

# York Region Social Capital Study



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *York Region Social Capital Study* is an initiative of United Way Greater Toronto and Wellesley Institute.

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The *York Region Social Capital Study* builds on the theoretical framework and survey developed for the 2018 *Toronto Social Capital Study* and complements a second report called the *Peel Social Capital Study* covering Peel Region. The authors thank the Toronto Foundation, Environics Institute, Community Foundations of Canada/ Canadian Heritage, MLSE Foundation, Ontario Trillium Foundation, TAS Design Build, United Way Greater Toronto, Wellesley Institute, CanadaHelps, City of Toronto, Environics Analytics, National Institute on Ageing, and Toronto Public Health for their roles in developing the *Toronto Social Capital Study*.

The authors and partners would like to thank all of those who took the time to complete a survey, participated in a community conversation or helped organize a community conversation.

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. was responsible for collecting survey data.

A number of people helped shape this project's outcome. Michelynn Lafèche, Nation Cheong, Ruth Crammond, James Iveniuk, Nauman Khan, Laura McDonough, Kwame McKenzie, Brenda Roche, Jane Wedlock, Sidhra Yakub, and Biljana Zuvella all made important contributions. We thank Erika Clark, James Iveniuk, Mark Morrison and Alex Shatrov for their contributions on data analysis.

The report was made possible by funding from United Way Greater Toronto, The Regional Municipality of York, York Regional Police, and Wellesley Institute.

ISBN: 978-0-921669-46-3

2021

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to minimize the impacts of the far-reaching COVID-19 crisis, governments, the community sector, the health sector, and businesses have leveraged trusted, deep connections with community. Community members have mobilized quickly and acted together to help meet community needs through neighbourhood-based mutual aid networks and other informal activity. Trusted connections and social networks have been critical in this crisis. They have enabled better information sharing, encouraged testing and contact tracing, and propelled an unprecedented humanitarian effort to bring food, medicine, shelter, and a sense of belonging to those suffering most from the pandemic.

This is social capital. It is the foundation upon which thriving communities are built. Higher social capital is correlated with better well-being, improved mental health, more inclusive communities, and improved access to opportunity. The term social capital is used to describe the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which individuals and communities trust and rely upon one another. Measures of social capital can provide insight into how well communities can work together to accomplish common goals.

This study, undertaken before the COVID pandemic, is the first major research report to explore social capital in York Region, Ontario, examining:

- How it is distributed and how people experience it.
- The relationship between social capital and the health and well-being of individuals and communities.
- How social capital levels differ among key demographic groups, including those based on income or financial security.
- Next steps for addressing gaps in social capital in York Region.

Most notably, this report paints a picture of the inequitable distribution of social capital. While trust is relatively high in the community, factors such as income, age, and where you live play a role in access to social capital and its benefits. We know from other research that race and ethno-cultural background also play important roles in the inequitable distribution of social capital.<sup>1</sup>



This report concludes with three areas of opportunity to move the conversation on social capital in York Region forward, by:

- Mitigating the impacts of less access to opportunity
- Addressing the systemic issues impacting the uneven distribution of social capital
- Identifying and conducting additional research to understand the nature of social capital in York Region

Given the inequitable impact of the pandemic, especially on vulnerable, low-income, racialized,<sup>A</sup> and Indigenous communities, the report's findings provide critical factors to consider as we collectively embark on one of the most important community goals in a lifetime — a shared mission dedicated to community recovery and building back better in a post-pandemic world. With such high stakes, understanding and nurturing social capital has never been more vital.

## 1.1 Key Findings

Findings in the areas of social trust, social networks, civic connection, and neighbourhood support uncovered promising attitudes and activities that demonstrated vibrant social capital in York Region. At the same time, these findings exposed a concerning divide along income and financial security lines.

### Social Trust

- **General trust:** Levels were high with almost 2 out of 3 respondents (66.5%) agreeing that most people can be trusted. Respondents held lower levels of high trust towards people who spoke a different language (48.0%), who had a very different ethnic background (45.3%), who had different political views (38.6%), and who were strangers (20.3%).
- **Group trust:** Levels of group trust varied. About 9 in 10 (90.4%) respondents had high levels of trust in their family members. But income, financial security, and education impacted trust in neighbours. People with household incomes of \$30,000 or less, people who were struggling financially, those with less than high school education, and those who did not know their neighbours reported the lowest levels of trust in their neighbours.
- **Institutions:** The majority of respondents showed high or medium confidence in local institutions, with a marked majority trusting the police (74.2%), regardless of their age, income, or education. This is consistent with research that indicates that about 3 in 4 Canadians have either a great deal or some confidence in the police.<sup>2</sup> The majority of respondents also had high confidence in neighbourhood centres (64.3%), local merchants/ business people (60.5%), the school system (58.5%), and the justice system and courts (56.0%).

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A The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” The visible minority population includes, but is not limited to, the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. This report uses the term ‘racialized’ instead of ‘visible minority’ in alignment with the Ontario Human Rights Code, which defines race as a social construct. Statistics referring to racialized groups come from official sources that use the term ‘visible minority’.

- **Belonging:** Most respondents felt a sense of belonging to their local community with 22.7% claiming a very strong sense of belonging and 53.4% a somewhat strong sense of belonging.

### Social Networks

- **Social networks:** Networks with family and friends were strong with almost 9 in 10 respondents reporting feeling close to at least one family member and 9 in 10 feeling close to at least one friend. Almost half (46.3%) of York Region respondents had five or fewer of these relatives.
- **Bonding and bridging capital through friends:** The majority of York Region respondents reported that all or most of the friends they had been in contact with recently shared the same age, mother tongue, and education as respondents — reflecting strong bonding capital.

### Civic Connection

- **Group participation:** The majority of York Region respondents (62.8%) participated in at least one group or organization.
- **Bridging capital through group contacts:** Almost 4 in 10 young people aged 18-24 (38.4%) reported participating in groups with people of different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnically diverse group contacts were also higher for those struggling financially with over half (55.5%) reporting that most or all their group contacts were with individuals of a different ethnic background. The corresponding percentage drops to 27.1% for those who felt financially secure.
- **Giving back:** People were giving back through unpaid volunteer work with 4 in 10 respondents reporting they had volunteered in the past year and a vast majority (77.5%) donating money or goods in the same period. Almost 9 in 10 of those with incomes of \$150,000 or more donated in the past year and a significant portion (49.3%) of those who earned less than \$30,000 a year also reported the same.
- **Political engagement:** About 6 in 10 respondents (59.5%) reported they were very interested or somewhat interested in politics, though the political action that respondents reported tended to be minimal. Almost half of respondents (47.2%) reported searching for information on a political issue, and about one quarter (23.3%) boycotted or chose a product for ethical reasons.

### Neighbourhood support:

- **Neighbourhood safety:** In general, respondents felt they lived in safe neighbourhoods in York Region with 80.5% agreeing that the neighbourhood had safe places for children to play and 74.9% of respondents identifying their neighbourhood as safe to walk in at night. However, there was an undeniable income gradient, with only 16.9% of those with incomes under \$30,000 strongly agreeing that their neighbourhood was safe for children to play in, far less than the rate reported by those earning \$150,000 or more (47.1%).

