



Canadian public opinion research 2025 – summary report

Canadians want stability — co-operatives deliver it

In 2019, Abacus Data partnered with Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada to ask a question that felt urgent at the time: what role could co-operatives and mutuals play in an age of uncertainty? That title captured a country wrestling with inequality, distrust, affordability pressures, and a growing sense among many people that they had less say over the systems shaping their lives. Looking back, it is striking how current that framing still feels. If anything, the title could just as easily be used today.

What has changed is the depth and immediacy of the uncertainty Canadians are living through. The years since then have included a global pandemic, a prolonged affordability squeeze, higher borrowing costs, a worsening housing crisis, rapid technological disruption, and sharper geopolitical and trade uncertainty. The result is not simply that Canadians are worried. It is that many now experience instability as something deeply personal: in the cost of groceries, in rent or mortgage payments, in the search for decent housing, in how secure work feels, and in whether the institutions around them are still built to protect ordinary people.

That is the context for this new wave of research from Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada and CHF Canada. And it helps explain why the findings are so important. At a moment when Canadians are searching for stability, fairness, and a greater sense of agency, the co-operative model stands out not as a nostalgic alternative but as a modern, practical, and deeply relevant one. The public mood has changed since 2019, but the promise of co-operatives has only become more resonant.

The context in 2025: uncertainty has become a lived experience

The first major story in the data is that uncertainty in Canada today operates at both the macro and micro level. Canadians are paying attention to broad structural shifts like automation, artificial intelligence, trade tensions, immigration policy, and the influence of powerful interests on government decision-making. But they are even more affected by the pressures closest to home: the cost of living, housing affordability, precarious work, and widening inequality. These are not abstract policy concerns. They are the pressures people feel around the kitchen table.

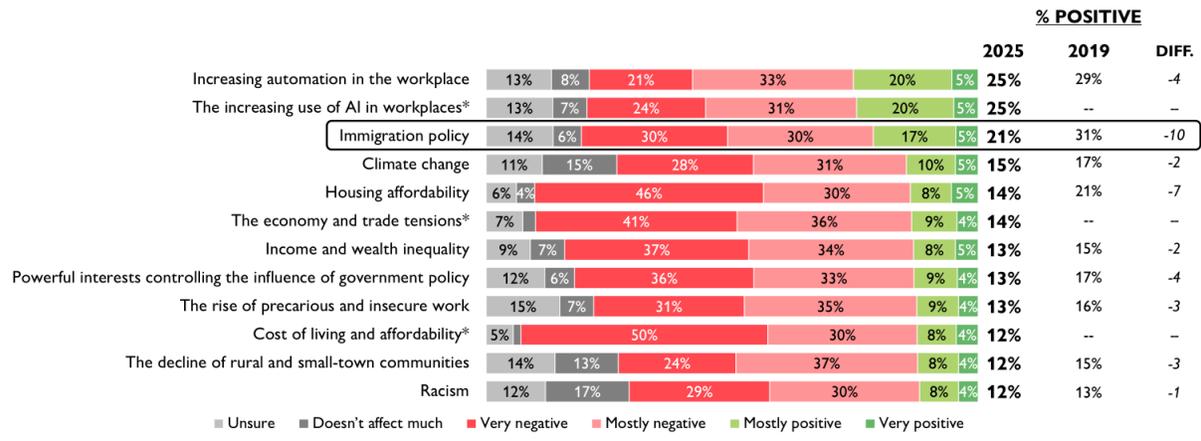
Canadians see today's economy as being shaped most of all by pressures that feel immediate and personal. Cost of living and affordability is seen as having a negative impact by 80% of Canadians, including 50% who say the impact is *very negative*, while housing affordability is close behind at 76% negative, with



46% describing its effect as *very negative*. At the same time, broader structural concerns also weigh heavily: 71% say income and wealth inequality has a negative impact on how the economy works today, and 69% say the same about powerful interests controlling government policy. Compared with 2019, attitudes toward immigration policy have shifted the most, with Canadians now 10 points less likely to see it as having a positive impact, a sign of how much the broader economic and political context has changed.

What kind of impact, if any, do the following have on the way the economy is structured and the way it works today?

