



Abridged Report.  
The full report is available separately.

# Canadians' *Prosocial Behaviours* Survey

*The drivers of generosity, civic  
participation, and civility.*

An initiative of  
**GIV3** and **SECTOR3** INSIGHTS

April 2026

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# Why This Study Matters Now

## ➤ Prosocial behaviour is part of the functioning of a healthy society

- **A well-functioning democracy depends not only on laws, institutions, and public services, but also on the everyday willingness of citizens to contribute to the common good.**
  - Generosity, volunteering, helping others, voting, and civic participation all play a role in making communities more resilient, cooperative, and humane. Where these behaviours are strong, communities often absorb social strain more effectively. Where they weaken, more pressure falls onto governments, formal services, and already-stretched charitable institutions.

## ➤ Prosocial behaviours as weakening, as well as their key drivers.

- Multiple indicators suggest long-term softening in financial giving, volunteering, and other forms of contribution.
- Several key drivers have been weakening: Connectedness, religiosity, aging Boomers, and financial capacity.

## ➤ This matters for charities and governments

- **These shifts matter not only to charities, but also to governments concerned with health, social cohesion, civic resilience, public trust, and the cost of downstream social problems.**

**This study was designed to better understand the foundations and drivers of prosocial behaviour in Canada.**

- It builds on prior work exploring the many of forms and correlates of generosity in Canada ([www.Sector3Insights.com](http://www.Sector3Insights.com))



# Executive Summary: **Canadians' Prosocial Behaviours Survey**

*Exploring the social elements driving greater generosity, civic participation, and civility. – April 2026*

This summarizes the key points from a unique, national survey of Canadian adults exploring their civic/prosocial behaviours and the drivers behind them. **It was designed to find the true drivers to help support smart, relevant policy considerations.**

**Background/Introduction:** Prosocial behaviours (giving, volunteering, civic participation, voting, etc.) are public goods that are an important part of a healthy civil society. They help communities function, strengthen resilience, and reduce pressure on formal systems of care and government. *Yet many of the social conditions that appear to support these behaviours are weakening in Canada.*

## **Key Insights/Implications:**

1. Prosocial behaviour depends heavily on **connectedness/community embeddedness** (more so than on empathy and goodwill)
  - Canadians who are more socially embedded (in associations, religious attendance, clubs, etc.) are more prosocial.
2. Prosocial behaviour is shaped by **social norms**; Especially obligation to be generous, upbringing, and visible examples.
3. Religiosity matters, but largely because it reinforces belonging, participation, social expectation, and social norms (less due to divinity/spirituality). - Religion is important because it is good at supporting the drivers of connectedness + social norms.
4. Financial capacity matters, but less than the above drivers.
5. Older adults are more prosocial in both behaviour and values

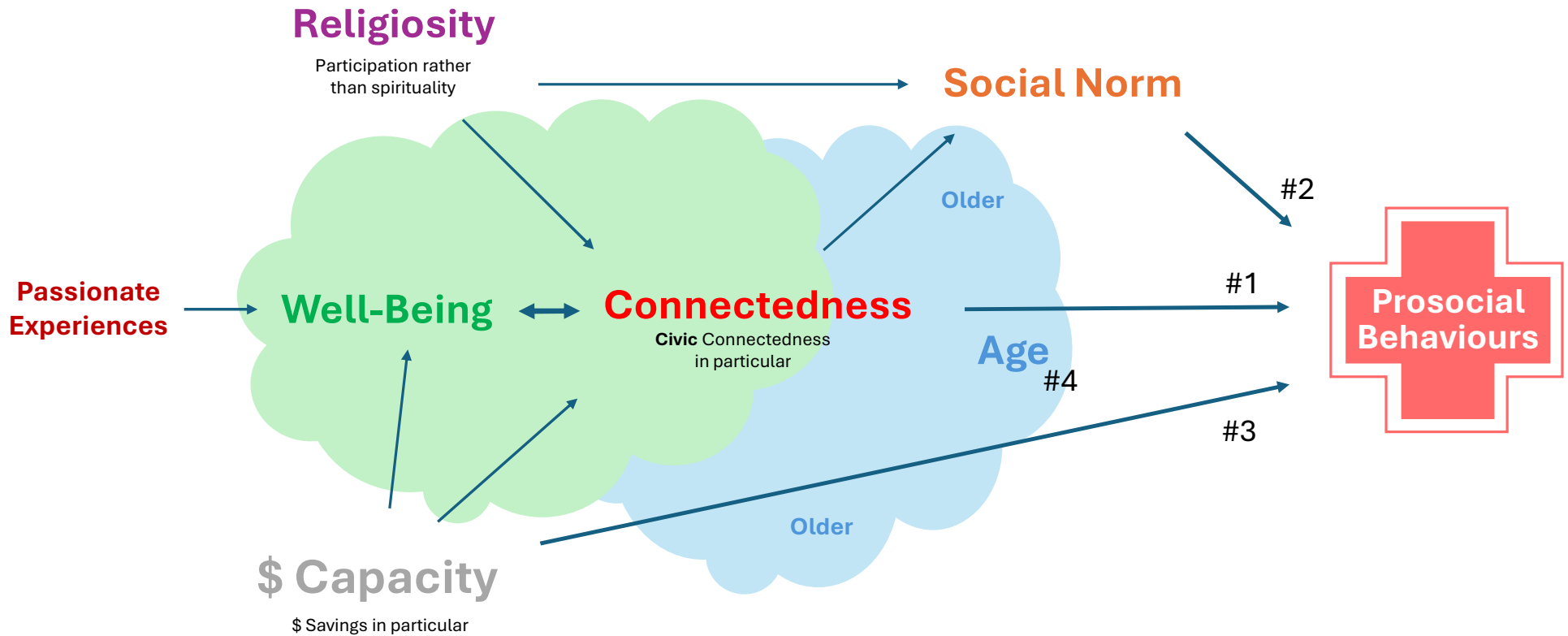
**A significant concern for the future:** The continuing weakening of connectedness, religiosity, and the passing of the Boomer cohort implies a further weakening in prosocial behaviour in Canada unless remedial action is taken.

**The central implication:** Prosocial behaviour is not simply a matter of personal virtue or private preference. **It is socially produced.** Canadians are more prosocial when people are connected, embedded, encouraged, and shaped by social norms that make helping others feel ordinary and expected. → For the charitable sector and governments alike, the need is to **strengthen the social architecture that helps produce stronger prosocial behaviour via new innovative policy development.**

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# A Visual Representation of the Drivers of Prosocial Behaviour in Canada

This summarizes the key insights from a unique, national survey of Canadian adults exploring their civic/prosocial behaviours. Our modeling teases out and accounts for the interactions between these many characteristics



**ASIDE: Social media + digital entertainment consumption** have no meaningful impact on prosocial behaviour after accounting for age and income



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# What needs to be done

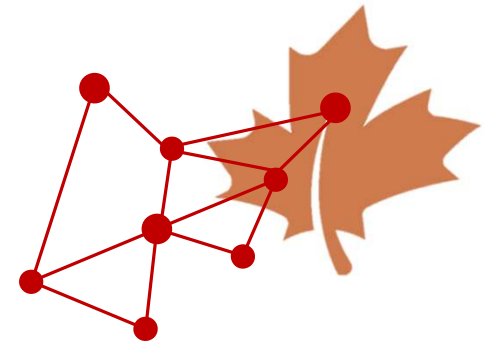
If Canada wants stronger generosity and civic contribution, it cannot rely on the appeals of individual charities. It must rebuild the social architecture that helps produce them. – The current drivers are weakening.