- **Neighbourhood help:** Most respondents (68.2%) agreed that their neighbours were willing to help one another.
- **Close-knit neighbourhoods:** Less than half of respondents (42.1%) felt their neighbourhoods were close-knit and had neighbours that shared the same values (38.5%).
- **Local agency:** The majority of respondents believed they could make a big difference (50.2%) or some difference (39.3%) in addressing problems in their community. This is a promising result for the potential of future collective action.
- **Access to services:** Most people reported having access to the services they needed, with 68.1% reporting they had access to at least 75% of the services they needed. Of those who reported needing a specific service, housing support (41.7%), income support (41.4%), and employment counselling (34.4%) were identified as the top three services that individuals reported not having access to if or when they needed them.<sup>B</sup>

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<sup>B</sup> It is unclear *why* people did not have access to these services and there is an opportunity to unpack this further in future research.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Social capital has been studied in Canada at multiple levels of geography.<sup>3</sup> However, this report represents the first major research to explore comprehensive measurements of social capital in York Region. The Region currently has useful benchmarks for economic performance, public health, financial security, and infrastructure, but there are few measures that capture the dimensions of social capital such as the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which individuals and communities trust and rely upon one another. This research is intended to act as a benchmark and provide new data for studying social capital over time, which can inform policies and practices across all sectors in the future.

This report provides a snapshot of social capital measurements in York Region and examines the importance of social capital to the health, safety, and wellbeing of individuals and communities. It identifies different levels of community social capital such as general trust and group participation. It also explores how social capital levels are impacted by financial security, age, income level, and gender. Finally, it identifies next steps that can be considered by a range of sectors to address the gaps in social capital in York Region for all respondents, regardless of income or background.

The *York Region Social Capital Study* builds on the theoretical framework developed for the *Toronto Social Capital Study* and complements a second report called the *Peel Social Capital Study* covering Peel Region.<sup>c</sup> The *Toronto Social Capital Study* was launched in 2018 by the Toronto Foundation and the Environics Institute for Survey Research. This study is a unique collaboration between the community sector, represented by United Way Greater Toronto; a research leader on equity and social determinants of health, represented by Wellesley Institute; and the government, represented by the Regional Municipality of York and York Regional Police. Each partner has contributed its unique perspective in a collective effort to ensure that individuals and communities have access to opportunities that can improve their lives.

There are many definitions and approaches to social capital in the literature.<sup>d</sup> The above three reports are rooted in the following definition:

“Social capital is the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which individuals and communities trust and rely upon one another. Social trust is essential for communities to function, for people from different backgrounds to find common ground, and for respondents to have access to opportunities that will improve their lives. There is ample evidence that high levels of trust

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C Partners on the Toronto Social Capital Study include the Toronto Foundation, Environics Institute, Community Foundations of Canada/ Canadian Heritage, MLSE Foundation, Ontario Trillium Foundation, TAS Design Build, United Way Greater Toronto, Wellesley Institute, CanadaHelps, City of Toronto, Environics Analytics, National Institute on Ageing, and Toronto Public Health. Partners on the Peel Social Capital Study include United Way Greater Toronto, Region of Peel, Wellesley Institute, and The Community Foundation of Mississauga.

D There is no single definition of “social capital” that emerges from research on the topic. For a more in-depth exploration of the definitions of social capital, see Galley, 2015.



and social connection are not simply “feel good” notions, but key ingredients to making both individuals and communities productive, healthy and safe.”<sup>4</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged all sectors and communities to work together to support individuals and communities most affected by the health, social, and economic impacts of the virus. Emergency responses have included fast-tracked government income security supports; unprecedented coordinated response tables convened by local governments and the community sector; and conscientious compliance with new public health protocols by residents, from wearing masks to observing physical distance, to seeking testing services as necessary. While public policy actions through funding, collaboration, and information sharing have all been key to the success of these efforts, social capital has also been critical in this crisis.

Social capital has been noted as a way of recognizing “the value of ordinary daily interactions in strengthening communities.”<sup>5</sup> It is a measure of how well communities can work together to accomplish goals. Emerging research has shown that social capital, along with public policies, plays a role in helping communities work together to accomplish the collective actions needed to limit the spread of COVID-19 such as complying with public health directives and weathering the storm of COVID-19 shutdowns.<sup>6</sup> These collective efforts have required people to trust one another, trust public institutions, and rely on their social networks to help get their needs met.

Social capital has also been found to play a role in recovery and rebuild in previous emergency situations.<sup>7</sup> It can and should be leveraged to support COVID recovery. Measures of social capital and who has access to it can inform strategies to overcome distrust in COVID testing and vaccines. For instance, local partners who enjoy more trust in their communities can help bridge the gap in trust some communities have in institutions to help people get tested and vaccinated.<sup>8</sup>

While this report examines social capital in York before the pandemic, it provides us with significant factors to consider in planning further response, recovery and rebuild measures in the Greater Toronto Area. The findings herein remind us to incorporate trust-building and social connection strategies as core elements of building back better, more socially vibrant, and equitable communities. To meet

this growing aspiration, the private sector, the non-profit sector, and government will have to work together to develop coordinated equity- and community-based recovery agendas that factor social capital into regional and local post-COVID action plans.

## 2.1 York Region Social Capital Study

The research used to inform this report is based on a combination of two methods: a survey and community conversations. The survey was similar to the one used for the Toronto study, which was based on surveys that had been standardized and validated from other sources.<sup>E</sup> This survey was adapted to better reflect the York Region context by adding some questions and customizing others. The York Region survey was conducted with York Region-based respondents to measure four dimensions of social capital, along with other information pertaining to personal attitudes, behaviours, and demographic characteristics. The survey was administered via telephone and online, in English, with 1,217<sup>F</sup> respondents between December 2018 and March 2019. For more information on the administration of the survey and community conversations, please refer to Appendix A.

Based on the information collected through the survey, the presentation of results is organized around four dimensions of social capital, which were developed by the *Toronto Social Capital Study*:

- **Social trust:** Social trust is the extent to which individuals trust (or distrust) others whom they know or have an opinion about.<sup>9</sup>
- **Social networks:** Social networks are defined as the presence and quality of social connections that individuals have with others, including family and friends.<sup>10</sup>
- **Civic connection:** Civic connection is the concept of community or collective vitality — the extent to which people engage with others in groups and organizations (above and beyond family and friends).<sup>11</sup>
- **Neighbourhood support:** Neighbourhood support measures the extent to which respondents view their neighbourhood as having supportive characteristics.<sup>12</sup> This dimension was added to the three primary dimensions of social capital.

The *York Region Social Capital Study* takes a first look at an important issue that has implications for the future health of communities in York Region. It aims to:<sup>G</sup>

- Raise awareness of the importance and benefits of social trust, reciprocity and vibrancy of communities, so that these measures are considered alongside other measures of well-being and opportunity.
- Create an evidence base that all sectors can use to inform decisions on investments, policies and initiatives.

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E For example, the Statistics Canada General Social Survey 2013.

F This represents the number of respondents in York Region only. 1,210 respondents were surveyed separately for the Peel Region Social Capital Study. The number of respondents in this study was weighted by age and ethnicity, which is why the total weighted sample size appears as 1,062 (or less depending on non-response) throughout the figures of this report. More information can be found in Appendix A.

G These aims were inspired by the goals set forth in the *Toronto Social Capital Study*.

- Establish a basic source of descriptive information that can serve as a foundation for further in-depth research into social capital in York Region.

The hope is that this report will inspire the cross-sector collaboration needed to resolve the complex issues of poverty and inequality faced by some communities in York Region.