Canadians are concerned about direct micro and macro economic trends- more so micro concerns. Of the possible causes, income and wealth inequality is most commonly noted. The impact of immigration policy has seen the biggest shift since 2019- now 10pts more negative.



Base: All respondents (n=5,012) | * added in 2025



That helps explain why there is such broad agreement on the diagnosis. Canadians overwhelmingly agree that the world would be better if people collaborated more with one another. At the same time, they increasingly feel that the institutions meant to make life workable and secure are under strain. Essential building blocks of a stable life — a good job, housing, healthcare access, and confidence in the future — feel harder to secure than they used to. The result is a public that still believes in collaboration, but is less convinced that existing systems are set up to deliver it.

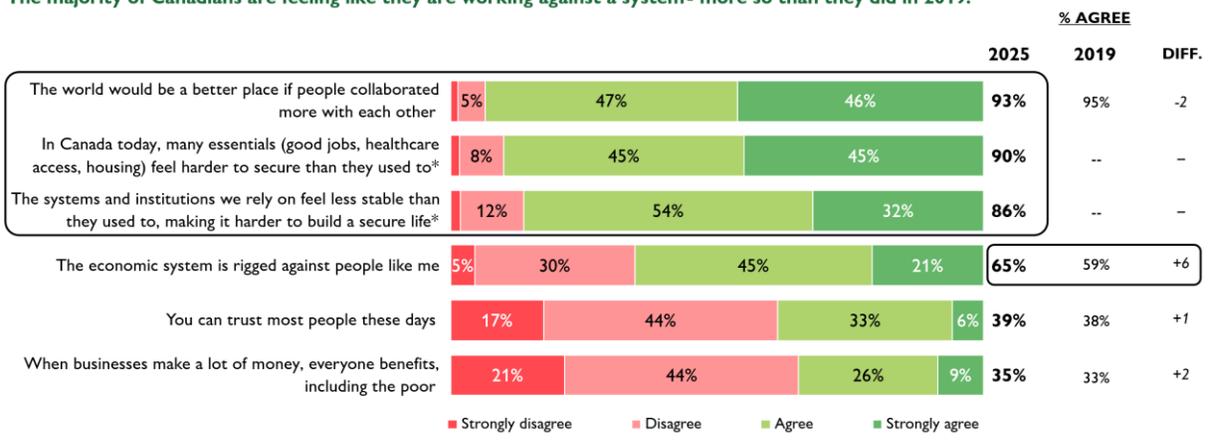
Even amid that anxiety, Canadians remain deeply committed to the idea of collective action. An overwhelming 95% agree that the world would be a better place if people collaborated more with each other, including a large share who strongly agree.

But that optimism is paired with a clear sense that the systems people depend on are under strain: 90% say essentials like good jobs, healthcare, and housing feel harder to secure than they used to, and 86% say the systems and institutions we rely on feel less stable than they once were. That sense of

frustration is also personal: 65% agree that the economic system is rigged against people like them, up 6 points since 2019. Together, these findings suggest that Canadians have not lost faith in collaboration itself—they have lost confidence in whether existing systems are delivering it.

Do you agree or disagree with the following?

Canadians continue to believe that the world would be a better place if people collaborated more with each other, but feel systems that could facilitate collaboration are becoming more strained than ever. The majority of Canadians are feeling like they are working against a system - more so than they did in 2019.



Base: All respondents (n=5,012) | * added in 2025

This is one of the most important continuities with 2019. Then, we found that many Canadians felt the economic system was not working for them and that too much power was concentrated in too few hands. Today, that sentiment remains, but the stakes feel higher. After several years of repeated shocks, instability is no longer just a political or economic concept. It has become the backdrop of everyday life.

