinions of Ontarians from different regions differ across key issues related to the economy, immigration and diversity, international trade, relations with Indigenous peoples, the impact of government and policy priorities. In particular, the report explores whether there is an urban-rural divide in opinions on these issues.

<sup>11</sup> The margin of error for each regional sample is approximately plus or minus 6 percentage points.

# Regional Differences in Ontario: Toronto as an Outlier?



## Views on Policy Issues



## Immigration

Feelings on accepting more immigrants from conflict areas

### WE SHOULD



### WE SHOULD NOT



## Trust in Institutions

Feel local police are treating non-whites as fairly as whites



Feel government has a negative impact on people's lives





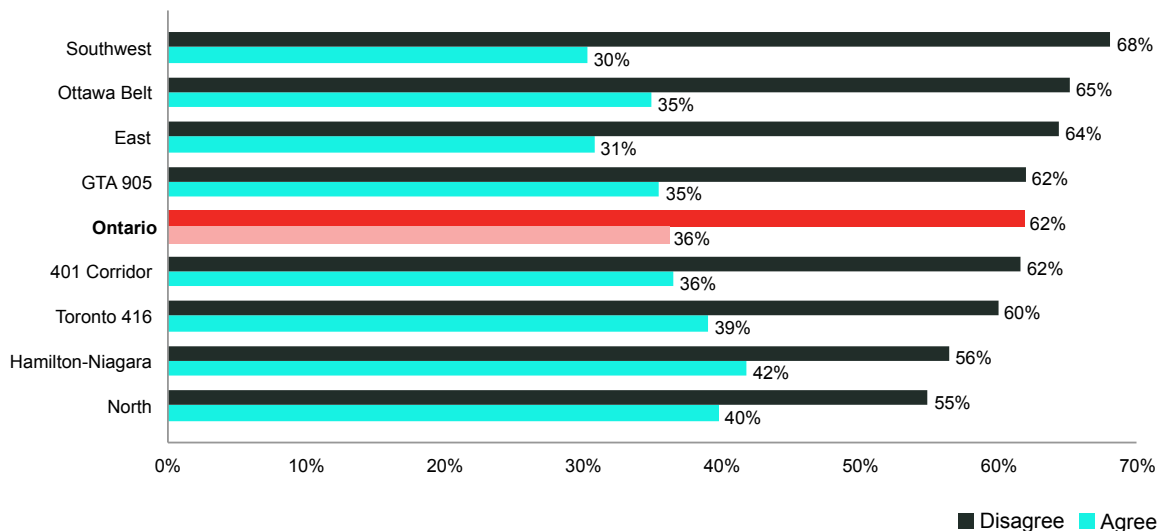
# Values

The question of whether citizens in different regions hold different values is one that was put directly to the survey respondents. *Portraits 2017* asked Ontarians whether they agree or disagree with the statement that “Canadians basically have the same values regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas.” A majority in every region of the province disagree, with disagreement ranging between 55 per cent among those in the North of the province to 68 per cent among those in the Southwest. At the same time, between 30 and 42 per cent of Ontarians, depending on their region, agree that urban and rural residents have the same values.

It is interesting to note, however, that there is no particular urban-rural divide in opinions on this question – meaning that it is not the case that urban Ontarians hold one view, and rural Ontarians another. Views in the North of the province are more or less the same as those in the more built-up area from Hamilton to Niagara. Similarly, views in the urban 905 region resemble those in the more rural East.

**FIGURE 2**

**Q: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
Canadians basically have the same values regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas**

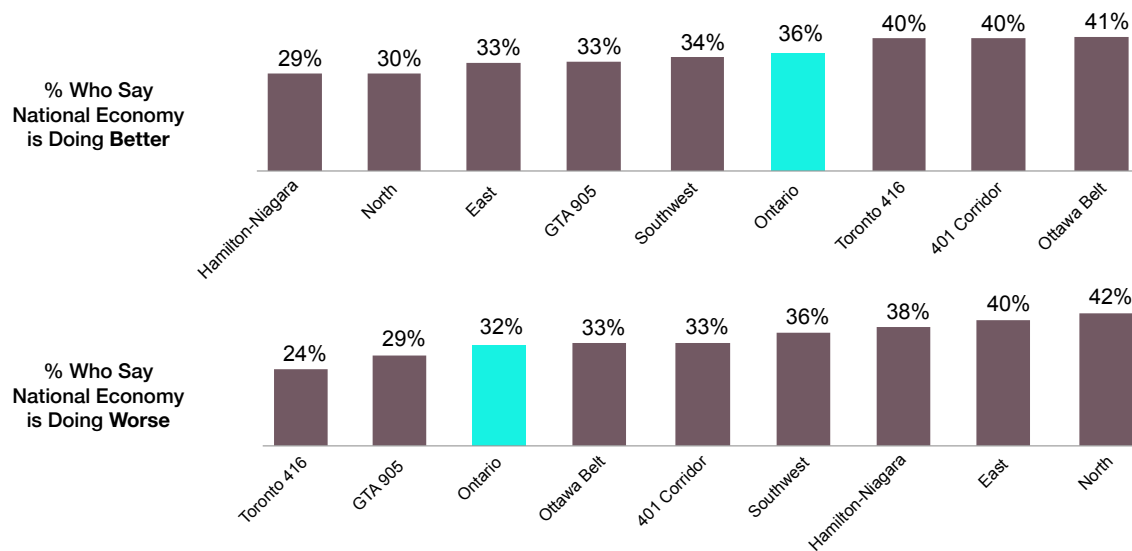


# Economic Outlook

The perceptions of Ontarians about the performance of the national economy vary based on region. While four in ten residents of Toronto (40%), the 401 Corridor (40%) and the Ottawa Belt (41%) say that the national economy has been doing better over the past five years, only 29 per cent of the population of Hamilton-Niagara and 30 per cent of the population of North feels the same way. Conversely, about four in ten residents of Hamilton-Niagara (38%), East (40%) and the North (42%) say that the national economy is doing worse, compared with just 24 per cent in Toronto.