- Prosocial behaviours depend on strong(er) social norms, repeated participation, visible examples, belonging, and the socialization/normalization of helping behaviour over time.
- Canada needs new policy leadership to reverse the weakening of social norms and to develop policies which boost community connectedness. **Policy implication include:**

- ✓ **Develop innovate (tax) incentives to encourage the full spectrum of prosocial behaviours** that matter to our civility (i.e. incentives for volunteering, for care-giving, for donating items/things, for donating body parts, and so on).
- ✓ **Rebuild the social conditions** that support generosity. **Build connectedness + embeddedness in our communities.**
  - Strengthen local associations, volunteer pathways, neighbourhood groups, and recurring community participation.
  - Create recurring community gatherings, volunteer circles, neighbourhood groups, civic clubs, giving circles, school/workplace-based service rituals, monthly local events tied to helping others, and so on.
  - The point is to create **routine, repeated participation**. Treat connectedness as part of a society's **social infrastructure**.
- ✓ **Strengthen social norms, not just awareness of need**
  - Religious generosity is often visible:: Public asks, shared campaigns, visible participation, collective rituals of contribution. On the other hand, outside religion, giving is often hidden and privatized. This weakens norm formation. Possible interventions: public community fundraising goals , visible local giving/volunteering campaigns , community challenge models, social proof messaging , “people in this neighbourhood/ workplace helped X families” style reporting .
  - The data suggest obligation is a powerful value. The strongest differentiators include: “Helping is a personal responsibility” / “Supporting charities is an obligation” / “I was raised to help others”
  - Being raised to help others is a major pathway. Develop better interventions through schools, families, youth service programs, faith groups, sports and clubs, structured volunteering for teens and young adults.
- ✓ **And better measure prosocial behaviours and drivers more systemically. We need to be measuring what matters.**

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**These are the key findings and insights...**  
**A more thorough summary report is available separately.**

# How prosocial are Canadians?



Canadians are generous in more ways than indicated by \$ donations in the well-measured T1 filings with charity tax credits.

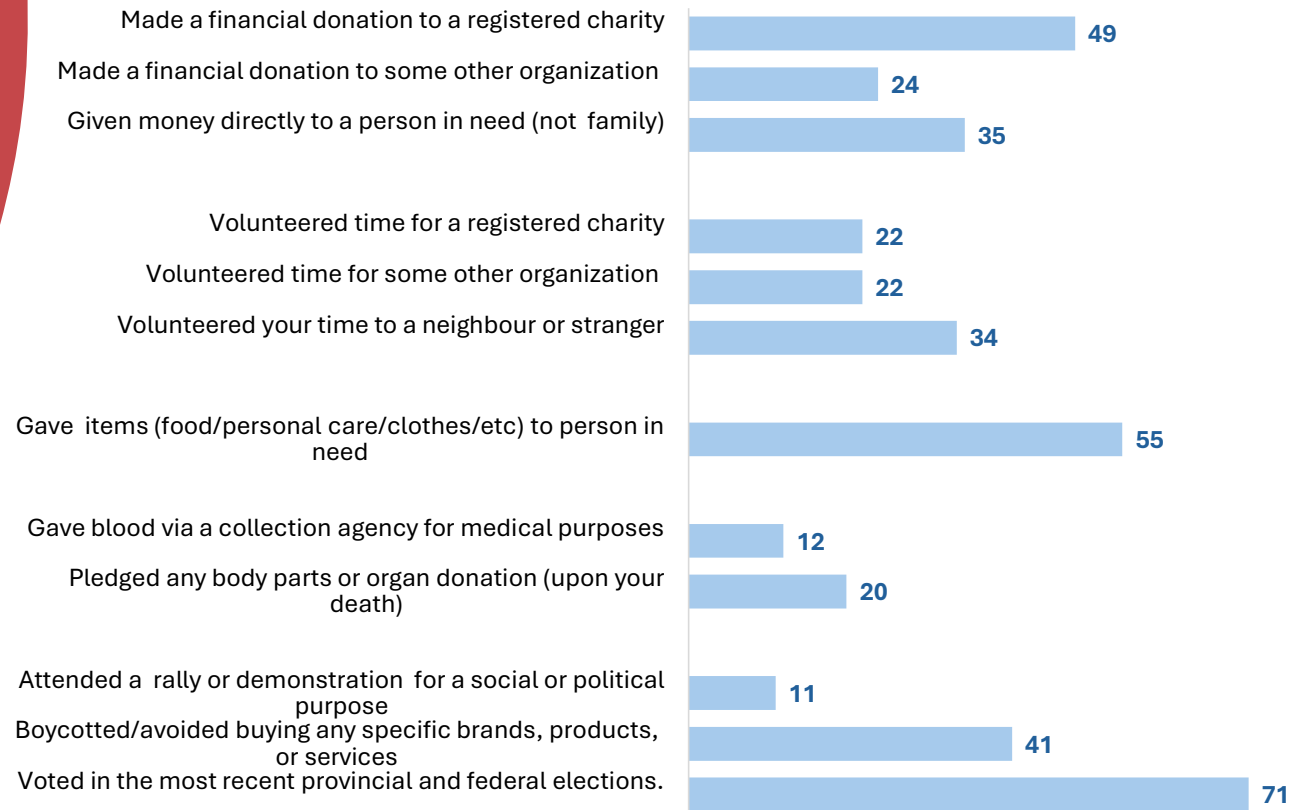
Beyond making financial donations, they are giving items (food, personal care, clothes, household items) to people in need. And they are volunteering.

They are also doing other prosocial behaviours: Boycotting, voting, and pledging organs, and so on.

However, a relatively low incidence of Canadians are active across many forms of contribution...

## Prosocial Behaviour Done in Past 12 Months

All Adults (%)



Q. "In the past 12 months, have you, yourself,...."

# Of the 12 measured behaviours, there is room for improvement



**In absolute, Canadians do not appear to be so prosocially oriented....**

- Fewer than 20% of Canadians have done more than half of the 12 measured behaviours...
- One-third have done fewer than 3 of the 12 behaviours.