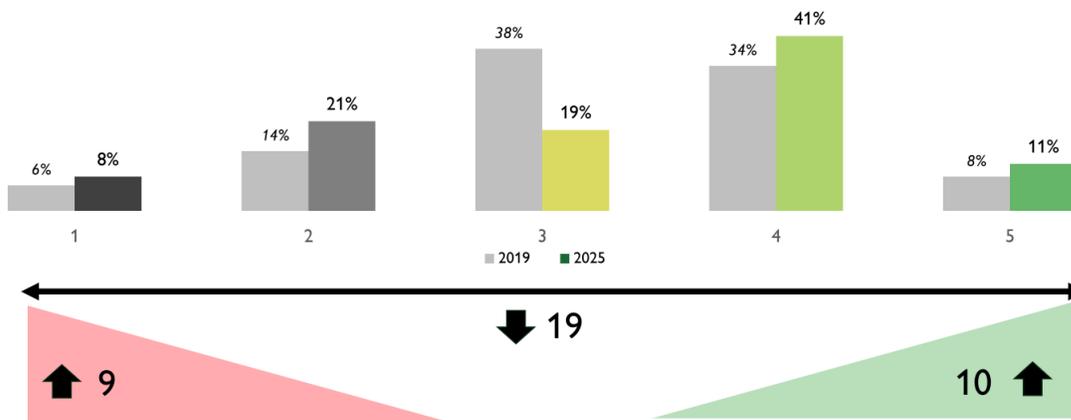
Control, security, and the shape of public mood

One of the clearest shifts since 2019 is how Canadians now sort themselves along what might be called the control continuum.

Canadians are becoming more polarized in how much control they feel they have over their own lives. The share placing themselves at the low end of the scale has risen, with 8% now rating their sense of control at 1 and 21% at 2, while the share at the high end has also grown, with 41% rating their control at 4 and 11% at 5. The middle has hollowed out: just 19% place themselves at 3, a decline of 19 points, while the low-control end is up 9 points and the high-control end is up 10 points. This points to a more divided post-pandemic reality, where many Canadians feel increasingly empowered, but many others feel they are losing their grip.

Thinking about your life and your ability to decide on its direction and outcome. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much control do you feel you have in your life? 1 means you don't really have control and others decide and have a lot of influence on how your life turns out. 5 means you feel you are in complete control of your life.

The pandemic recovery has pushed Canadians to opposite ends of the control continuum. Both groups that feel they are in a lot or not a lot of control have risen around 10 points, the middle declining by nearly 20 pt.



Base: All respondents (n=5,012)

CMC | ABACUS DATA

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The most important takeaway is that fewer people are sitting in the middle. More Canadians now say they feel highly in control of their lives, and more say they feel they have very little control. That polarization matters because a person's sense of control shapes how they interpret everything else: whether they trust institutions, whether they feel optimistic about the future, and whether they believe the economy is working for people like them.

That sense of division is also reflected in what Canadians say they are focused on right now. The largest share, 38%, say their attention is centred on safety needs like personal security, employment, health, and resources, while another 27% are focused on physiological needs such as food, shelter, and other essentials. Far fewer say they are focused on higher-order goals like self-actualization (18%), esteem (9%), or love and belonging (8%). In other words, for most Canadians, the current moment is still being experienced through the lens of security and basic stability—exactly the conditions in which co-operatives can speak most credibly to people's needs.

What do Canadians say they are focused on?

abacus data



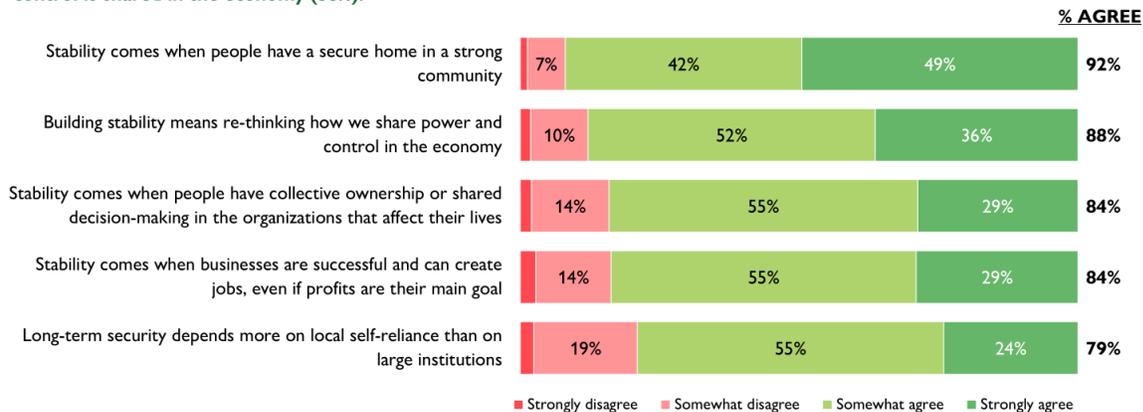
At the same time, Canadians are remarkably aligned on what stability actually means. They do not define it narrowly as quarterly growth or abstract economic performance. They define it in human terms: secure homes, strong communities, more shared power, and a greater say in the organizations that affect their lives. This is a crucial insight for the co-operative sector.