## FIGURES 3 & 4

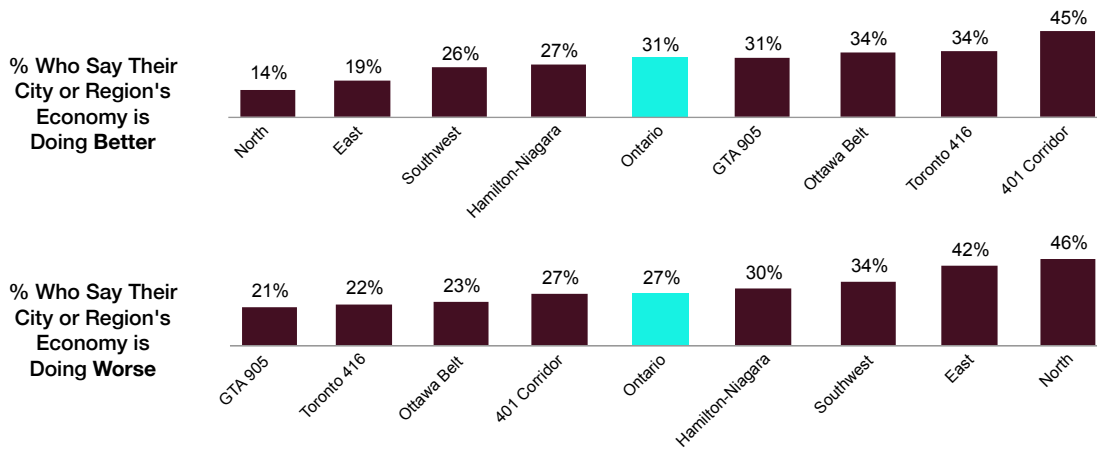
**Q: Over the past five years, would you say the following are doing better, about the same, or worse? Canada's national economy**



The findings are similar with respect to the performance of the city or regional economy. Residents in urban centres have a more positive outlook compared to rural residents – 45 per cent of those in the 401 Corridor, and 34 per cent of those in Toronto and the Ottawa Belt say that their city or region's economy is doing better, compared with just 14 per cent of those in the North and 19 per cent of those in the East. Similarly, 42 per cent of residents in the East and 46 per cent in the North say that their region's economy is doing worse, compared to only one in five residents of GTA (21%), Toronto (22%) and the Ottawa Belt (23%).

## FIGURES 5 & 6

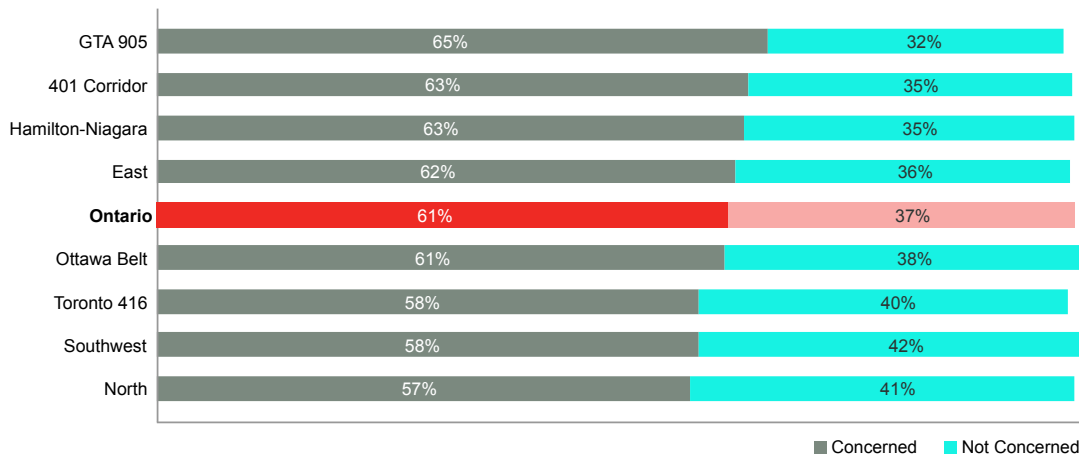
**Q: Over the past five years, would you say the following are doing better, about the same, or worse? The economy in the city or region where you live**



While urban populations generally have a more positive assessment of the economy, Ontarians across all regions seem to be worried about their future prospects in terms of employment. A majority of Ontarians in each region are concerned about themselves or a member of their immediate family finding or keeping a stable, full-time job. Remarkably, the respondents in the 905 region of the GTA, who are the least likely to say that their region's economy is doing worse, are the most concerned about their own job security. Conversely, respondents in the North, who are the most likely to say that their region's economy is doing worse, are the least concerned out of all regions about keeping their own jobs.

## FIGURE 7

**Q: How concerned are you about yourself or a member of your immediate family finding or keeping a stable, full-time job?**



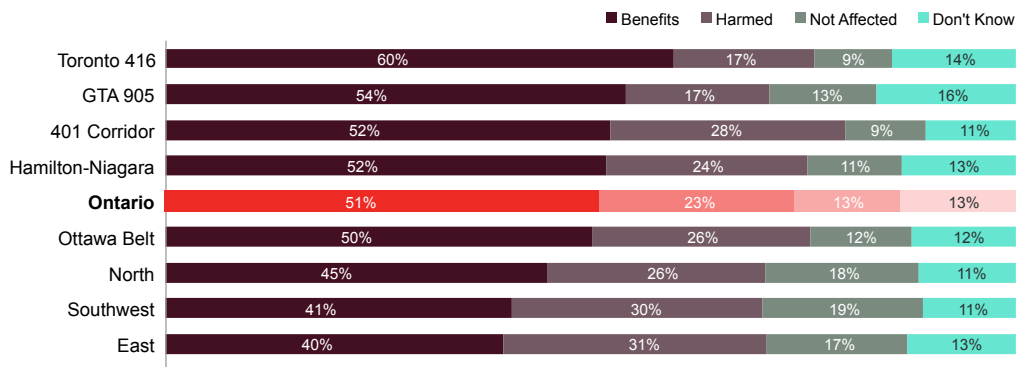
# International Trade

Ontarians have favourable views of international trade. Across all regions, a majority of Ontarians support Canada negotiating new trade agreements with other countries and say that international trade agreements benefit Canada and the province.

There are, however, some regional differences in opinion on the question of whether international trade agreements benefit local communities. While majorities in urban and suburban areas such as Toronto, the 905 region, the 401 Corridor and Hamilton-Niagara say that international trade agreements benefit their local communities either a great deal or a little, the proportion holding this view dips below 50 per cent in the predominantly rural regions of the North, Southwest and East (though in every region, the proportion saying that trade agreements are beneficial to their local communities outweighs the proportion saying they are harmful).