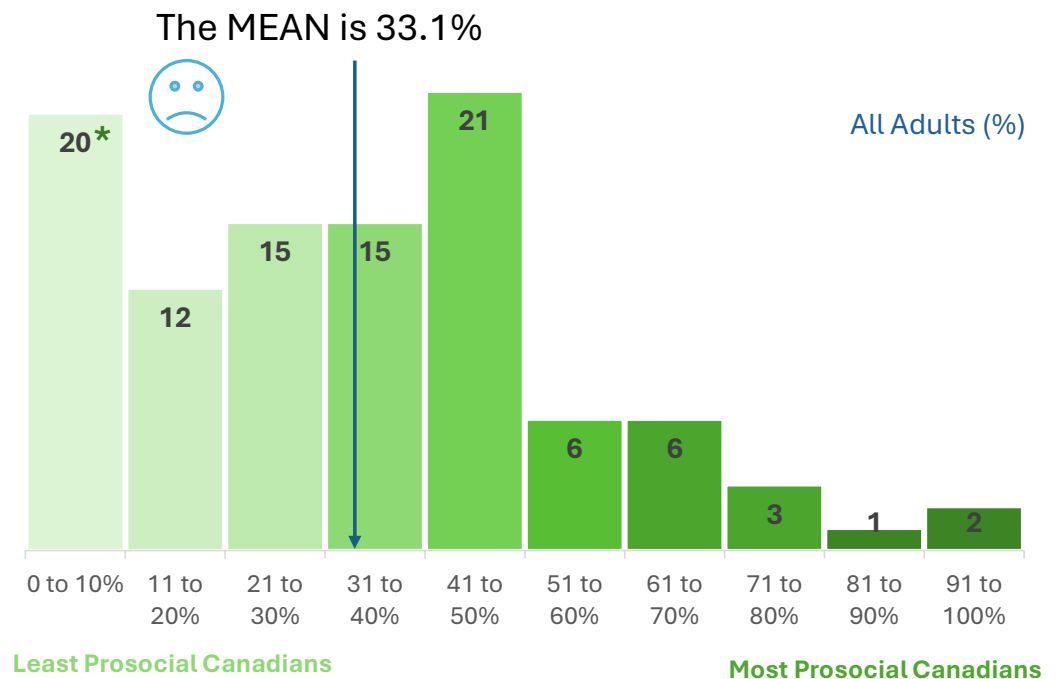
**There is much room for improvement.**

**Owing to the importance of these prosocial contributions:**

- ✓ It is likely important to understand what drives these behaviours.
- ✓ Who are the more prosocially oriented? Why is that?

## Canadian's Prosocial Behaviour Index Scores

*This indicates the percentage of the 12 measured behaviours Canadians have done in the past 12 months. The closer to 100% the more people did all 12 of the measured behaviours*



\* **How to read:** 20% of Canadians did fewer than 10% of the 12 measured prosocial behaviours

# Some have stronger prosocial behaviours than others...



We find stronger prosocial behaviours among...

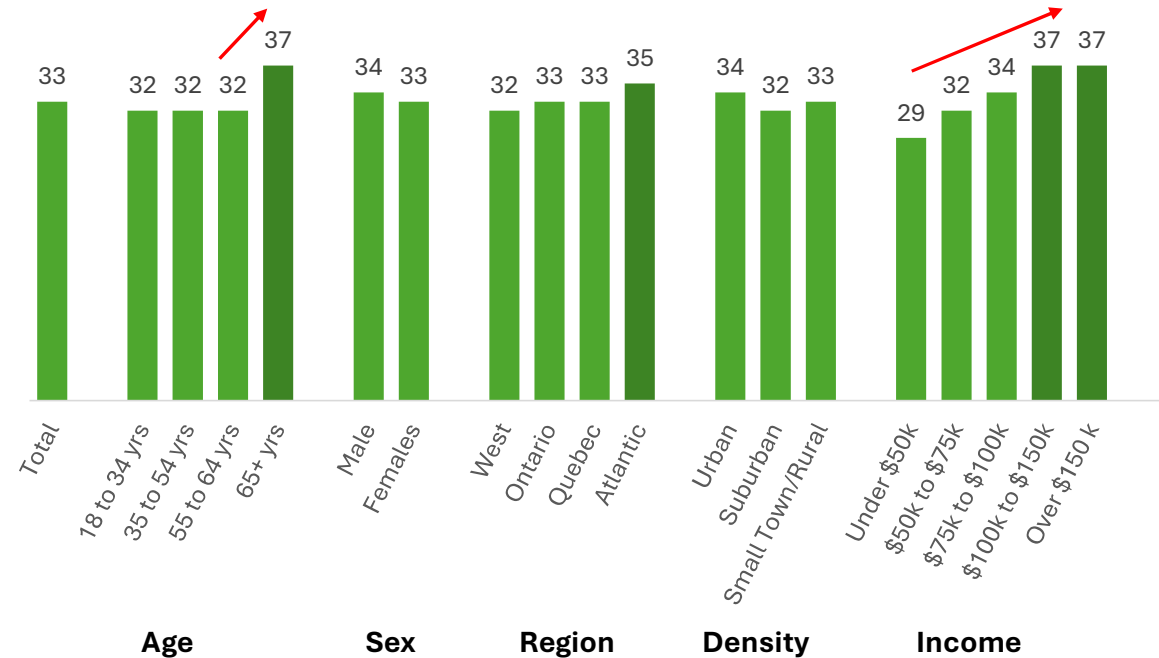
- Baby Boomers, and
- Higher Income Households

There are no statistically significant differences by gender, urban vs rural, and just a slight regional skew (Atlantic Canada).

However, there are some significant differences by psychological characteristics .....

## Canadian's Prosocial Behaviour Index Scores

Mean Score for Each Sub-Segment



# Four different prosocial profiles emerge

This works from the strongest prosocial Canadians to the weakest



## Prosocial Heroes (23%)

**Average behaviours: 7.5 of 12**

strongest all-round helping segment

**Younger**, happy + connected, religious

### What they do most

gave items to people in need: **85%**

voted: **82%**

donated to a registered charity: **80%**

helped a neighbour with time: **77%**

gave money directly to a person: **77%**

donated to another organization: **66%**

### Personal profile

average age: **45**

happiness: **77.4**

connectedness index: **76.5**

well-being index: **71.4**

very/quite religious: **42%**

financially comfortable: **41%**

quite stretched/struggling: **23%**

gave **\$200+** in past year: **61%**

## The Decents (32%)

**Average behaviours: 4.1 of 12**

**Older**, Reasonably connected and reasonably well engaged, but more selective rather than deeply active

### What they do most

gave items to people in need: **92%**

voted: **88%**

donated to a registered charity: **55%**

boycotted based on values: **47%**

helped a neighbour with time: **29%**

gave money directly to a person **27%**

### What they do less

volunteered for a charity: **11%**

### Personal profile

average age: **52**

happiness: **70.8**

connectedness index: **72.2**

well-being index: **68.3**

very/quite religious: **19%**

financially comfortable: **37%**

quite stretched/struggling: **29%**

gave **\$200+** in past year: **33%**

## Hands Off Voters (25%)

**Average behaviours: 2.6 of 12**

**Older**, civically aware, strongly anchored in voting, but much weaker on hands-on helping and giving goods

### What they do most

voted: **96%**

boycotted based on values: **41%**

donated to a registered charity: **40%**

### What they do much less

helped a neighbour with time: **19%**

gave money directly to a person: **15%**

organ donor pledge: **14%**

Gave items : **0%**

### Personal profile

average age: **52**

happiness: **69.1**

connectedness index: **68.5**

well-being index: **67.0**

very/quite religious: **18%**

financially comfortable: **36%**

quite stretched/struggling: **29%**

gave **\$200+** in past year: **17%**

## Detached (20%)

**Average behaviours: 1.4 of 12**

**Youngest group**. Least connected, lowest financial comfort. Least generous. Clearly the most behaviourally disengaged

### What they do at all

gave goods/items: **31%**

gave money directly to a person **23%**

donated to a registered charity: **16%**

boycotted: **14%**

helped a neighbour with time: **12%**

### What stands out most

voted: **0%**

### Personal profile

average age: **40**

happiness: **69.3**

connectedness index: **67.0**

well-being index: **64.9**

very/quite religious: **21%**

financially comfortable: **21%**

quite stretched/struggling: **37%**

gave **\$200+** in past year: **12%**

# The concept of “connectedness”



Connectedness is often treated as a soft or intuitive concept, but it is better understood as a multidimensional condition. It includes

- **Emotional** experiences such as belonging and appreciation,
- **Social** realities such as relationships and support networks, and
- **Civic** orientations such as trust, openness, participation, and comfort in community life.