When Canadians think about what would make life more stable and secure, their answers point clearly toward shared security and more collective forms of control. Fully 92% agree that stability comes when people have a secure home in a strong community, while 88% agree that building stability means re-thinking how power and control are shared in the economy. Support is also strong for more participatory models: 84% agree that stability comes when people have collective ownership or shared decision-making in the organizations that affect their lives. Taken together, these numbers suggest that Canadians are not only worried about instability—they are also open to solutions rooted in community, shared power, and co-operative principles.

NEW To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following ideas about how to make life in Canada more stable and secure for people?

Opinions about preferred solutions are near as unanimous as the diagnosis. Canadians believe stability comes from collective ownership and control.

Nearly all (92%) agree that stability comes from secure homes in strong communities, followed by re-thinking how power and control is shared in the economy (88%).



Base: All respondents (n=5,012)

The public is not only diagnosing what is broken; it is also articulating, with unusual clarity, what a more secure future would look like.

This is also where the co-operative model connects most powerfully with broader social needs. When people are preoccupied with affordability, safety, and stability, they are focused on the foundational layers of life. The data suggest that Canadians are orienting toward those basic needs first. In that environment, co-operatives matter because they are not built around extraction from communities; they are built around helping people meet concrete needs together — housing, financial services, local services, decent work, and a stronger sense of belonging and control.

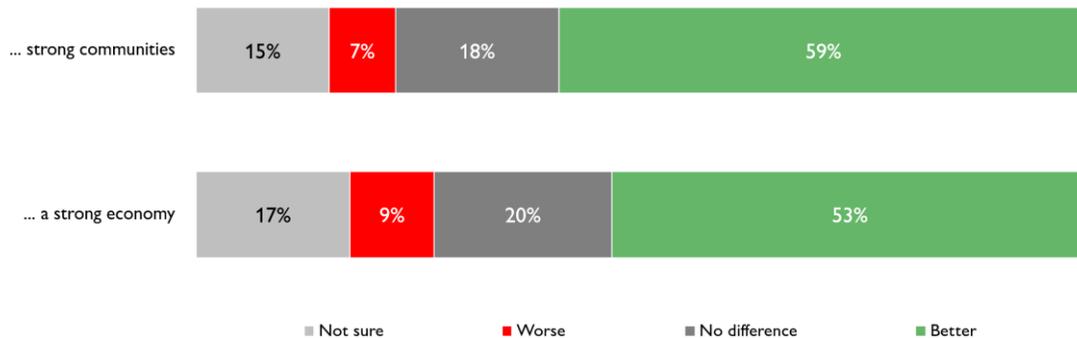
Why co-operatives resonate now

Against that backdrop, the findings on co-operatives are especially notable. Canadians see co-operatives as a positive force not only in principle but in practice. A clear majority believe that having more co-operatives in Canada would be better for building strong communities, and more than half say the same about building a stronger economy. Very few see any downside. That matters because it shows that co-operatives are not viewed as marginal or niche. They are seen as broadly constructive institutions.



NEW If there were more co-operatives operating in Canada, do you think this would be better or worse for building...

3 in 5 (59%) think that more co-ops would be better for building strong communities, while just over half (53%) think they would be better for building a strong economy. Very few see negative consequences.