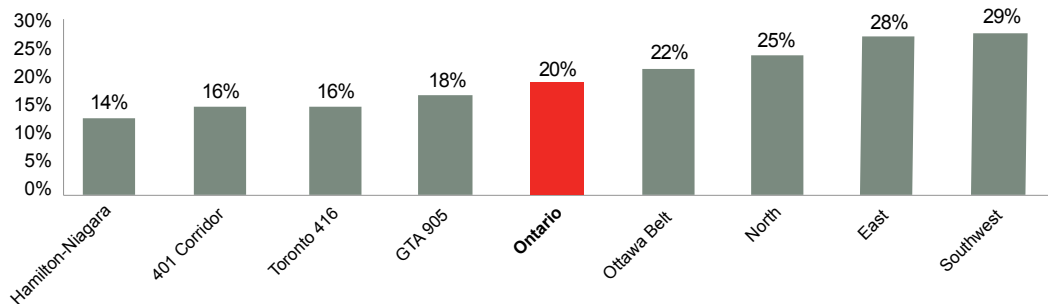
**FIGURE 8**

**Q: How much do you think each of the following benefits, is harmed, or is not affected either way by international trade agreements? Your local community**



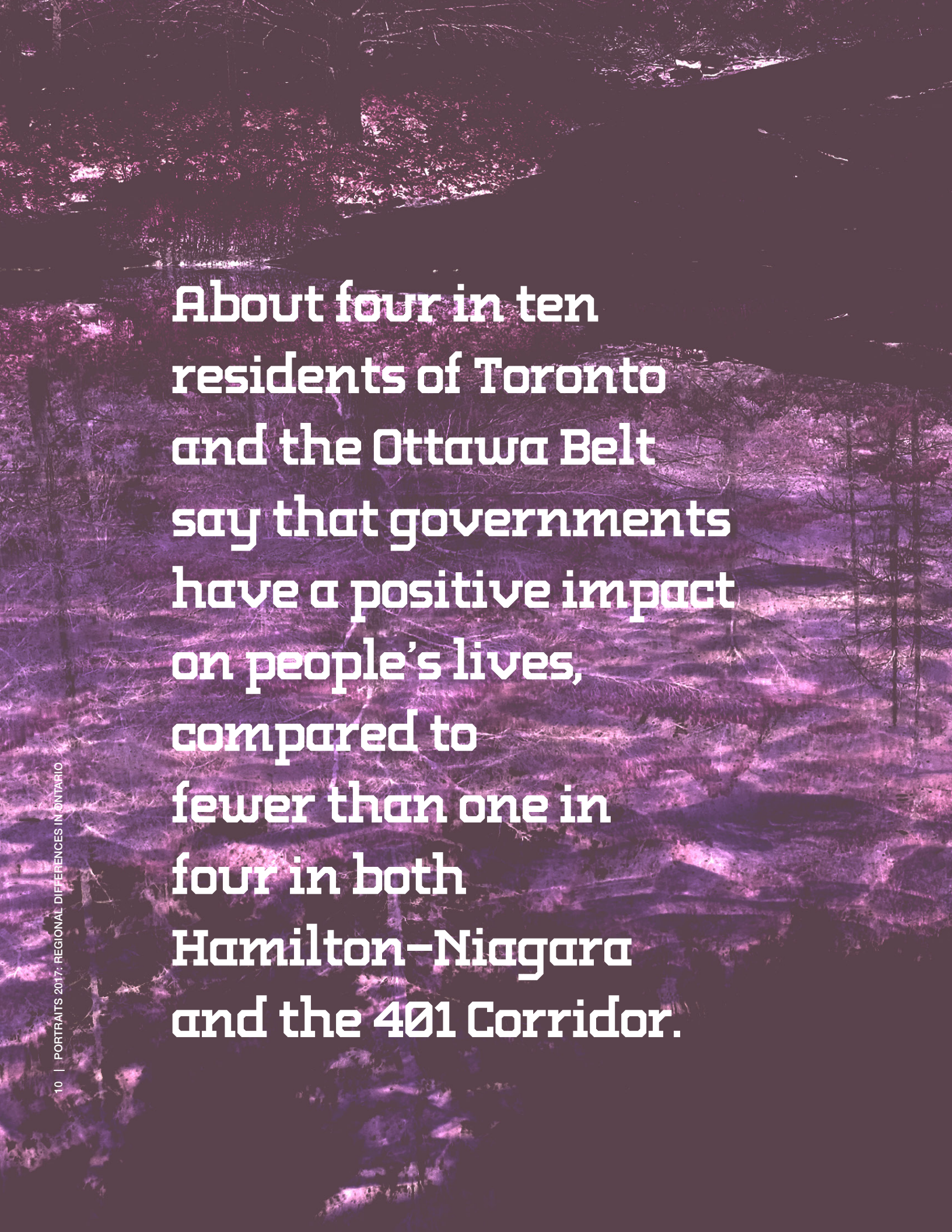
**FIGURE 9**

**Q: Gap (in points) between % saying trade benefits Canada and trade benefits local community**



*There are, however, some regional differences in opinion on the question of whether international trade agreements benefit local communities.*

This pattern can also be illustrated by looking at the gap between the proportion of respondents saying that international trade agreements benefit Canada, and the proportion saying trade benefits their local community. This gap is smaller in Hamilton-Niagara, the 401 Corridor and Toronto, but larger in the Northern, Eastern and Southwestern regions of the province (see Figure 9). It is possible that these differences in opinion regarding the impact of trade on local communities are based on the different underlying economic conditions of each region, including the extent to which they were affected by the implementation of free trade agreements in the late 1980s and early 1990s, or hit by and have subsequently recovered from the last economic recession.

An aerial photograph of a forested landscape with a winding road. The trees are mostly bare, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The road curves through the terrain, and there are some small structures or buildings visible in the distance.

**About four in ten residents of Toronto and the Ottawa Belt say that governments have a positive impact on people's lives, compared to fewer than one in four in both Hamilton-Niagara and the 401 Corridor.**

# The Impact of Governments

There are some regional differences in the views of Ontarians on how governments impact their lives.