Note the comparatively low score for participation in group activities, and the sense of belonging in the community. This is an important concern...

## Connectedness Characteristics



NOTE: These are abbreviated labels. Please see the Full Report for the complete wording of each attribute. Visit <https://sector3insights.com> to access prior (free) research sharing more insights about social norms

# “Connectedness” is a key bridge to prosocial behaviour



Those with higher “connectedness”, and stronger religiosity, are more prosocial.

And the inverse is true: Canadians who are not well connected, and/or with lower religiosity are less prosocial...

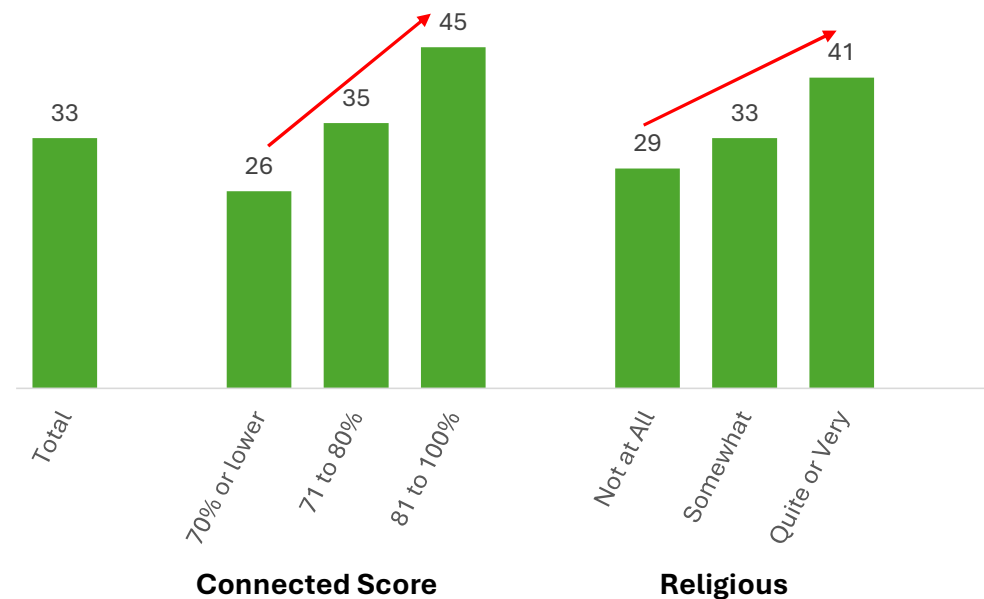
These last elements are most concerning since both **connectedness** and **religiosity** have been declining in Canada. And this will be exacerbated with the passing of the **Baby Boomers**.

*All of this implies weaker prosocial behaviours for the future in Canada, with the related consequences if remedial actions are not taken.*

## Canadian’s Prosocial Behaviour

*This indicates the percentage of the 12 measured behaviours Canadians have done in the past 12 months. The closer to 100% the more people did all 12 of the measured behaviours*

### Mean Score for Each Sub-Segment

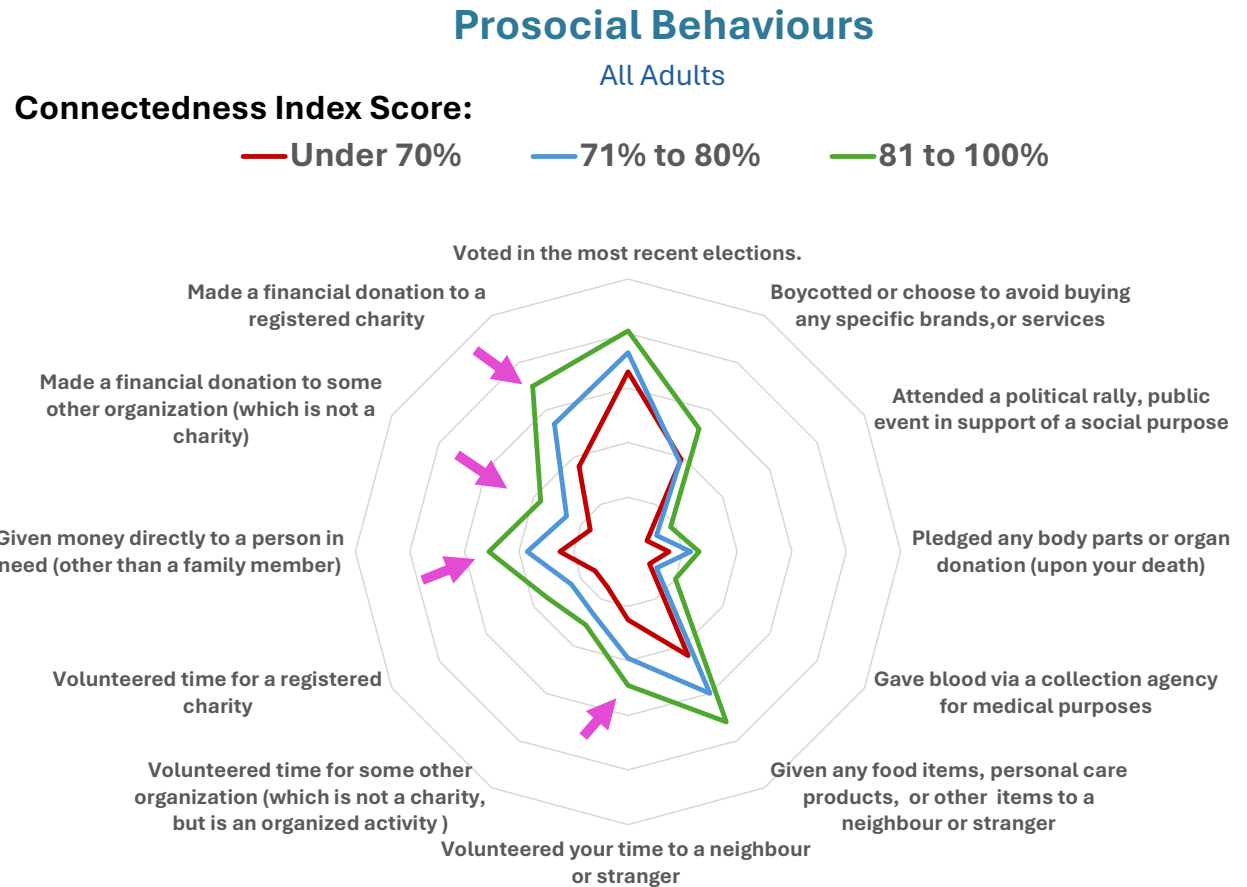




# Prosocial behaviours done by level of connectedness

Those with greater connectedness are more likely to be generous in giving money, items/things, and volunteering. - These are characteristics of being engaged in the community/others.