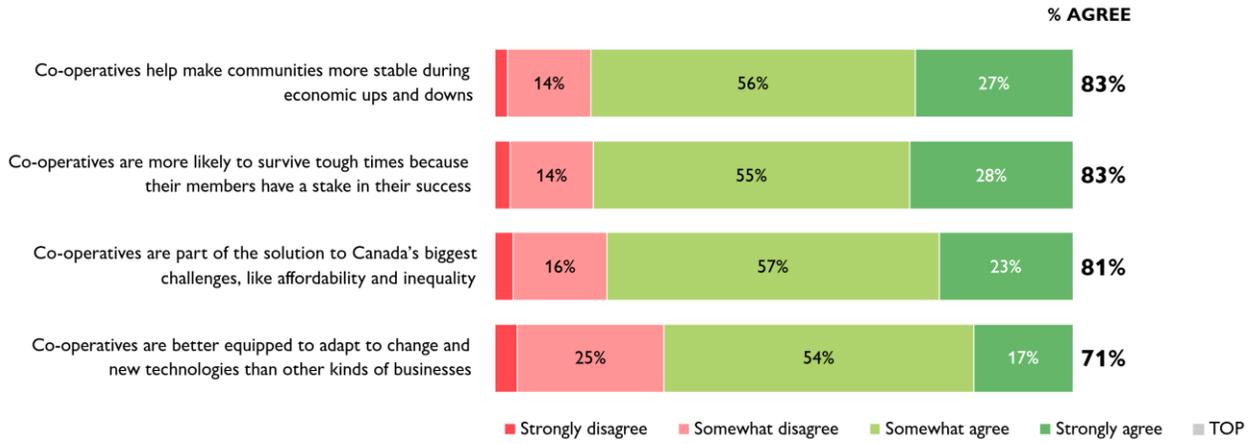
Base: All respondents (n=5,012)

Canadians also associate co-operatives with the qualities they are looking for most right now. Large majorities agree that co-operatives help make communities more stable during economic ups and downs, are more likely to survive tough times because members have a stake in their success, and are part of the solution to major challenges like affordability and inequality. Even on adaptation and innovation (an area where conventional businesses often assume they hold the advantage) Canadians still give co-operatives strong marks. In other words, the public does not see co-operatives as old-fashioned. It sees them as resilient, grounded, and capable of evolving.



NEW To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Canadians consistently see co-operatives as a stable path forward.



Base: All respondents (n=5,012)



This is a vital part of the story. In uncertain times, people do not just want change for its own sake. They want institutions that can endure, adapt, and remain accountable. Co-operatives answer that need because their structure ties performance to people and place. Their success is not detached from the wellbeing of their members and communities; it is bound up with it.

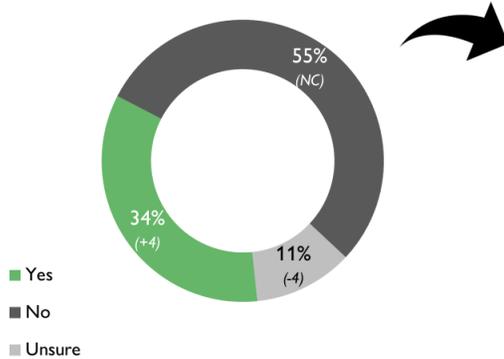
A model Canadians want more of

Another striking finding in the research is the breadth of the co-operative universe in Canada today. Roughly one in three Canadians already report being a member of a co-operative, and among non-members, strong interest in joining remains high. Taken together, that means about 70% of Canadians are either already in the co-operative sector or open to becoming part of it.

? Are you a member of a co-operative business? This could mean being a member customer, member employee, or a member resident in the case of a housing co-operative.

7 in 10 Canadians are currently or interested in becoming a member of a co-op

Are you a member of a co-operative business?



Among those who are not currently members
65% are interested in joining a co-op
 meaning...
70% of Canadians sit within the co-operative universe.