### 3. THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

One of the key reasons that the frame of social capital has resonated with researchers and governments is that it is associated with aspects of community well-being such as social cohesion, social mobility, and social inclusion.<sup>13</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) describes a cohesive society as one that “works toward the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility”.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, social capital is associated with many other features of healthy communities.<sup>H 15</sup>

Higher social capital is linked to **personal well-being and better health**, including:

- **Better life satisfaction:** Social connections — a key component of social capital — have been found to be a strong predictor of life satisfaction.<sup>16</sup>
- **Improved well-being for children:** Social capital rates have been used to predict child well-being such as lower infant mortality rates, teen pregnancies, low birth-weight babies, and teen drug use.<sup>17</sup>
- **Improved physical and mental health:** Social capital can lead to better physical and mental health, as more networked people have better health outcomes in their personal lives, at work, and in the community.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, family social capital can mitigate the effect of poverty on children’s anxiety and depression.<sup>19</sup>

Higher social capital has also been found to **contribute to community well-being**. More specifically, it is associated with:

- **Giving back to community:**<sup>20</sup> Trust is a core element of social capital. Individuals who are more trusting have been found to be more likely to give to charity or volunteer their time.<sup>21</sup>
- **Safer societies:** Increased rates of social capital are correlated with safer societies as some researchers have found an association between elements of social capital such as trust and crime.<sup>22 1</sup>
- **More functional civil societies and democracies:** Civil society and democracy both need citizen participation in social and public life. Greater participation in voluntary associations, as one measure of participation, can be due to and result in improved trust, cooperation, social resources, and other types of engagement that are needed for healthy democracies.<sup>23</sup> In this way, higher social capital is associated with better functioning democracies and increased political participation.

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H The direction of the relationship between social capital and these benefits is not always clear. These benefits may be caused by higher levels of social capital, the benefits may cause social capital to grow or the benefits may increase as social capital increases. The relationship between social capital and outcomes can also be negative. For example, in the case of gangs or dysfunctional family units, strong social capital can result in harmful impacts for communities (Helliwell, 2001 and Powdthavee, 2008 in Sen et al.).

I See Strouble, 2015 for a discussion of the association between safety, systemic issues like structural discrimination and social capital. Strouble highlights that some African-American communities have lower social capital because of structural barriers such as high incarceration rates that can reduce trust.

- **Easier provision of public policies:**<sup>24</sup> Social capital encourages people to follow the rules that govern society and makes it easier for people to take collective action.<sup>25</sup> This reduces the need for resources to enforce rules and helps with the implementation of public policies.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, higher levels of social capital are also associated with **improved access to opportunities** such as:

- **Improved education outcomes:** Researchers note that social capital can translate into better education as a stronger network can lead to connections to schools and the supports many students need within schools.<sup>27</sup>
- **Better employment opportunities:** Social capital can be converted into improved employment opportunities<sup>28</sup> as finding employment can often be a function of who one knows as opposed to what job one applies for.<sup>29</sup> Social networks have been found to have a positive effect on the occupational status and annual income of immigrants.<sup>30</sup>
- **More inclusive societies:** People with higher levels of trust are less likely to be xenophobic, are more likely to respect gender and racial equality, and are more likely to uphold civil liberties.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.1 The social capital divide

Access to social capital and the ability to leverage it are not always evenly distributed among all groups. For example, those with lower income or newcomers to the country may not have access to the types of social networks that some other Canadians do. Even when access to social capital is more evenly distributed, the ability to leverage it into better opportunities can be constrained by other systemic issues such as poverty or systemic discrimination. For example, while two families may know someone in their network who can connect them with the same quality of child care, the higher income family may have the resources to travel to the neighbourhood where that child care is located, whereas the lower income family may not. In this way, social capital can ease or create barriers to opportunities, alongside other key factors such as income, government supports, community services, and systemic enablers or barriers.

While this report will show the uneven distribution of social capital among groups by income, age, and other characteristics, the data in this report is insufficient to explain why these levels differ for these groups. In fact, the literature on social capital has not deeply explored what causes uneven distribution in social capital and instead has highlighted correlation.<sup>32</sup> However, it is still important to highlight this uneven distribution because of social capital's correlation with well-being and access to opportunity.

Social capital's inequitable distribution adds to the understanding that income and ethno-cultural background play disproportionate roles in a person's ability to get ahead. This would substantiate other research findings on the region such as *The Opportunity Equation* series. In this series, the growth in income inequality in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has meant that a person's background, such as their ethno-cultural background or gender, played an outsized role in their access to opportunity.<sup>33</sup>

Another study described this as:

“This is often how social capital operates. It is a resource that insiders find they can draw upon easily, or without conscious thought, while outsiders find they must collectively organize sustained social action to obtain some degree of equitable access to its services. . . . The result of this social structure is that persons with similar personal abilities find they have unequal social capabilities depending on their ethnicity or some other personal characteristic.”<sup>34</sup>

Regardless, enabling a person to access more social capital will not automatically lead to a good quality of life if other factors such as access to and availability of income, affordable housing, secure employment, and other resources are not addressed in tandem.

## 4. SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE CONTEXT OF YORK REGION

Social capital can help a community flourish or limit its growth. The following section presents a brief overview of the context and major systemic issues that play a role in the levels and distribution of social capital in York Region.

York Region is a vibrant, diverse, and growing area of the GTA. With almost 1.2 million people living in the Region, it plays an important role in the social, political and economic growth of the GTA.<sup>35</sup>

York Region has also been one of the regions of Ontario hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, residents of York Region had tested positive for COVID-19 over 30,000 times and almost 550 people had lost their lives to the pandemic, despite concerted efforts by multiple levels of government, public health, community agencies, and residents to prevent the spread of the illness.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 1: Map of York Region



York Region is made up of nine local cities and towns (**Figure 1**):

- Town of Aurora
- Town of East Gwillimbury
- Town of Georgina
- Township of King
- City of Markham
- Town of Newmarket
- City of Richmond Hill
- City of Vaughan
- Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

York Region is a two-tier municipality, meaning it is served by both an upper-tier Regional and many lower-tier municipal governments. The Regional Municipality of York delivers specific services for the lower-tier municipalities. Most designated urban land in York Region is concentrated in the south and middle around Vaughan, Markham, Richmond Hill, Aurora, and Newmarket.<sup>37</sup> There is rural land and green space in King, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Georgina, and East Gwillimbury.<sup>38</sup> Geographically, the entire region is about three times larger than the City of Toronto.<sup>39</sup>

One of York Region's many assets is its people. York Region has a highly educated population: 41% of residents have education of university level or above.<sup>40</sup> York Region is also among one of the most diverse regions in Canada. About half of York Region respondents identify with a racialized ethno-cultural background, which is more than twice the rate of the rest of Canada.<sup>41</sup> The City of Markham is Canada's most diverse municipality with almost 4 out of 5 people identifying with a racialized ethno-cultural group.<sup>42</sup> In York Region, the top three racialized groups by population size are Chinese (45%), South Asian (22%), and West Asian (8%).<sup>43</sup> The top languages spoken at home outside of English and French are Cantonese, Mandarin, and Persian/Farsi.<sup>44</sup> Although disaggregated data for COVID-19 rates is not publicly available for York Region, according to Statistics Canada, those neighbourhoods in Ontario with the highest proportions of racialized individuals had COVID-19 rates three times as high as neighbourhoods with lower proportions of racialized individuals.<sup>45</sup> In addition, for racialized groups in Canada, COVID-19 made it harder to meet financial obligations and basic needs.<sup>46</sup>

As of 2016, less than 1% of York Region's population identified as Indigenous in the Canadian Census, although census data on this issue is widely acknowledged as underestimating true population counts of Indigenous peoples.<sup>47</sup> For example, in Toronto, a more accurate study found the rates of Indigenous peoples in Toronto were two-to-four times higher than the census counts.<sup>48</sup> The only reserve in Peel Region, Toronto, and York Region is the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation located on Georgina Island in Lake Simcoe.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to COVID-19, many economic trends for York Region were moving in a positive direction. For example, York Region had the second highest median household income in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).<sup>49</sup> With over 600,000 jobs, York Region's employment growth had outpaced that of Ontario and Canada for the past five years.<sup>50</sup> However, the pandemic has disrupted this growth. Between January 2020 and February 2021, the unemployment rate for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), which includes Toronto, York Region, Peel Region, and