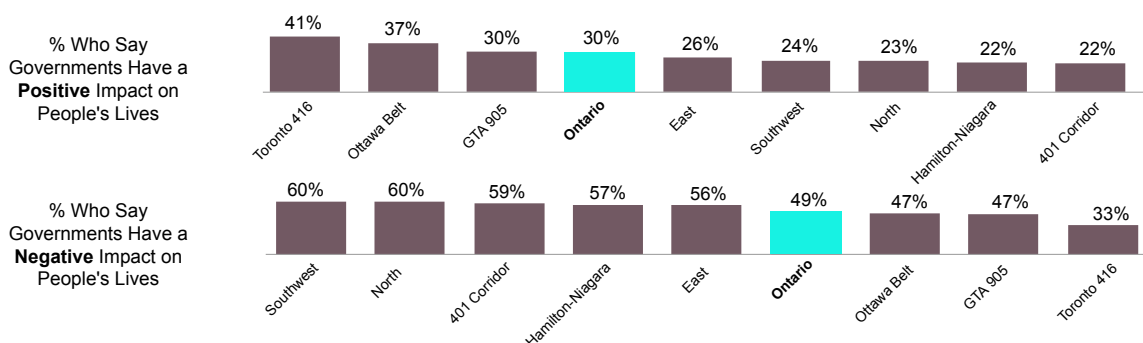
About four in ten residents of Toronto (41%) and the Ottawa Belt (37%) say that governments have a positive impact on people’s lives, compared to fewer than one in four (22%) in both Hamilton-Niagara and the 401 Corridor. About six in ten residents of the Southwest, North, 401 Corridor, Hamilton-Niagara and East say that governments have a negative impact on people’s lives, compared with only one in three (33%) in Toronto.

It is interesting to note that, with the exception of Toronto – where people are more likely to say that governments have a positive impact (41%) than a negative one (33%) – people from every other region are more likely to say that governments have a negative impact on their lives.

These results are suggestive of a slight difference of opinion between the urban and rural areas of the province, since Toronto, its surrounding 905 region, and the Ottawa region are the most likely to say that governments impact people positively and the least likely to say that they impact them negatively. Having said this, the situation is not quite that simple as, along with the mostly rural regions such as the Southwest and the North, mostly urban regions such as Hamilton-Niagara and the 401 Corridor are among those who view governments’ impact least favourably.

## FIGURES 10 & 11

**Q: These days, what kind of impact do you think governments have on people’s lives? A positive impact, a negative impact, or governments don’t have much impact on most people’s lives.**



# Immigration and Diversity

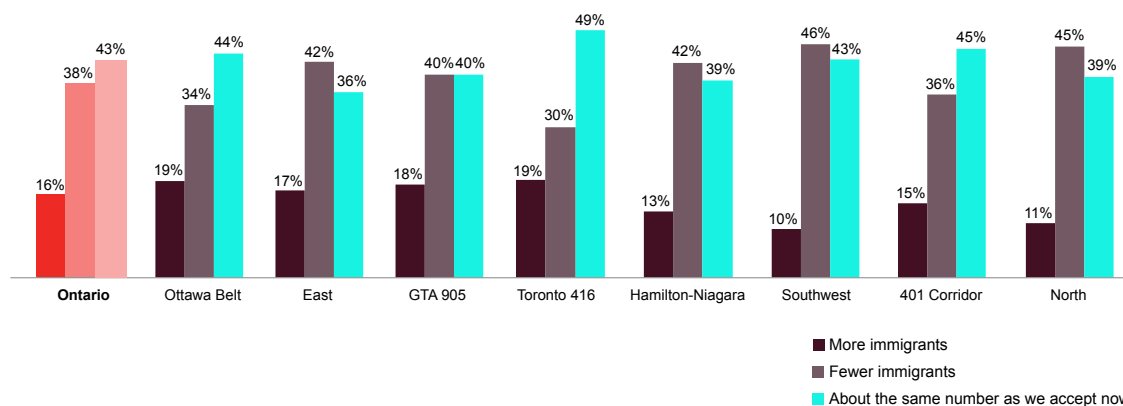
With one exception, there is no significant regional divergence in views across the province on whether Canada should increase, decrease or maintain immigration levels. About 40 per cent of Ontarians in all regions say that Canada should maintain current immigration levels, while another 40 per cent say that the country should accept fewer immigrants (see Figure 12).

The exception to this pattern is Toronto, where the proportion saying that Canada should accept fewer immigrants is lower (at 30%), and that saying Canada should continue to accept the same number of immigrants that it accepts now is higher (at 49%).

While there are no stark urban-rural differences in opinion, populations in urban centres such as the Ottawa Belt (19%), Toronto (19%) and GTA (18%) are somewhat more likely to say that Canada should accept more immigrants, compared to the rural regions of the North (11%) and Southwest (10%).

**FIGURE 12**

**Q: Do you think Canada should accept more immigrants, fewer immigrants, or about the same number as we accept now?**



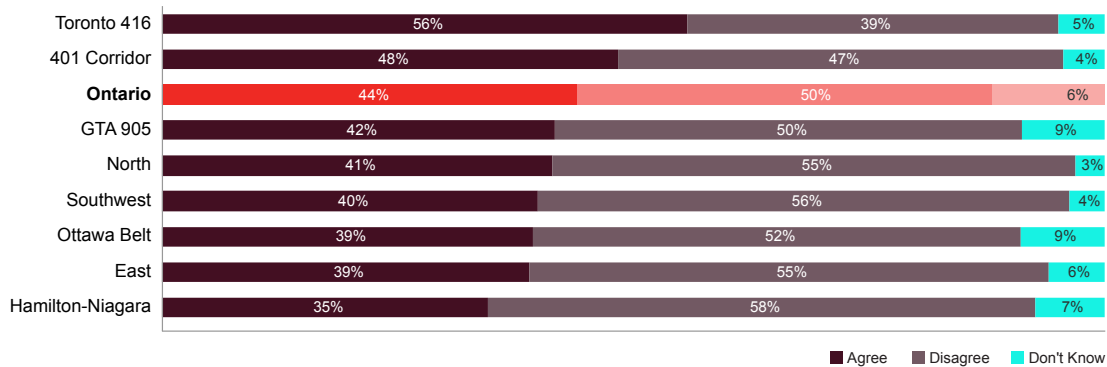
The pattern is similar when Ontarians are asked specifically about accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world that are experiencing conflict. About one in two residents of most Ontario regions disagree that Canada should accept more immigrants from those parts of the world that are experiencing conflict, but Toronto is an exception. Not only is the disagreement with this statement lower in Toronto, but the city stands out as the only region of the province where residents are more likely



to agree (56%) than to disagree (39%).<sup>12</sup> The same situation holds when Ontarians are asked if immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society. Not only are Torontonians more likely to disagree with this statement (at 52 percent, compared with around 40 per cent in most other regions), but Toronto is the only region in the province in which the proportion disagreeing is greater than the proportion agreeing.