- Less differentiated are voting, boycotting, attending rallies, and pledging body parts (which feel more individualistic)



Q. "In the past 12 months, have you, yourself,...."

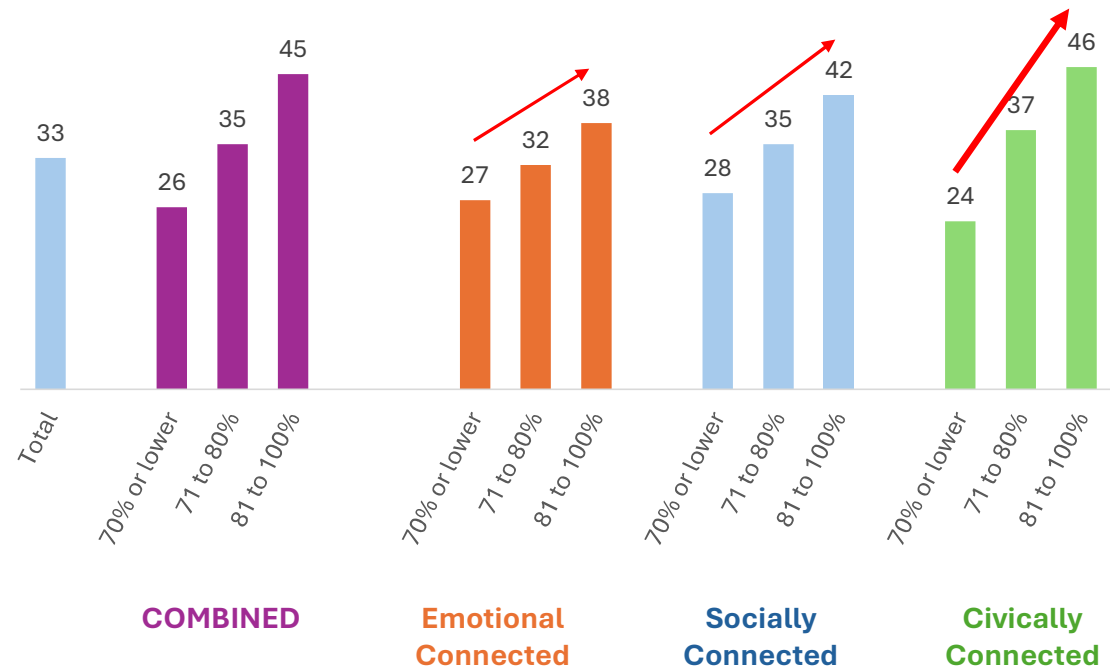
## “Civic Connectedness” is the most impactful on behaviour



All three forms of connectedness affect prosocial behaviour, but it is the “Civic Connections” which matter most. This is more about community than about personal feelings.

### Prosocial Behaviour Score by Elements of Connectedness

Mean Score for Each Sub-Segment



# Modeling the drivers of prosocial behaviour

**The approach to modeling:** We modeled different characteristics on to the number of prosocial behaviours each person did in the past 12 months. Our goal was to explore which of the characteristics matter most in understanding (driving) prosocial behaviours.

- **The strongest correlates of higher prosocial behaviour are:**

- More group memberships / association involvement
- Being active in volunteering/charitable organizations
- Higher civic connectedness
- Higher overall connectedness
- Religious service attendance / faith-community involvement
- Higher savings / financial capacity
- Better life expectations / happiness / connectedness since COVID
- More exercise.

- **Discussion:** Although we find many patterns where being engaged in some prosocial behaviours also drives other prosocial behaviours (i.e. people who volunteer are also more likely to be donors), this appears circular in the modeling (i.e. prosocial behaviours driver prosocial behaviour, even if true!)

- In turn, we also modeled the many characteristics of prosocial after removing all 'behaviours' on the driver side – see next page...

## Modeling the drivers of prosocial behaviour (excluding behaviours as drivers)

Driver (strongest to weakest)	Interpretation
<i>“Supporting charities is a conscious obligation I have for myself”</i>	The strongest clean predictor. This is not behaviour itself; it is an internalized norm.
<i>Religious service attendance</i>	Attendance matters more than general spirituality once everything is in the model.
<i>Age</i>	Older adults have more prosocial behaviours, even after accounting for income, religiosity, health, and connectedness.
<i>Posting/commenting digitally</i>	Active digital expression predicts more prosocial behaviours; passive screen time does not.
<i>“There are many needs/social problems in my community...”</i>	Perceived local need appears to activate behaviour.
<i>“Everyone has a responsibility to give/help”</i>	General civic/prosocial obligation matters.
<i>“Raised to help others”</i>	Upbringing remains important even after religiosity and age are controlled.
<i>Openness to diversity</i>	Social openness is associated with broader prosocial behaviour.
<i>Household savings/income</i>	Capacity matters, but it is not the dominant story.
<i>Traditional/social support network</i>	Having people in one’s life is positive, though less dominant once values and religiosity are included.

## Summarizing the modeling of the drivers of prosocial behaviour

1. The big insight is about **embeddedness**. People who are already inside groups, associations, faith communities, neighbourhood structures, and civic life are much more likely to act prosocially.
  - Many prosocial behaviours also encourage other prosocial behaviours (e.g. volunteering correlates with greater giving).
2. A second strong theme is **norms and moral framing**. The clearest predictor is not income by itself, but whether a person sees giving as a **personal obligation** and whether they were **socialized into helping** as a child.
  - And these two elements of **embeddedness** and **moral framing** are strongly developed among religious Canadians which explains why religiosity is often identified as a key driver to giving + volunteering.
3. A third point: **capacity matters, but it is not the whole story**. Accumulated **wealth** as well as **older age** help, but social belonging and prosocial norms appear at least as important, and often more important.
  - To be clear, younger Canadians have weaker prosocial values versus older adults.