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<sup>1</sup> Chippewas of Georgina Island. Although this reserve is geographically close to York Region, the reserve itself is not accountable to the laws of York Regional government or the provincial government, and is a distinct nation governed by a Chief and Council members.

parts of Halton and Durham Regions, doubled from 5.5% to 11.1%.<sup>51</sup>

Even before the pandemic, income growth was not keeping up with the rising cost of living and had increasingly become unevenly spread across groups. York Region has not escaped the harmful impacts of social and economic trends impacting the rest of the GTA: growing poverty, increasing costs of housing and food, rising income inequality and the pervasiveness of precarious employment, all of which have a disproportionate impact on certain populations like racialized groups, immigrants, women, and young people.<sup>52</sup>

These trends matter to the social capital of a community. Low-income can present barriers to getting to know people in a community, participating in social networks and voluntary associations, and developing a sense of trust and reciprocity.<sup>53</sup> In 2015 in York Region, about 12% of the population lived with low-income, with racialization, immigration status, disability, and lack of official language knowledge each playing a role in who was more likely to live in low-income.<sup>54</sup> Over 14% of children under 18 years of age live in low-income households.<sup>55</sup> While household income increased by 17% between 2006 and 2016, rent costs grew close to three times as fast (46% increase).<sup>56</sup>

In the past 30 years, middle-income neighbourhoods in York Region have shrunk from 94% to 65%.<sup>57</sup> According to this measure, many neighbourhoods in the GTA are now largely segregated into high and low income. Over 1980-2015, this socio-economic trend impacted all regions in the GTA, including York Region.

Over the same period, between 1980 and 2015, young people, immigrants, and racialized groups became poorer.<sup>K</sup> The average income of young people in York Region decreased by 21% while the income gap between racialized and white groups increased over time, with racialized individuals earning 66 cents for every dollar earned by a white person in York Region in 2015.<sup>58</sup>

Young people, immigrants, and racialized communities in York Region are experiencing barriers to improving their economic standing with income inequality growing over time.<sup>59</sup> This is partly because of an increasingly precarious labour market. Precarious employment has become entrenched in the labour market, with 41.3% of workers between the ages of 25 and 64 in York Region working in some degree of precarious employment, which has a harmful impact on individual, family, and community well-being.<sup>60</sup> Precarious employment makes it difficult to participate in activities like voluntary associations and to plan activities with family and friends.<sup>61</sup>

This increase in income inequality that is in part being fueled by precarious employment is particularly relevant because income inequality has been found to have a negative impact on the level of social capital.<sup>62</sup> In particular, the level of economic equality has been found to be the strongest determinant of trust, as those at the bottom in more equal societies are more likely to believe that prosperity is shared and is accessible to all.<sup>63</sup>

In sum, York Region is a community with a vibrant, diverse and growing population sharing many of the GTA's social and economic trends. These include rising income inequality, growing precarious employment, and poverty. Some respondents are

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K York Region immigrants who have been in Canada for 10 to 19 years earned \$56,000 in 1980 and only \$45,500 in 2015: standard to 2015 dollars. Source: Rebalancing the Opportunity Equation, 2019.

able to thrive in this community with limited barriers to their success, while others are faced with systemic barriers that make it challenging to thrive.

This next section will explore the key findings related to social capital and unpack who may be benefitting from greater access to social capital and who may be getting left behind.

## Types of Social Capital

This report references two types of social capital. The first is **bonding social capital**, which describes “the extent to which individuals form social networks with people who are like themselves”.<sup>64</sup> The second is **bridging social capital**, which is the extent to which people form social networks “with people who are different in some meaningful way, such as ethnic background, language and political views”.<sup>65</sup> L Both types of social capital can be important sources of well-being and access to opportunity. For example, a newcomer with many bonding connections within their own ethno-cultural community may more easily access a job in an industry or business led by someone from that community. However, if their skills, experience, and aspirations are outside of their bonding access points, they may have to build and activate bridging social capital to get a start in another industry.

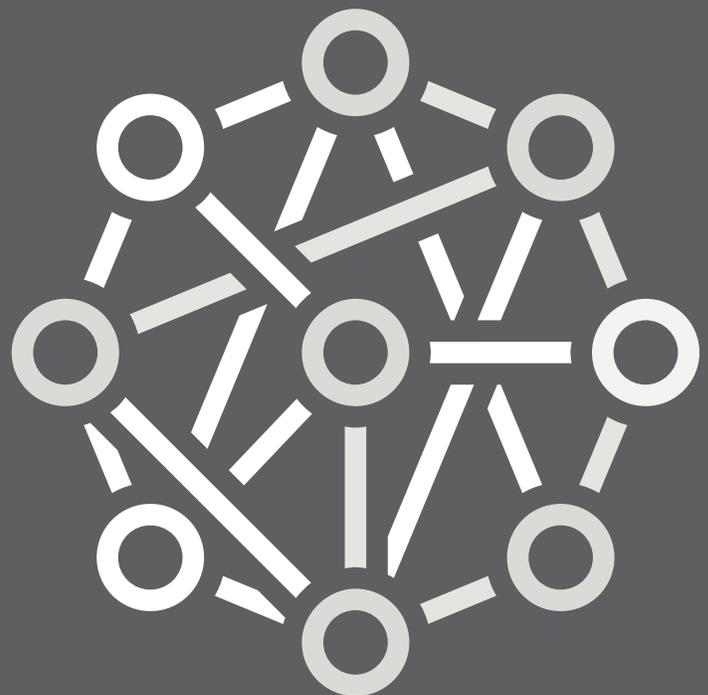
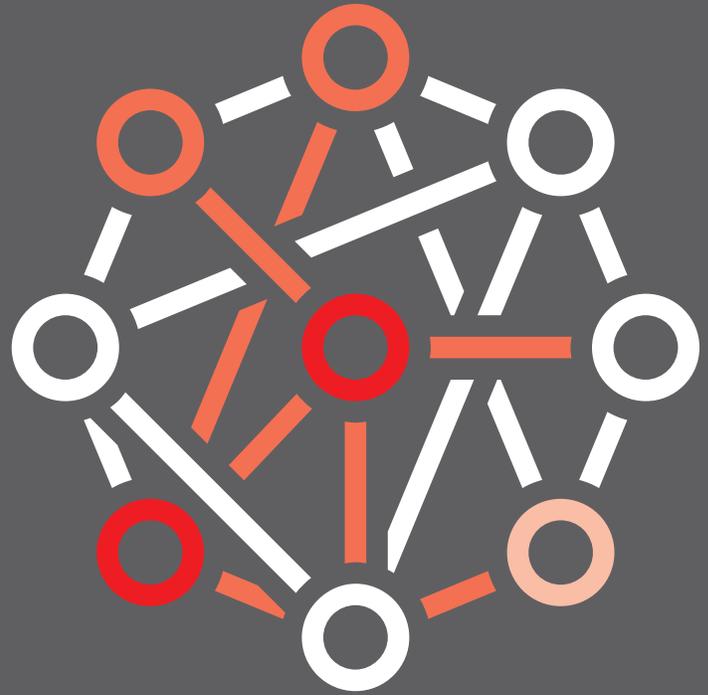
Bonding and bridging capital are used as a framework to guide understanding of findings in this report. This study is intended to serve as a foundation for further research that could reveal important learnings about bonding and bridging in Peel. For example, how factors such as diversity and discrimination impact bonding and bridging capital and people’s ability to access them.