Base: All respondents (n=5,012) | Note: results in brackets represent change from 2019

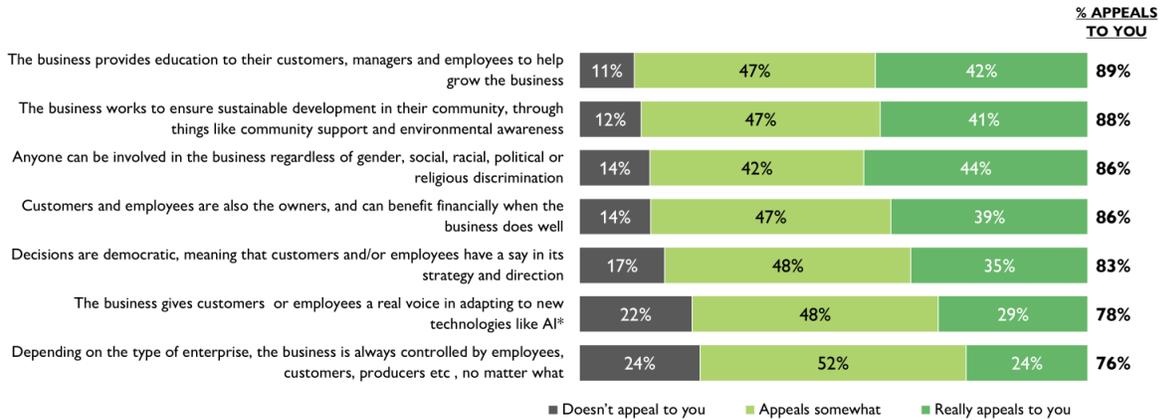
That scale is significant for at least two reasons. First, it shows that co-operatives already have deep roots in Canadian life. They are not speculative institutions waiting to be tested; they are woven into communities across the country, including in housing, finance, retail, agriculture, and local service delivery. Second, it means the co-operative model has something increasingly rare in Canadian public life: broad cross-cutting appeal. In a more fragmented and polarized country, co-operatives still connect with people across age groups, regions, and perspectives because they are seen as practical, fair, and community-minded.

The findings on messaging are equally useful. Canadians respond more strongly to a description of co-operatives that emphasizes shared ownership, member control, and mutual benefit than to one framed more abstractly around helping neighbours and building community. That does not mean the community story is unimportant. It means that in a period of precarity, Canadians first want to understand how co-operatives work for them and how the model delivers concrete value. Once that connection is made, the broader community benefit becomes even more compelling.



Now we want to imagine some ways or principles that a business or corporation in Canada could follow in how it operates.

Canadians find a number of co-operative attributes are appealing, namely the focus on building community.

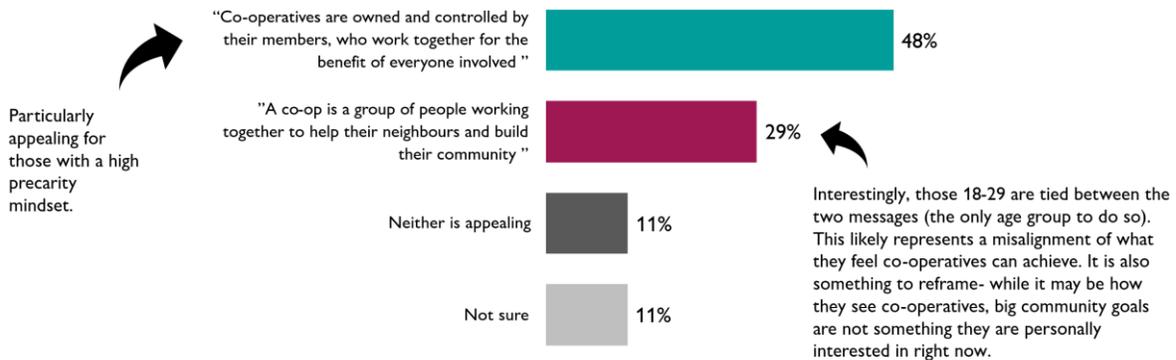


Base: All respondents (n=5,012)

When Canadians are presented with two different ways of describing co-operatives, the more appealing message is the one that emphasizes their business structure and practical model, rather than a broader aspirational or movement-based framing. The slide suggests this preference is especially pronounced among those with a high precarity mindset, indicating that in a period of uncertainty, people are more responsive to co-operatives when they are described as concrete, functional, and relevant to everyday economic needs. The one notable exception is younger Canadians aged 18 to 29, who are evenly split between the two descriptions, suggesting that while younger people may still be open to larger community-oriented ideas, they may need a clearer connection between those ideals and what co-operatives can tangibly deliver in their own lives.