# Appreciation of the social norm for generosity is weak and especially among non-religious Canadians

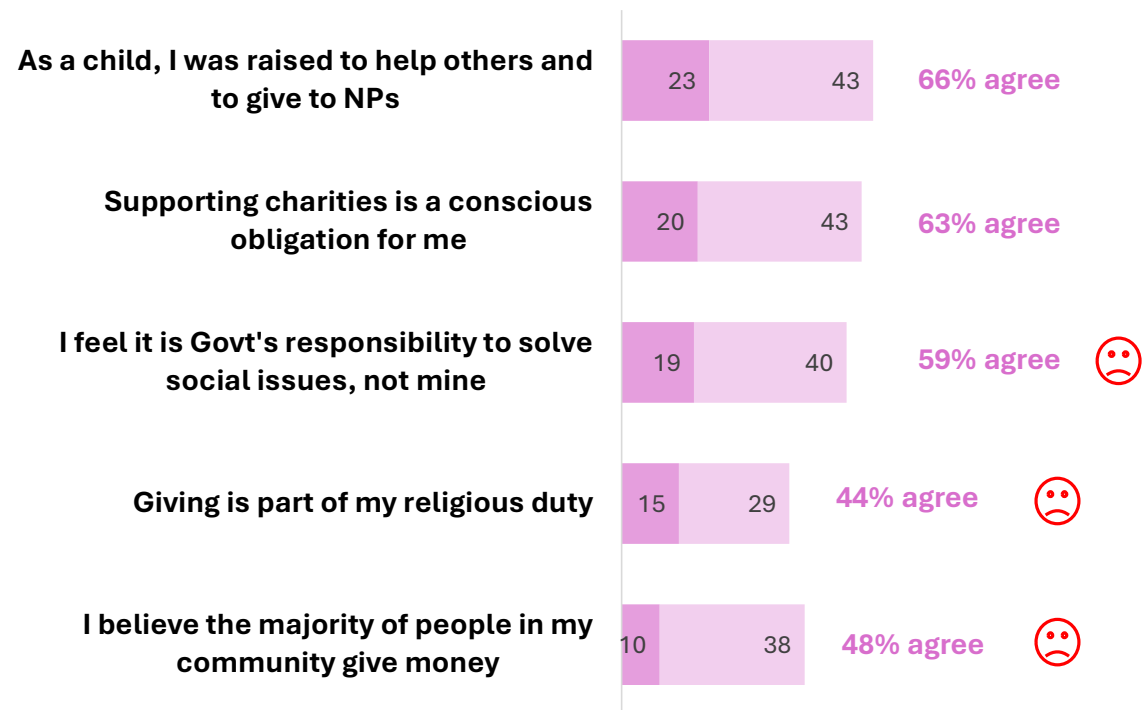


- Although most Canadians claim they were raised to help others, this is not universal.
- More than half of Canadians (52%) disagree that the majority of others are giving.
- 59% of Canadians feel it is NOT their responsibility to help solve social problems.
- The majority of Canadians do not have a religious duty to be giving.
- In brief, Canadians have generous sentiments, but the strength of the sentiments appear to be questionable. Social norms are not strongly present.**

## Prosocial Values & Attitudes

All Adults (%)

Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat



NOTE: These are abbreviated labels. Please see the full report for the complete wording of each attribute.

Visit <https://sector3insights.com> to access prior (free) research sharing more insights about social norms

# Religiosity matters mainly because it builds belonging, norms, and repetition



One of the most distinctive insights in this report

- Canadian adult populations splits into three distinct groups: 25% are religious. 30% are “somewhat religious”. 43% are not at all religious
- Religiosity is one of the most consistent correlates of generosity in this study, and in all of our previous research ([www.Sector3Insights.com](http://www.Sector3Insights.com)). But the relationship deserves careful interpretation.
  - The evidence suggests that religion matters not because of theological beliefs alone, but more because it provides a durable environment in which generosity is taught, repeated, modeled, expected, and socially reinforced. In that sense, religiosity appears to operate as a social-moral ecosystem, not merely as a private belief system.
    - Religious attendance appears to be the clearest direct religious predictor of giving, even after accounting for other influences.
    - Spirituality also matters, but much of its effect seems to operate indirectly through values and norms such as obligation, duty, and prosocial identity. This distinction is important. It suggests that repeated participation in a community of practice may matter more behaviourally than private spirituality alone.
- **These insights have wider significance beyond religion itself.** - If religious communities have historically helped cultivate generosity through belonging, repetition, visibility, and moral expectation, then the practical question for a more secular society is what other institutions might replicate these same social functions.
  - The lesson is not that public policy should attempt to make people more religious.
  - It is that stronger prosocial behaviour may require stronger secular structures of belonging, participation, and norm formation.

# Driver Analysis: The nature of religiosity's relationship with giving behaviour

**The approach to modeling:** We modeled giving \$ levels in past 12 months, using modeling which controlled for age, income, savings, and debt. Our goal was to explore which of the characteristics of religiosity matter most: attendance vs values vs spirituality. - We observed:

- 1. Attendance** is the strongest direct religious predictor of giving.
  - Attendance seems to work through:
    - social exposure,
    - Participation + connectedness
    - visibility of giving norms, and community expectations,
    - solicitation,
- 2. Spirituality** items were positively associated with giving. - *BUT*, once **personal/religious values** were added to the model, the **spirituality effect mostly collapsed toward zero**.
- 3.** This strongly suggests spirituality is working through a pathway to giving, mostly **by shaping norms, values, and identity — especially “obligation to give”**.

➤ *This implies that greater generosity in society is leveraged by (1) Connectedness, and (2) Development of greater social norms of giving (i.e. ‘obligation to give’ via upbringing, mentoring peers, defined levels, and so on). - It is not so dependent on spirituality or theology.*

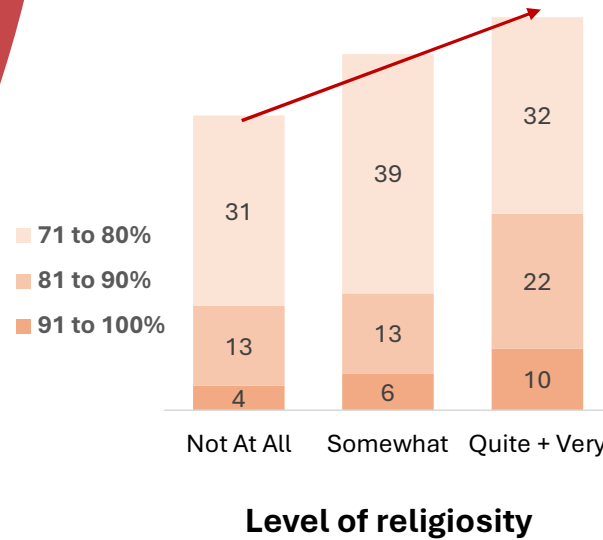
- We find greater generosity among religious Canadians because religions are good at hosting connectedness and defining social giving norms (and not because of spiritual beliefs).

# Religiosity correlates with connectedness + prosocial behaviour

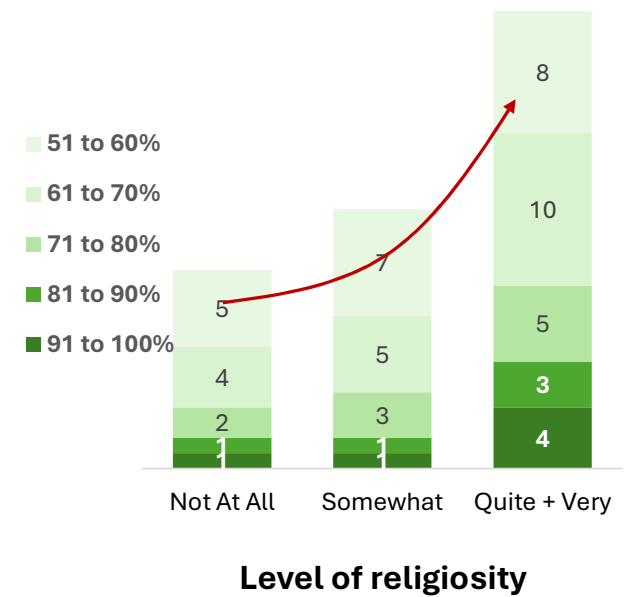


This is where we see the value or benefit of religiosity to our communities. - Religious Canadians are **more connected** and with **greater generosity**.