**FIGURE 13**

**Q: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Canada ought to be accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world which are experiencing major conflicts**

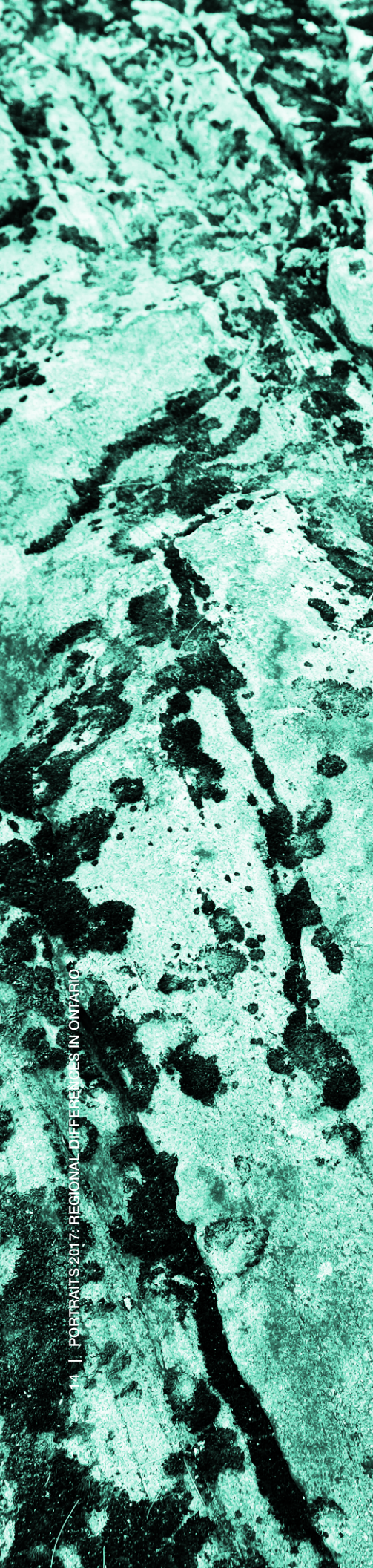


These results are perhaps not surprising, given that the Toronto CMA is home to the highest proportion of foreign-born individuals in the country – 47 per cent of the population is foreign-born. About 36 per cent of Canada’s overall immigrant population and about 70 per cent of Ontario’s overall immigrant population lives in Toronto. More than 75 per cent of the new immigrants in the province settle in the Toronto CMA.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the idea that attitudes in Toronto are a simple by-product of the greater number of immigrants living in the city seems too simplistic. On the two questions just discussed – whether Canada should accept more immigrants from conflict zones, and whether immigration is causing too many changes in Canadian society – views in Toronto differ as much from those in other urban areas with significant immigrant populations (notably the 905 region of the GTA), as those from regions with far fewer immigrants (such as the North). It is not just the difference of opinion in Toronto on the issue of immigration that is worth noting, then, but also the similarity of opinions between apparently dissimilar regions, such as the 905 region and the North.

12 The small difference in levels of agreement and disagreement in the 401 Corridor is not statistically significant.

13 Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017) “2016 Census Highlights: Factsheet 8.” <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-8.html>; see also: Andrew Parkin (2019) “A Different Ontario: Immigration.” Mowat Centre. <https://mowatcentre.ca/a-different-ontario-immigration/>.



Toronto also stands out on other questions related to the province’s diversity. For instance, a majority of residents in each region of the province say that they feel comfortable hearing languages other than English or French being spoken on the streets of Canada. While the proportion saying they are very or somewhat comfortable is about two-thirds in regions outside Toronto, within the province’s largest city, it reaches 81 per cent.

Additionally, the *Portraits 2017* survey asked Ontarians whether they agree or disagree with the notion that, these days, police in their community treat non-whites as fairly as they treat whites.<sup>14</sup> About 50 per cent or more Ontarians in most regions believe that police in their communities treat non-whites and whites equally. The rural regions of Southwest (62%), East (56%) and North (53%) are the most likely to believe this. But this sentiment is not shared by a majority of Torontonians – only 39 per cent agree, and 46 per cent disagree. In what is by now a familiar pattern, Toronto is the only region in the province where the proportion saying that the police in their community do not treat non-whites and whites in the same manner is greater than the proportion that says they do. Notably, this is not due to the larger non-white population of the city, as Torontonians who identify as “white” are also more likely to disagree than to agree that the police treats whites and non-whites the same.

14 Multiple studies have found that police brutality and discrimination disproportionately affect black and Indigenous populations. See: [http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news\\_centre/ohrc-interim-report-toronto-police-service-inquiry-shows-disturbing-results](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-interim-report-toronto-police-service-inquiry-shows-disturbing-results), <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-custom/deadly-force>, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/police-deaths-blacks-data-1.4599215> and [https://news.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/d35eyq/black-and-indigenous-people-are-overrepresented-in-canadas-weed-arrests](https://news.vice.com/en_ca/article/d35eyq/black-and-indigenous-people-are-overrepresented-in-canadas-weed-arrests).



**A plurality of  
Ontarians in  
each region say  
that Canada  
has not gone  
far enough  
in promoting  
reconciliation  
with Indigenous  
peoples.**

# Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

There are some regional differences in opinion regarding relations with Indigenous peoples.

» While a majority of Ontarians from all regions recognize that the situation of Indigenous peoples in Canada is worse than the situation of other Canadians, the view is most widely held among the residents of Toronto (74%), the Ottawa Belt (74%) and the 401 Corridor (70%). This compares with 58 per cent of respondents in the North, and 55 per cent of those in Hamilton-Niagara.

» Most Ontarians agree that it is beneficial to all Canadians that the cultures of Indigenous peoples remain strong. Residents of Toronto (78%), the 401 Corridor (74%), and the 905 region (70%) are the most likely to agree. Agreement is the lowest amongst residents of Ottawa Belt (66%) and in Hamilton-Niagara (64%).

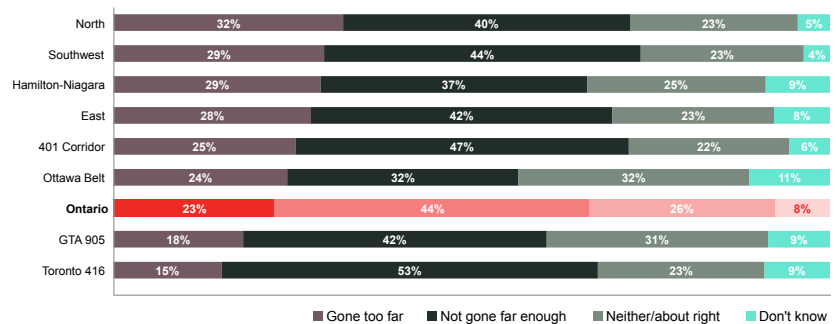
» While a plurality in every region say that Canada has not gone far enough in promoting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, the view is more widely shared in Toronto (53%). While only 15 per cent of the residents of Toronto say that Canada has gone too far in trying to promote reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, this proportion is about twice as high in Hamilton-Niagara (29%), the Southwest (29%), and the North (32%).