There is a wide range of research that has been conducted on social capital of Indigenous populations in Canada and the unique approaches and definitions used. Readers are encouraged to explore this literature.<sup>66</sup>

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L Toronto Community Foundation & Environics Institute, 2018.

# 5. KEY FINDINGS







## 5.1 SOCIAL TRUST

Social trust is defined as the extent to which individuals trust (or distrust) others whom they know or have an opinion about.<sup>M</sup> Trust is considered to be one of the most integral ingredients of social capital. Trust enables people to work together toward a common good and it enables people to get the services and supports they need. It acts as a social lubricant that makes the process of accomplishing a goal easier, more pleasant, and more efficient.

This study measures social trust in four ways:

- Trust in other people overall
- Trust in others belonging to specific groups that are either similar or different from one's group
- Confidence in various institutions (e.g. police, justice system, school system)
- Sense of belonging to one's local community

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<sup>M</sup> Toronto Community Foundation & Environics Institute, 2018.

## Highlights of social trust findings:

- **General trust:** Levels were high with almost 2 out of 3 respondents (66.5%) agreeing that most people can be trusted. Respondents had lower levels of high trust among people who spoke a different language (48.0%), who had a very different ethnic background (45.3%), with different political views (38.6%), and who were strangers (20.3%).
- **Group trust:** Levels of group trust varied. About 9 in 10 (90.4%) respondents had high levels of trust in their family members. But income, financial security and education impacted trust in neighbours. People with household incomes of \$30,000 or less, people who identified themselves as struggling financially, those with less than high school education, and those who did not know their neighbours reported the lowest levels of trust in their neighbours.
- **Institutions:** The majority of respondents showed high or medium confidence in local institutions, with a marked majority trusting the police (74.2%), regardless of their age, income, or education. This is consistent with research that indicates that about 3 in 4 Canadians have either a great deal or some confidence in the police.<sup>67</sup> The majority of respondents also had high confidence in neighbourhood centres (64.3%), local merchants/business people (60.5%), the school system (58.5%), and the justice system and courts (56%).
- **Belonging:** Most respondents felt a sense of belonging to their local community with 22.7% claiming a very strong sense of belonging and 53.4% a somewhat strong sense of belonging.



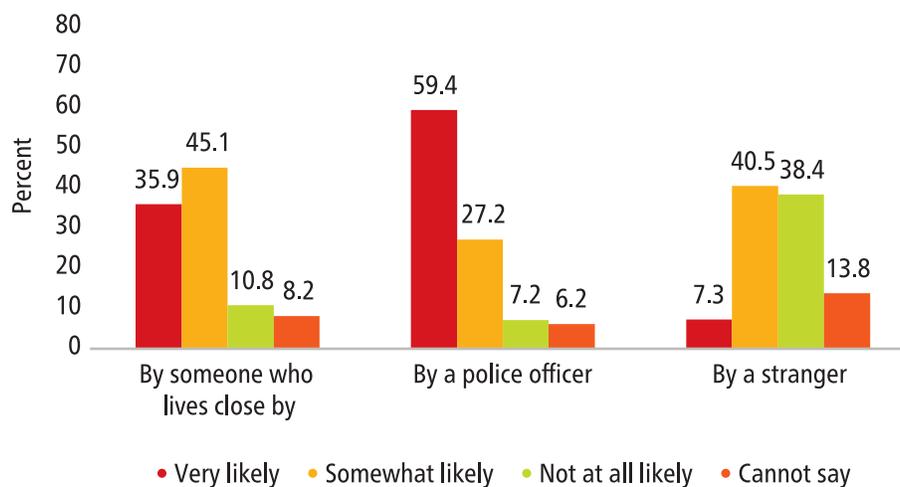
## 5.1.1 General trust

There are two common ways to measure general trust. One is to ask about people's confidence in recovering a lost wallet or purse containing \$200 from a police officer, a neighbour, and a stranger. Another is to ask which of two opposing statements is closest to one's view: 'most people can be trusted' or 'you cannot be too careful in dealing with people'.

### 5.1.1.1 Recovering a lost wallet or purse

York Region respondents are most likely to expect they would recover a lost wallet or purse if found by a police officer. Almost 3 in 5 of respondents (59.4%) said this was very likely, compared with 27.2% who reported it was somewhat or not at all likely (7.2%) likely (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Recovering a lost wallet or purse (%)



Survey question: If you lost a wallet or purse that contained \$200, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding)

People were less confident about recovering a lost wallet or purse from someone in their neighbourhood, with only about 1 in 3 (35.9%) who believed it was very likely to happen. This number fell to only 7.3% of respondents who believed that a stranger would be very likely to return a lost wallet or purse and almost 40% who believed that a stranger was not at all likely to return a lost wallet or purse. These findings suggest trust in those working in an official capacity, followed by trust in members of one's local community, but a relative lack of trust in someone unknown to them.

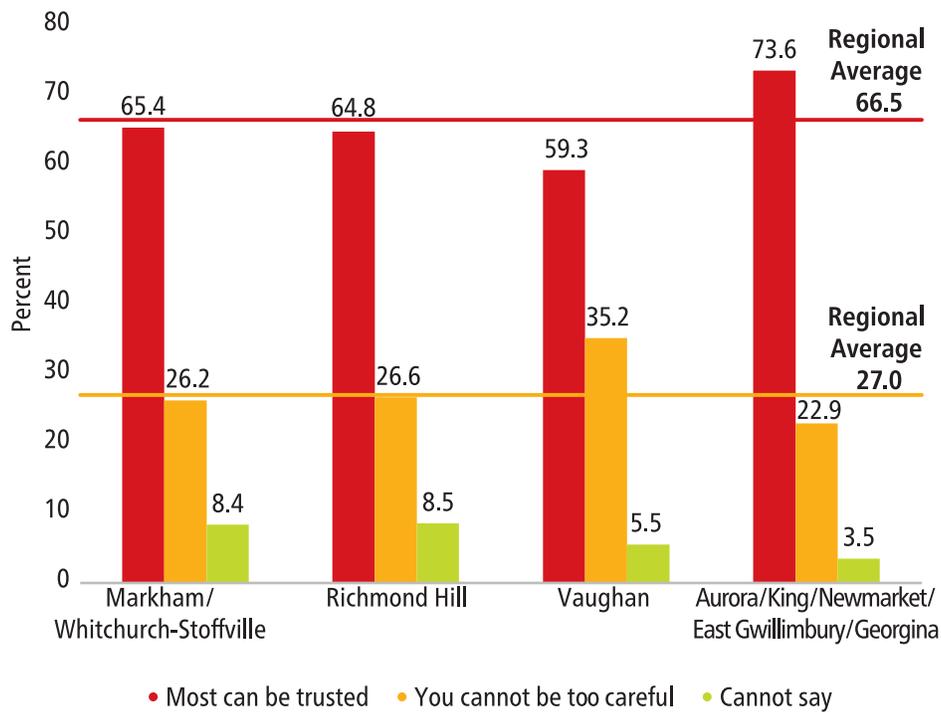
### 5.1.1.2 General trust in others

A significant majority of York Region respondents indicated they generally trust others. About 2 in 3 (66.5%) York Region respondents agreed that most people can be trusted. This aligns with the most recent data for Canada as a whole, which found that 54% of respondents in Canada indicated general trust in others.<sup>68 N</sup>

Conversely, over 1 in 4 (27%) York Region respondents believed ‘you cannot be too careful in dealing with people’. While this group is not small, it is still almost half the rate reported by respondents in the 2013 Canada-wide survey (46%).<sup>69</sup>

Levels of trust in York Region reveal differing patterns between northern and southern municipalities. Respondents in the northern municipalities of Aurora, King, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, and Georgina reported higher general trust than those in the southern municipalities of Richmond Hill and Vaughan or the combined area of Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: General trust by municipality and comparison to York Region average (%)<sup>o</sup>**



Survey question: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding). Significance level of  $p \leq .05$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between general trust and municipality.