### Social Connectedness



### Prosocial Behavior Index



# The concept of “well-being”.

## Combining many positive measures: The Well-Being Index

Many elements comprise our sense of well-being. In turn, we looked to combine a few different measures to arrive at a composite score which brings together several elements of overall well-being: *Happiness, lack of loneliness, sense of personal + financial security, and feeling in control of life.*

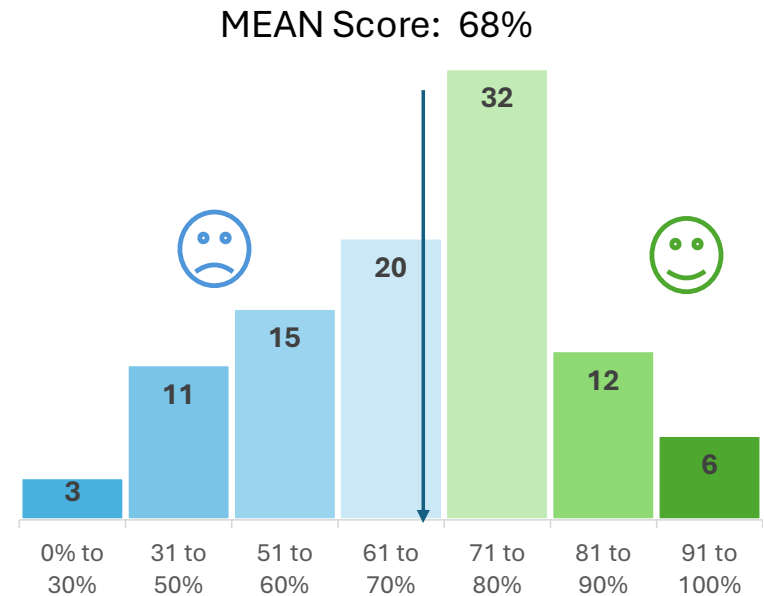
- If one is doing well on these four measures, they are likely feeling in a good way.

Respondents rate their subjective feelings on these elements, and their results are combined (per person) into a compound scale and indexed on a percentage scale:

- 100% is a perfect well-being score (highest possible rating for all four elements)
- The closer to 0% the worse the person is feeling about their well-being.
- *The full research summary report presents the details of each of these four measures and their individual impact.*

### Well-Being Score Distribution

*This score summarizes Canadians’ feelings for our 4 measures: Happiness, lack of loneliness, sense of personal + financial security, and feeling in control of life.*  
*- The closer to 100% the more people scored perfectly on the 4 scores.*



# Boomers are happier and have better well-being



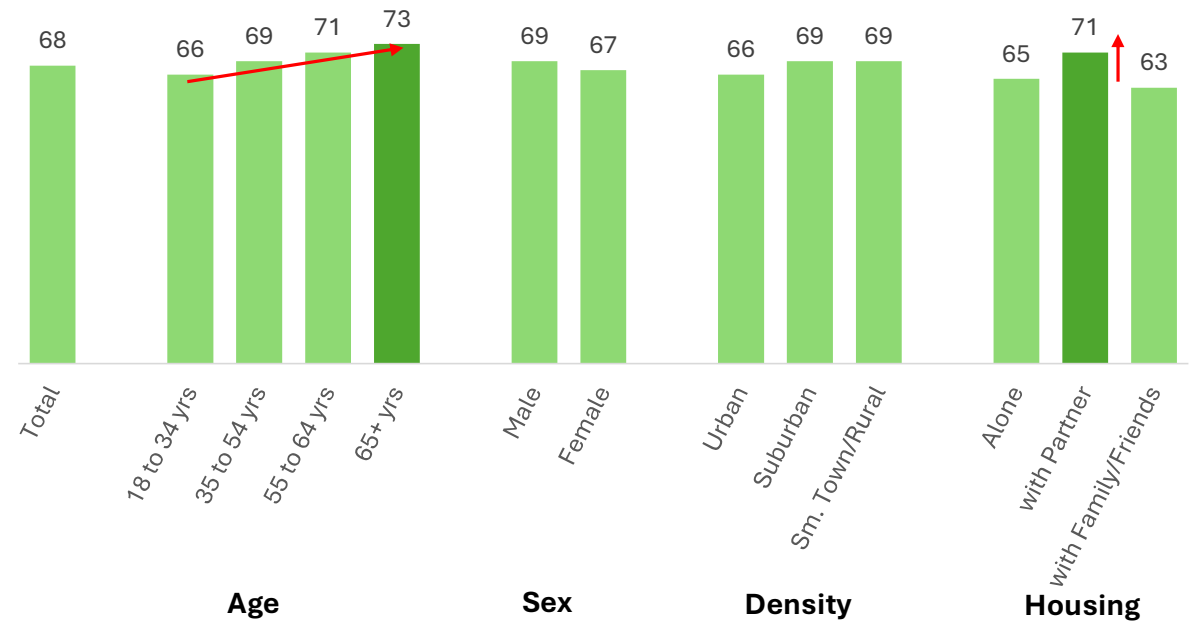
**Older Canadians** are more likely to have a better well-being than younger adults.

- This is a normal pattern owing to the financial pressures, time demands, and stresses on those in childbearing years, and those starting out in life as adults

Those **living with a partner** have better well-being, with lower loneliness and greater “connectedness”. This is indicative of a theme we will cover with respect to “connectedness” and its importance in our communities....

## Overall Well-Being Index Score

Mean Index Score (0 to 100%) for Each Sub-Segment



## Connectedness is the biggest correlate with well-being



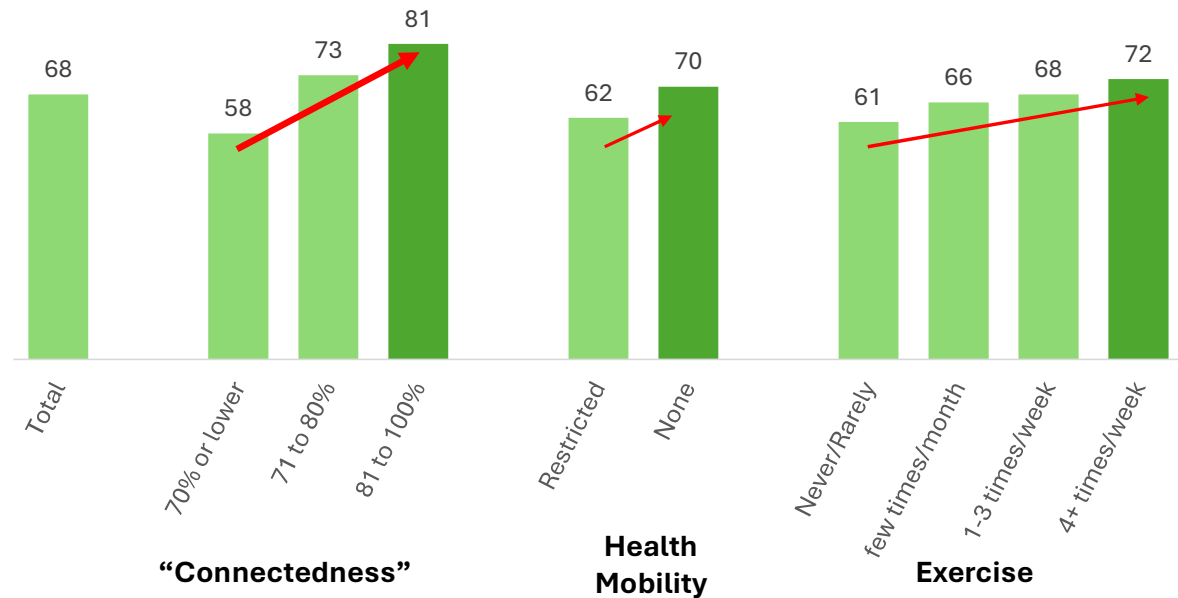
There is a strong correlation between one's well-being and **“connectedness”**.