» Residents of Toronto are also the most likely to say that promoting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada should be a high priority. One in three (32%) Torontonians holds this view, compared with between one in five and one in four in other regions of the province.

That said, it is hard to discern an overall pattern. While Toronto is consistently the region that is the most supportive of Indigenous peoples, residents of several other regions are often as supportive. Furthermore, there is no evidence of a distinct urban-rural difference in opinion. For example, while views in the North are sometimes notably different than those in Toronto, the region that least resembles Toronto on Indigenous issues is Hamilton-Niagara, which is mostly urban.

**FIGURE 14**

**Q: In your opinion, have governments in Canada gone too far or have they not gone far enough in trying to promote reconciliation with Indigenous (Aboriginal) peoples?**



# Policy Priorities

The *Portraits 2017* survey asked Ontarians to rank 12 items on whether each should be a high, medium or low priority in terms of helping the country work better. Taken together, the results provide considerable insight into the question of whether or not there are significant regional (or urban-rural) differences in opinions among Ontarians.

For most of the main items, the scale of the regional differences in opinion is moderate at best (see Figure 15). For instance, overall 57 per cent of Ontarians say that spending more on health care is a high priority. This figure dips a few points lower in some regions, and edges above 60 per cent in the Ottawa Belt, but these variations do not amount to a significant disagreement. Moreover, there is no urban-rural split – about the same proportion of urban Torontonians and rural Eastern Ontarians say that spending more on health care is a high priority. The same pattern – that of modest variations and no urban-rural split – holds for many other items, such as education spending, reducing inequality, and negotiating new trade agreements.

**FIGURE 15**

**Q: When it comes to helping the country work better, how much of a priority do you think each of the following should be?**

Percentage of Respondents who Ranked Item as a High Priority

Priority	Ontario Average	Ottawa Belt	East	GTA 905	Toronto 416	Hamilton-Niagara	Southwest	401 Corridor	North	Difference between the highest and the lowest (in points)
Transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial governments	8	6	5	9	11	8	7	7	9	6
Reducing inequality between the rich and poor	47	47	47	43	49	51	45	50	55	8
New international trade agreements	40	33	39	42	40	40	42	40	38	9
Spending more on education/training	40	37	39	38	45	42	36	41	46	10
Spending more on health care	57	65	56	54	57	60	55	55	54	11
Reconciling with Indigenous peoples	26	25	22	22	32	21	28	27	24	11
Being economically competitive	49	48	57	49	45	47	53	51	46	12
Improving Canada/US relations	22	20	22	20	22	18	30	20	27	12
Spending more on military	14	24	18	9	10	14	18	16	18	15
Addressing climate change	43	41	40	39	53	36	41	42	44	17
Cutting taxes	40	40	42	39	31	55	44	44	42	24
Giving more money to big cities	9	7	5	8	25	5	3	2	1	24

On several other items, however, bigger differences emerge. One of these is spending more on the military, where the Ottawa Belt stands out as an outlier – while across the province, relatively few see this as a high priority, the proportion is higher in and around Ottawa, perhaps because of a larger number of people in the national capital region who have a professional or personal connection with the armed forces.

The three items marked by the largest regional differences, however, are all ones where Toronto is the outlier – addressing climate change, cutting taxes and giving more money to big cities. It is not surprising, of course, to find that the proportion of Torontonians prioritizing more money for big cities, while only 25 per cent, far outweighs the negligible one per cent in the province’s North. But what stands out on the other two items is not the split between the province’s metropolis and its rural or remote areas, but rather the split between Toronto and its urban neighbours. While Torontonians are the most likely to prioritize addressing climate change (53%), the 905 region (39%) and Hamilton-Niagara (36%) are the least likely. In the case of cutting taxes, the biggest difference is between the urban Torontonians, only 31% of whom rank it as a high priority, compared to the majority of the residents of Hamilton-Niagara (55%).

In short, then, two observations can be made. First, in the case of many policy priorities, there is a risk of overstating the differences in opinion among regions, since the variations in opinions on one side of the provincial average to the other are relatively modest. Second, while for some items Toronto stands out as either the most or the least supportive, it would be a mistake to read this as an urban-rural cleavage in the province, since some of the biggest differences are between Toronto and other urban areas.

# Attachment

Finally, the survey asked Ontarians how attached they feel to Canada, to the province and to their city, town or region.

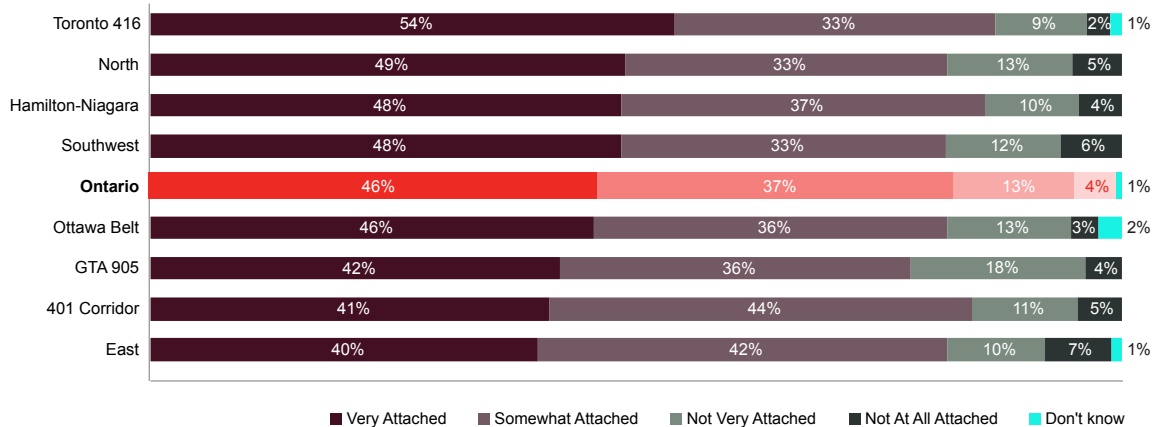
Not surprisingly, Ontarians in all regions are much more strongly attached to Canada than to their province or to their city, town or region. On average, across all regions, 73 per cent of Ontarians say that they feel very attached to Canada, and 93 per cent say that they feel very or somewhat attached to the country.