N Canadian survey data provided for context, though caution should always be exercised in comparing different surveys.

O These municipalities were aggregated for this analysis due to small sample sizes for some municipalities. See note in methodology for further information.

These high levels of general trust in the Region are an asset, given the positive association that social capital has with well-being and the potential for easing access to opportunity. However, we know from other research that income inequality is growing, with some groups such as seniors, those born in Canada, white people, men, and the university educated gaining more access to income, job security, and opportunities. Other groups such as young people, immigrants, racialized communities, women, and high school graduates continue to experience more barriers to income, job security, and opportunities. For the latter group, hard work alone is not enough as systemic barriers make it harder to succeed.<sup>70</sup>

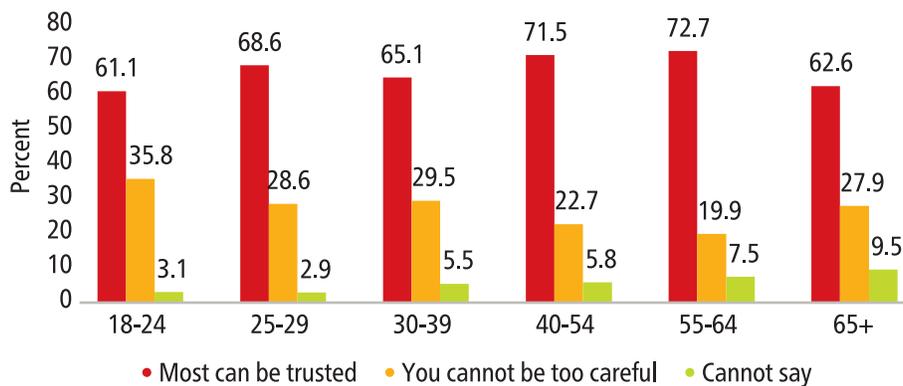
Because of this, it is important to understand not just the overall rates of social capital, but the differential rates of social capital to understand how social capital may be playing a role in enabling or preventing people from access to opportunity. This report begins this conversation by looking at social capital through different socio-demographic variables, starting with general trust.

General trust was also analyzed by socio-demographic characteristic in order to understand whether social capital is unevenly distributed.

General trust varied across the York Region population by socio-demographic characteristics, most noticeably by age. Middle-aged respondents, those 40 to 64 years of age, reported the highest levels of trust (**Figure 4**).

Young respondents between the ages of 18 to 24 years of age and those aged 65+ reported the lowest levels of trust (**Figure 4**). Once again, even those reporting the least trust in York Region showed fairly high levels of trust.

**Figure 4: General trust by age group (%)**



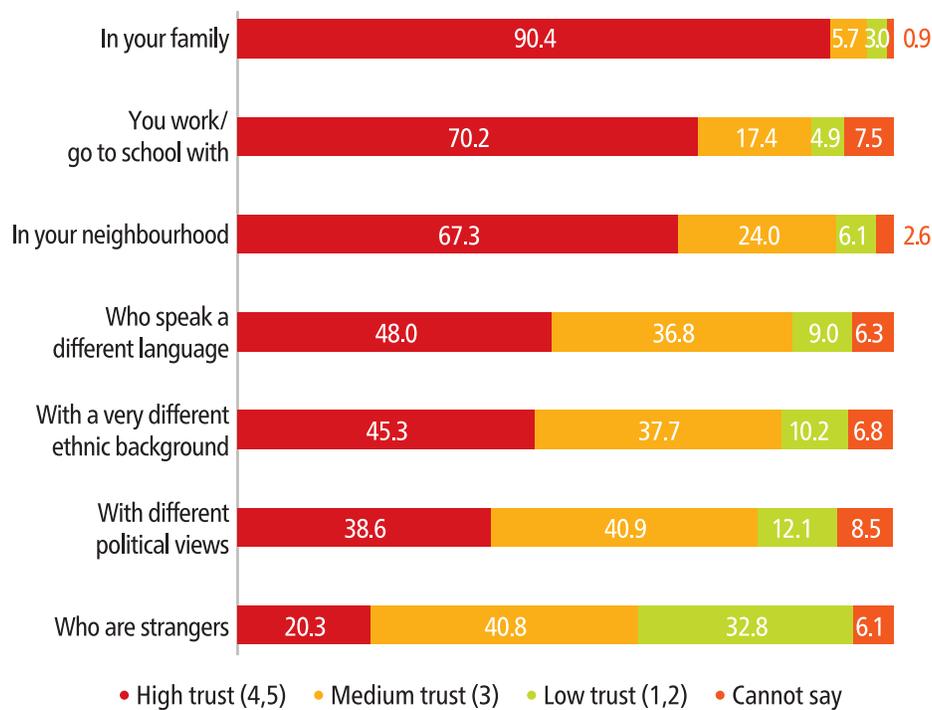
Survey question: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people? N=1060 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.) Significance level of  $p \leq .05$ .

## 5.1.2 Group trust

Another dimension of social trust is the degree to which individuals trust other groups of people, ranging from those like themselves, such as family, to those who are different, such as those with a different ethnic background or different political views. Part of the impetus for asking this question is to understand whether individuals in the context of an increasingly multicultural GTA have meaningful interactions with people who they perceive to be different from themselves.<sup>71</sup>

About 9 in 10 (90.4%) York Region respondents have a high level of trust in family members (**Figure 5**). About 7 in 10 (70.2%) have a high level of trust in people they work/go to school with and almost 7 in 10 (67.3%) respondents reported high levels of trust in people in their neighbourhood (**Figure 5**).

**Figure 5: Trust in people (%)**



*Survey question: Using a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 means “cannot be trusted at all” and 5 means “can be trusted a lot”), how much do you trust each of the following groups of people? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding).*

Slightly less than half of respondents indicated a high level of trust in people who spoke a different language (48.0%) or in people from a different ethnic background (45.3%). Less than 4 in 10 (38.6%) respondents have a high level of trust for those with different political views. About one third of respondents (32.8%) reported low trust in strangers, echoing earlier findings that noted a belief that strangers would not return a wallet or a purse. These findings suggest that trust — the foundation for a meaningful relationship — is still high for a range of groups that respondents could have perceived as different from themselves.

### 5.1.2.1 Trust in people in one's neighbourhood

While trust levels in people like oneself were relatively similar across municipalities, this was not the case for trust in people different from oneself. Differences were reported across municipalities, once again with northern municipalities showing higher levels of trust. For example, almost 2 in 3 (64.2%) respondents of northern municipalities (Aurora, King, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, and Georgina) reported a high level of trust in people with a different ethnic background. However, less than 40% of respondents in southern municipalities felt the same way, including respondents from Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Markham, and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Group trust levels varied across socio-demographic characteristics. For example, respondents with the highest levels of trust in their neighbours were those who had household incomes of \$150,000 or more,<sup>P</sup> those with financial security,<sup>Q</sup> those with a university education,<sup>R</sup> and those who knew their neighbours.<sup>S</sup> Eight in 10 (80.4%) respondents with household incomes of \$150,000 or more agreed or strongly agreed that their neighbours could be trusted. By comparison, only 4 in 10 (40.8%) people with household incomes of \$30,000 or less agreed or strongly agreed that their neighbours could be trusted. Those struggling financially, with less than high school education, and those who did not know their neighbours had the lowest levels of trust in their neighbours.