Those who are healthier feel a greater well-being. Is this due to greater social connectedness or simply about personal energy?

- Those who exercise with others gain the incremental benefit of connectedness.

### Overall Well-Being Index Score

Mean Index Score (0 to 100%) for Each Sub-Segment



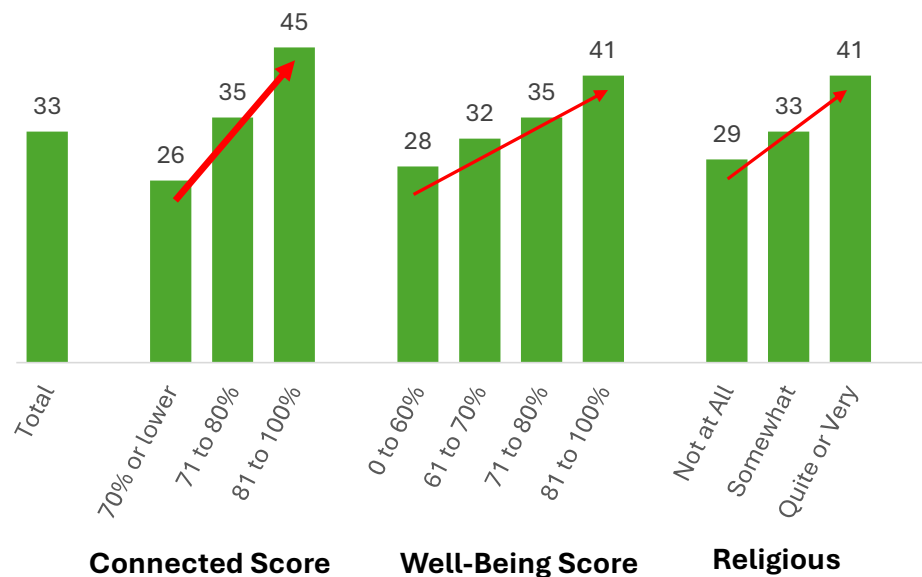
## Well-being supports prosocial behaviour, but less than the importance of connectedness



There is a correlation between one's well-being and prosocial behaviour. However, well-being is not as important as “connectedness”.

### Canadian's Prosocial Behaviour Index Scores

Mean Score for Each Sub-Segment





# Remarkably, there is little evidence that social media and TV screen time is undermining prosocial behaviour.

One element of life which has increased in the past decade is the use of social media and consumption of digital entertainment.

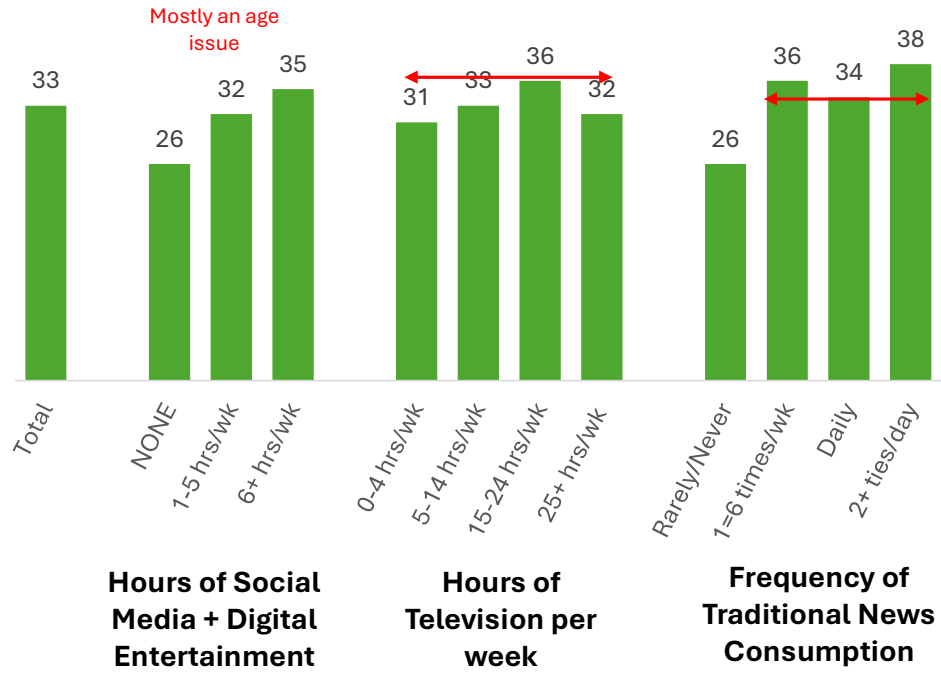
In turn, we wanted to explore if this negatively influenced prosocial behaviours. The answer, is “not really”.

- **Total social-media hours and TV hours consumed** look weak as influences once age, income, and religiosity are controlled.
  - **AGE is a confounder and** needed to be backed-out to understand the impact of media, alone.
- The only media variable showing a distinct signal so far is **passive scrolling frequency** — and even that effect is modest rather than large. And the effect is positive rather than negative!

(The media variables matter a bit more for Well-Being, but still not a lot)

## Canadian’s Prosocial Behaviour Index Scores

Mean Score for Each Sub-Segment



## Conclusion/Implication

If Canada wants stronger generosity and civic contribution, it cannot rely on the appeals of individual charities. It must rebuild the social architecture that helps produce them. – The current drivers are weakening.

- Prosocial behaviours depend on strong(er) social norms, repeated participation, visible examples, belonging, and the socialization/normalization of helping behaviour over time.
- Canada needs new policy leadership to reverse the weakening of social norms and to develop policies which boost community connectedness. **Policy implication include:**
  - ✓ Develop innovate (tax) **incentives to encourage the full spectrum of prosocial behaviours** that matter to our civility (i.e. incentives for volunteering, for care-giving, for donating items/things, for donating body parts, and so on).
  - ✓ **Rebuild the social conditions** that support generosity. **Build connectedness + embeddedness in our communities.**
    - Strengthen local associations, volunteer pathways, neighbourhood groups, and recurring community participation.
    - Create recurring community gatherings, volunteer circles, neighbourhood groups, civic clubs, giving circles, school/workplace-based service rituals, monthly local events tied to helping others, and so on.
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  - ✓ **Strengthen social norms, not just awareness of need**
    - Religious generosity is often visible:: Public asks, shared campaigns, visible participation, collective rituals of contribution. On the other hand, outside religion, giving is often hidden and privatized. This weakens norm formation. Possible interventions: public community fundraising goals , visible local giving/volunteering campaigns , community challenge models, social proof messaging , “people in this neighbourhood/ workplace helped X families” style reporting .
    - The data suggest obligation is a powerful value. The strongest differentiators include: “Helping is a personal responsibility” / “Supporting charities is an obligation” / “I was raised to help others”
    - Being raised to help others is a major pathway. Develop better interventions through schools, families, youth service programs, faith groups, sports and clubs, structured volunteering for teens and young adults.
  - ✓ **And better measure prosocial behaviours and drivers more systemically. We need to be measuring what matters.**

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