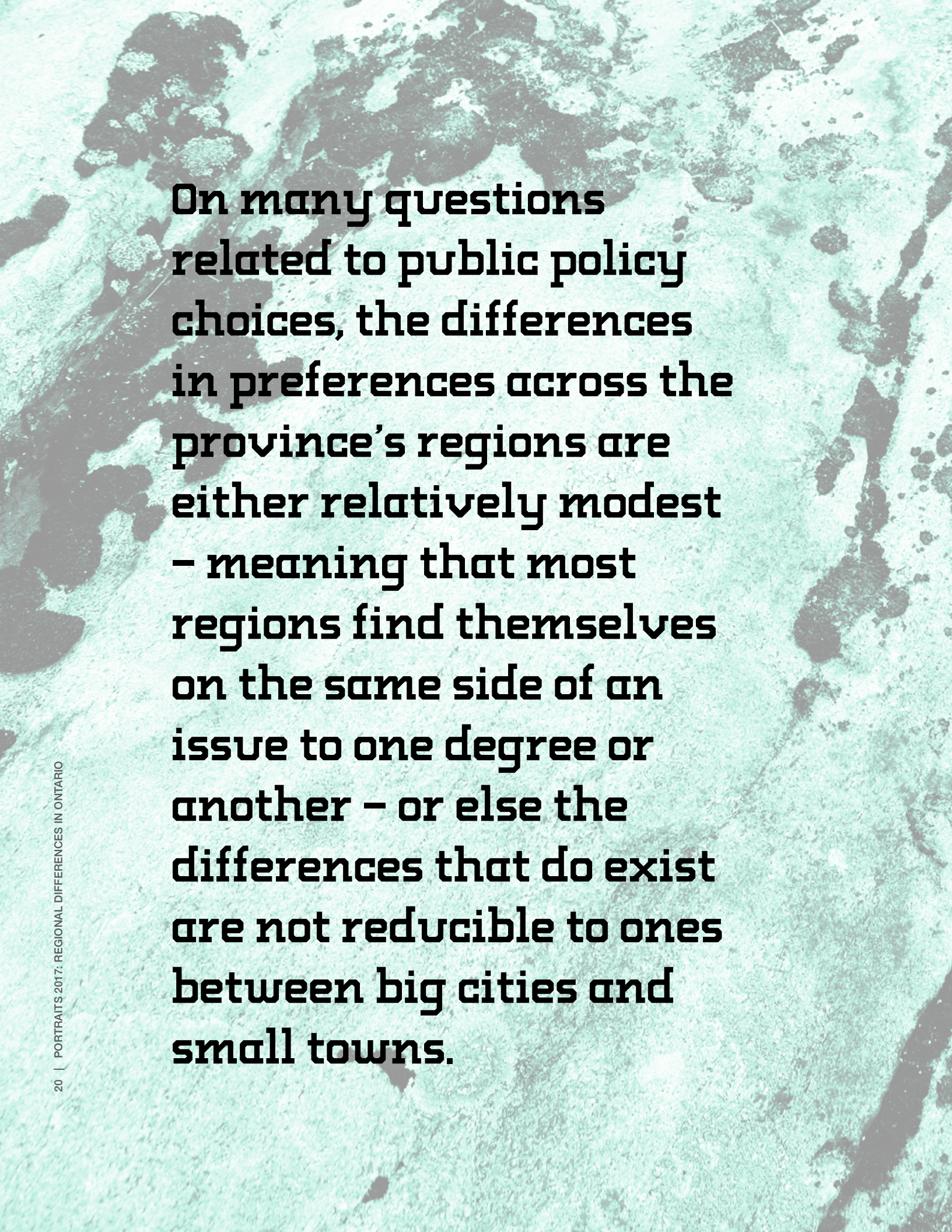
Ontarians are just as likely to say that they feel very or somewhat attached to the province (85%) as they are to their city, town or region (83%). Interestingly, however, the strength of attachment is slightly higher in the case of attachment to the city, town or region than to the province. Overall, 46 per cent say that they are very attached to their city, town or region, compared with 41 per cent for the province. While this is not a very large difference, it is nonetheless a good illustration of Ontarians' ties to their local communities.

The other noteworthy finding is that, while Ontarians in all regions say that they feel attached to their city, town or region, this sentiment is the strongest in Toronto. More than one in two (54%) Torontonians say that they feel very attached to their city, compared to 42 per cent in the neighbouring 905 region and 40 per cent in the more rural East. Among other things, this suggests that the sense of attachment to the local community is not in fact a distinctly “small town” phenomenon in contemporary Ontario.

**FIGURE 16**

**Q: How attached do you feel to each of the following? Your city, town or region**



An aerial photograph of a forest with a river winding through it. The forest is dense and green, with the river appearing as a dark, narrow strip. The overall tone is natural and serene.

**On many questions related to public policy choices, the differences in preferences across the province's regions are either relatively modest – meaning that most regions find themselves on the same side of an issue to one degree or another – or else the differences that do exist are not reducible to ones between big cities and small towns.**



# Conclusion

Overall, the results of the *Portraits 2017* survey show that there are some key differences in the opinions of Ontarians from different regions. These differences, however, cannot easily be characterized as forming an urban-rural divide. Interestingly, this is the case despite the fact that most Ontarians themselves reject the premise that residents of urban and rural areas basically have the same values.