### 5.1.2.2 Trust in people with very different ethnic backgrounds

Trust in people with different ethnic backgrounds increased with income and financial security. For example, about half (51.0%) of respondents with financial security reported high trust in people with a different ethnic background versus only 1 in 3 (31.0%) of those struggling financially.<sup>T</sup> Females were more likely to report high trust in people with a different ethnic background than males (50.5% versus 39.3%).<sup>U</sup>

People who knew their neighbours also reported higher levels of trust in those from a different ethnic group. About 6 in 10 (59.5%) people who knew many or most of their neighbours reported high levels of trust in people from a different ethnic group versus under 2 in 10 (17.2%) of their counterparts who knew none of their neighbours.<sup>V</sup>

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P Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between trust in neighbours and household income.

Q Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between trust in neighbours and financial security.

R Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between trust in neighbours and education.

S Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between group trust and those who know their neighbours.

T Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between trust in people with very different ethnic background and financial security.

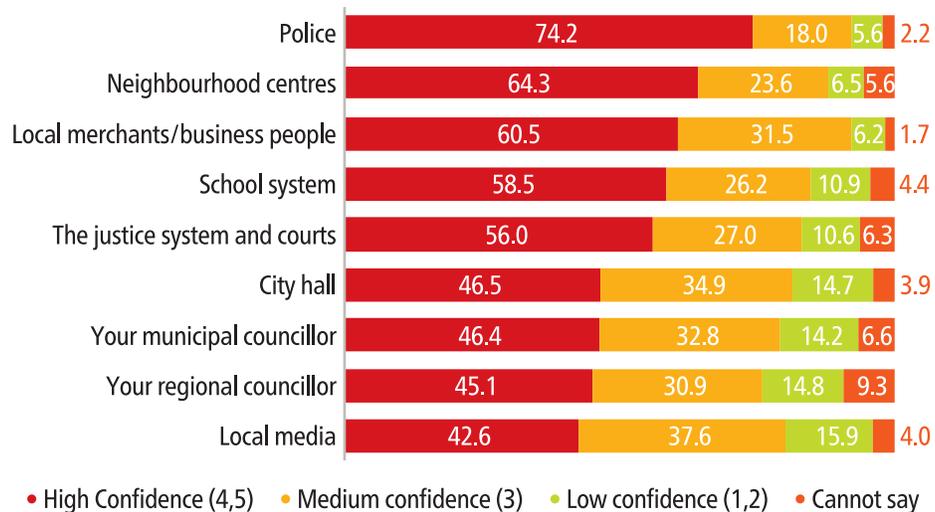
U Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association trust in people with very different ethnic background and gender.

V Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between trust in neighbours and those who know their neighbours.

### 5.1.3 Confidence in local institutions

Confidence in a range of institutions represents another key aspect of social trust. Local institutions play essential roles in helping communities function in terms of their safety, social and economic development, and legal protections. The survey asked York Region respondents the extent to which they had confidence in each of nine local institutions (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Confidence in local institutions (%)



Survey question: Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “no confidence at all” and 5 means “a great deal of confidence”, how much confidence do you have in each of the following? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding).

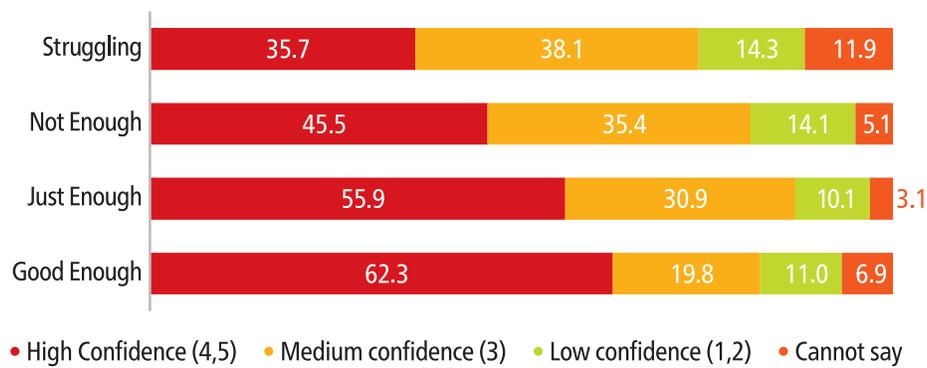
Across the nine institutions, police were the most trusted institution with about 3 in 4 (74.2%) respondents expressing a high level of trust. This is consistent with research that indicates that about 3 in 4 Canadians have either a great deal or some confidence in the police.<sup>72</sup>

Roughly 6 in 10 reported a high level of trust in neighbourhood centres, local businesses, the school system, and the justice system and courts. Between 42.6% and 46.5% of respondents say they have high confidence in city hall, municipal or regional councillors, or local media. Most respondents reported some level of confidence in these institutions and a small proportion (under 15.9% and under) of respondents reported low confidence (Figure 6).

Confidence in local institutions varied by municipality, with northern municipalities showing higher degrees of confidence compared to southern municipalities. Police are the only institution that respondents cited with similar levels of strong trust across all municipalities. This is also the only institution highly trusted by respondents regardless of their age, income, or education.

Irrespective of municipalities, York Region respondents' confidence in institutions increased with financial security and knowing one's neighbours. For example, while about 6 in 10 (62.3%) respondents with financial security reported high confidence in the justice system, just over one third (35.7%) of respondents struggling financially reported high confidence in the justice system and courts (**Figure 7**).

**Figure 7: Confidence in the justice system and courts by financial security (Struggling financially, not enough financially, etc.) (%)**

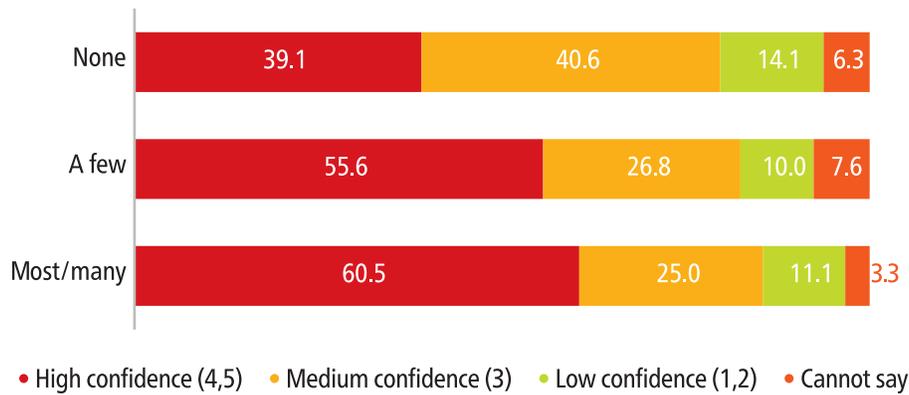


Survey question: Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “no confidence at all” and 5 means “a great deal of confidence”, how much confidence do you have in each of the following? N=1060 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding). Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between confidence in the justice system/courts and financial security.

While 4 in 10 (39.1%) respondents who knew none of their neighbours reported high trust in the justice system, 6 in 10 (60.5%) respondents who knew many or most of their neighbours reported high trust (**Figure 8**). Slightly over half (56.3%) of respondents who did not know their neighbours had high trust in police, and this increased to 81.6% for those who knew most or many of their neighbours (**Figure 9**).<sup>W</sup> This highlights a consistent pattern — respondents who knew their neighbours were much more likely to trust their neighbours and have high trust in institutions like the justice system and the police.