NEW Below are two short descriptions about co-operatives. Which one do you find MORE appealing, or would make you more interested in learning about or joining a co-operative?

In a time of precarity, Canadians prefer a framing that talks about the business structure of co-operatives.

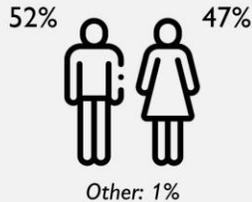


Base: All respondents (n=5,012)

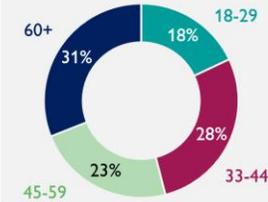
Current co-op members represent a broad cross-section of Canada, but the profile skews somewhat older and more established. Among members, 31% are 60 and over, compared with 28% aged 30 to 44, 23% aged 45 to 59, and 18% aged 18 to 29. In terms of education, 40% have at least a bachelor's degree, while 60% have a college education or less. Income is also fairly mixed, with 32% earning under \$50,000 and 37% between \$50,000 and \$100,000, suggesting that co-op membership already reaches well beyond any single socioeconomic group.

CO-OP MEMBERS (n=1,697)

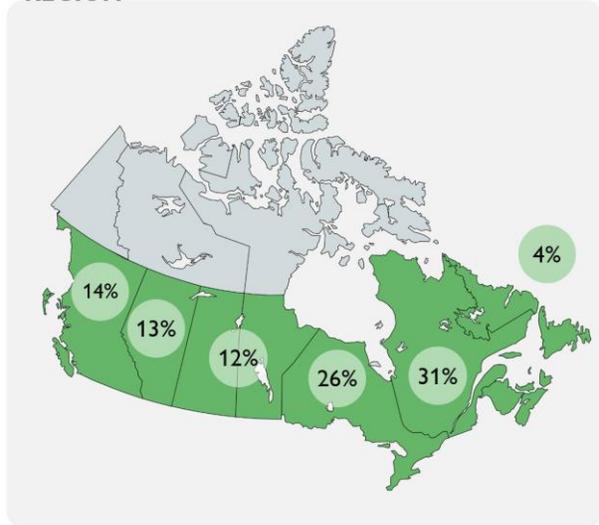
GENDER



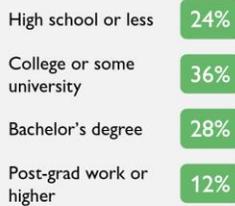
AGE



REGION



EDUCATION

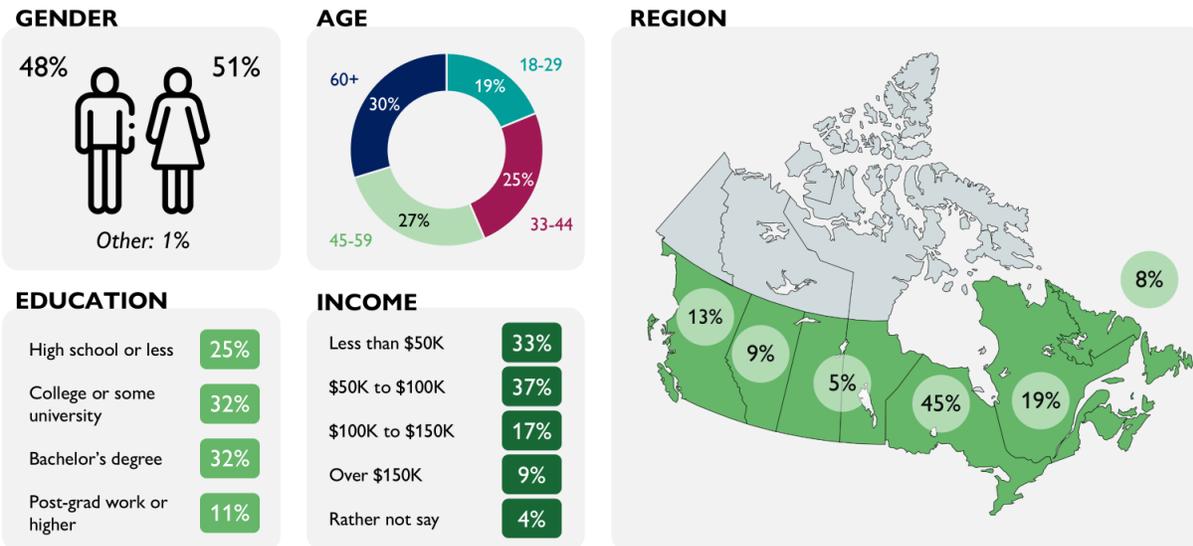


INCOME



The pool of Canadians interested in joining a co-op looks somewhat younger and slightly more female, pointing to a meaningful opportunity for future growth. Among interested non-members, 51% are women and 48% are men, while the age profile is relatively balanced: 30% are 60 and over, 27% are 45 to 59, 25% are 30 to 44, and 19% are 18 to 29. This group is also well educated, with 43% holding at least a bachelor's degree, and financially diverse, including 33% earning under \$50,000 and 37% between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Taken together, these results suggest that interest in co-operatives extends into a large and demographically varied audience that is not yet fully engaged by the sector.

INTERESTED NON-MEMBERS (n=1,807)



The path forward for co-operatives

The opportunity for the co-operative movement is substantial. But this research also points to a specific path forward. The first task is to connect co-operatives more directly to the pressures Canadians are facing right now. The strongest case for co-operatives in 2025 is not simply that they reflect admirable values. It is that they offer a credible response to instability. They give people a stake. They distribute voice and benefit more fairly. They keep decision-making closer to the communities affected by it. And they create forms of resilience that are especially valuable when larger systems feel distant or brittle.

The second task is to speak about co-operatives as solutions for today, not as exceptions from the past. The model should be presented with confidence as one that can help Canadians navigate affordability pressures, expand access to stable housing, strengthen local economies, and build institutions people feel they can trust. That case is especially powerful when co-operatives are linked to security, control, and community stability — the very things the public says matter most.