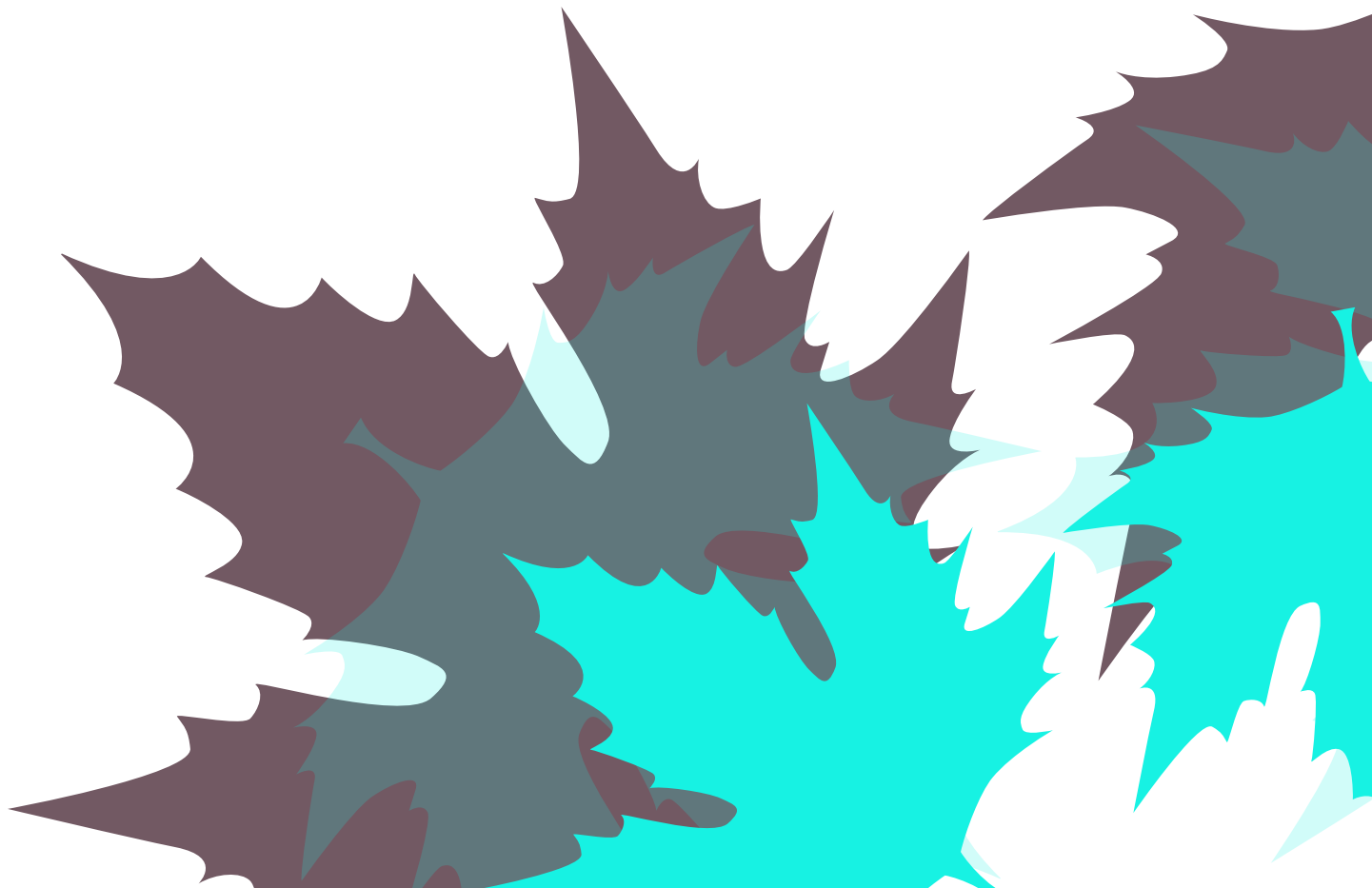
This is not to say that there are not some urban-rural differences. There are notable ones, for instance, on economic issues. Urban Ontarians are more likely than rural Ontarians to say that the economy in the city or region where they live has been doing better over the past five years. They are also more likely to say that international trade agreements have benefitted their local communities. The fact that both population and economic growth are currently concentrated in the province's urban centres appears to be reflected in the greater uneasiness about the local economy among those living in smaller communities.

This pattern, however, is the exception rather than the rule. On many questions related to public policy choices, the differences in preferences across the province's regions are either relatively modest – meaning that most regions find themselves on the same side of an issue to one degree or another – or else the differences that do exist are not reducible to ones between big cities and small towns. It is perhaps not surprising to find clear differences in views between Torontonians and Northerners on issues such as reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, or the impact of immigration. But the differences between Toronto and other mostly urban areas, such as its neighbouring Hamilton-Niagara or 905 regions, are often just as large. In many cases, with the exception of Toronto, what is most striking is the similarity of attitudes and policy preferences between the mostly urban and mostly rural areas of the province, not the differences.

One important conclusion of this study, then, is that Toronto in many ways is a region unto itself in terms of public opinion in Ontario – that is to say, it is frequently somewhat of an outlier. This is especially noticeable on issues such as immigration, climate change, taxes, and – least surprisingly – the need to transfer more resources to the country's big cities. As we have seen, on a number of questions, not only is Toronto the region that is the furthest to one side of the opinion spectrum, but it is sometimes the only region where agreement outweighs disagreement (or vice versa, depending on the question). The frequency with which opinions in Toronto stand somewhat apart from those in the other regions of the province suggests that the factors and experiences that shape these opinions in the inner metropolitan 416 area are somewhat unique

(factors that include demographic ones such as age, education and ethnicity, economic ones such as the concentration in the city of service industries relating to government, the broader public sector and the financial sectors, and others such as the greater reliance on certain public services, notably public transit). And in this regard, it is worth recalling the finding that while Ontarians in all regions say that they feel attached to their city, town or region, this sentiment is the strongest in Toronto. Having said this, it is important not to exaggerate the extent of these differences. Toronto stands out on many questions but by no means all. And in every case, there are significant numbers of people across all regions who think alike.

The final conclusion of this study, of course, is the observation that Ontario's population has perhaps now grown so large and diverse that conventional studies of public opinion – with provincial samples typically in the neighbourhood of 400 – can no longer be relied upon to provide a sufficiently nuanced portrait of the province. The regional patterns highlighted in this study could be captured because the *Portraits 2017* survey was conducted with a large sample of 2,000 Ontarians. While this approach was unusual, it is certainly important for it to be repeated in future studies to get a more complete and representative picture of the range of opinions across the province.



# APPENDIX

## METHODOLOGY

*Portraits 2017* is a public opinion survey undertaken by Mission Research on behalf of the Mowat Centre. Survey data were collected between November 1 and November 14, 2017 from within randomly-selected, representative samples of residents of Ontario (n=2,000) and Quebec (n=1,000) aged 18 and older.

Sample frames were drawn from opt-in market research panels and hence cannot be technically characterized as random probability samples. Still, as a guideline, appropriate margins of error for traditional samples of the sizes of the Ontario and the Quebec samples are +/- 2.2% and +/-3.1% respectively, 19 times out of 20. For the overall sample (n=3,000) the corresponding margin of error is +/- 1.8%, with a 5% error rate. All data are weighted according to the most recent Census figures for age, gender and region;<sup>15</sup> in turn, findings from the survey are representative of the adult population aged 18 and older in both Ontario and Quebec.

To address the question of whether attitudes have changed over time, the survey drew extensively from previous studies, including those conducted between 1998 and 2006 by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC). In comparing data between the earlier surveys and the current one, readers should note the evolution in survey mode (from telephone to Internet), which in turn often entails small adjustments to question wording and format. Readers should also note that the Ontario sample for other national surveys is typically much smaller than the sample of 2,000 Ontarians surveyed in *Portraits 2017*.

15 The sample in Quebec is also representative in terms of language spoken at home.