The third task is to make the co-operative advantage more visible. The data show that Canadians find many co-operative attributes appealing: community focus, inclusion, democratic decision-making, education, shared benefit, and giving people a real voice as organizations adapt to new technologies. These are not fringe preferences. They are mainstream expectations of what better institutions should look like. The sector has an opportunity to claim that space more clearly and more assertively.



The fourth task is to continue demonstrating that co-operatives are builders. They build housing security. They build local wealth. They build durable services. They build trust by giving people a meaningful role in the organizations that serve them. In a moment when many institutions feel transactional or remote, that builder mentality is one of the sector's greatest strengths.

And finally, the path forward is to keep co-operatives framed in the positive light they deserve: as institutions that make Canada more stable, more democratic, and more community-rooted. The argument is not that co-operatives solve everything on their own. It is that they point toward a better balance of power and a stronger way of organizing economic life — one that is better aligned with what Canadians say they need most right now.

The larger takeaway

In 2019, the phrase “the age of uncertainty” captured a growing unease. In 2025, that same phrase feels even more apt. But the new research also shows why the co-operative story is ultimately a hopeful one. Even in a more anxious and fragmented environment, Canadians have not given up on the idea that institutions can be fairer, more collaborative, and more grounded in the needs of real people.

That is where co-operatives stand apart. They do not ask Canadians to choose between economic resilience and community wellbeing, between innovation and accountability, or between individual need and collective strength. At their best, they bring those things together. They offer stability not by concentrating power, but by sharing it. They offer resilience not by distancing themselves from communities, but by investing in them. And they offer a path forward that feels not only credible, but timely.

If the challenge facing Canada today is how to build a more secure life in a less secure era, then the case for co-operatives is stronger than ever. They are not simply relevant to this moment. They are built for it.

Methodology

This report is based on a national survey conducted by Abacus Data on behalf of CMC and CHF Canada from November 5 to 17, 2025, among 5,012 Canadian adults aged 18 and over. The survey was completed online with respondents recruited to reflect a broad cross-section of the country, and the final data were weighted according to age, gender, education, and region to match the Canadian population. The results provide a robust snapshot of current public attitudes toward co-operatives, economic insecurity, and the broader social and economic context in which Canadians are forming their views today.