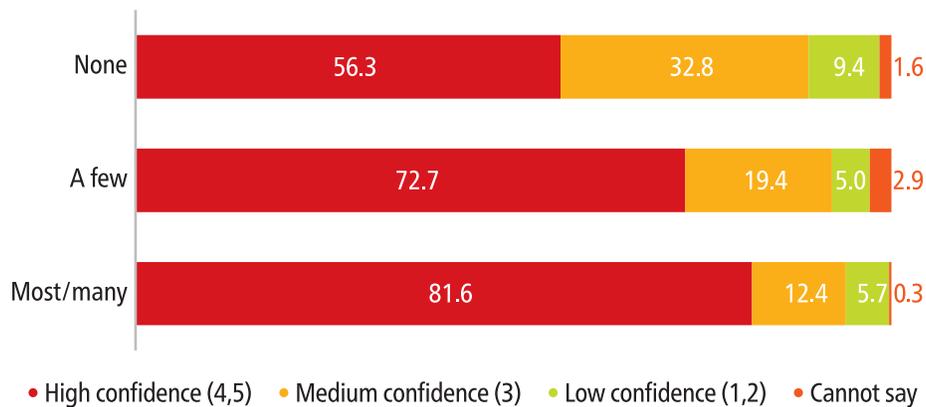
<sup>W</sup> Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between confidence in police and knowing neighbours.

**Figure 8: Confidence in the justice system and courts by number of neighbours known (%)**



Survey question: Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “no confidence at all” and 5 means “a great deal of confidence”, how much confidence do you have in each of the following? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding). Significance level of  $p \leq .05$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between confidence in justice system and courts and knowing neighbours.

**Figure 9: Confidence in police by number of neighbours known (%)**



Survey question: Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “no confidence at all” and 5 means “a great deal of confidence”, how much confidence do you have in each of the following? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding). Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between confidence in police and knowing neighbours.

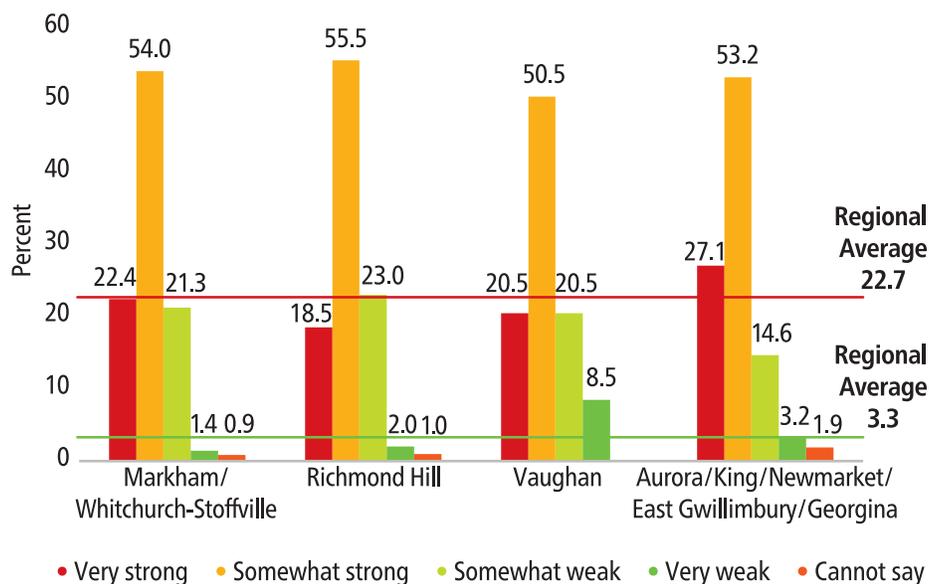
Trust in institutions has been critical to the COVID-19 response, as people have had to trust institutions enough to get tested and receive vaccines. However, some people’s experiences with discrimination have been found to be correlated with distrust in institutions.<sup>73</sup> Respondents in a recent Statistics Canada survey noted that this discrimination was correlated with race, Indigenous identity, physical appearance, and age. Trust in institutions will be critical to COVID-19 recovery as well.

## 5.1.4 Sense of belonging

The final measure of social trust is the extent to which people feel a sense of belonging to the community in which they live. Among York Region respondents, slightly over one-fifth (22.7%) felt a very strong sense of belonging to their local community, over half (53.4%) reported a somewhat strong sense of belonging, and 22.8% reported a somewhat or very weak sense of belonging, which amounts to about 76.1% who had a somewhat or very strong sense of belonging.

The difference between northern and southern municipalities in York Region was less evident in having a sense of belonging and more evident in not having a sense of belonging. In the northern municipalities, about 17.8% of respondents noted somewhat weak or very weak sense of belonging, 22.7% of respondents in Markham/Whitchurch-Stouffville, 25.0% of respondents in Richmond Hill, and 29.0% of respondents in Vaughan noted the same (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Sense of belonging to local community (%)



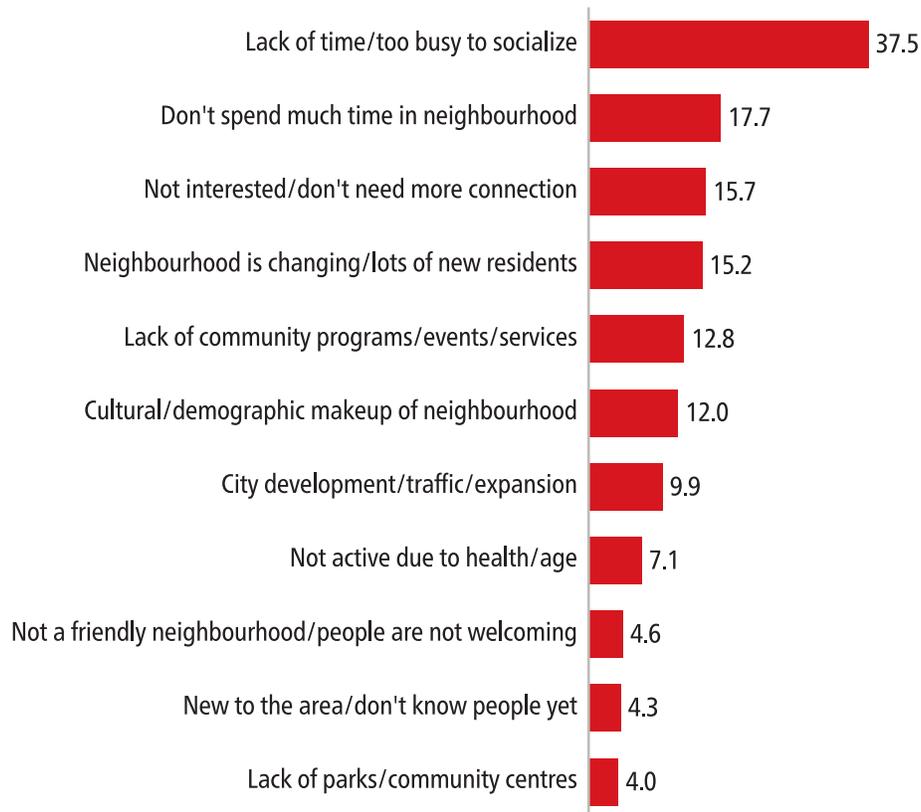
Survey question: How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community? Would you say it is...? N=1062 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding). Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between sense of belonging and municipality.

Perceptions of sense of belonging varied by gender and age. Women were more likely than men to feel a very strong sense of belonging (26.7% compared to 18.3%), which is consistent with literature.<sup>74</sup> Respondents 55 to 64 years of age were more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging (27.2%), while the group aged 30 to 39 years of age were the least likely (13.8%).<sup>x</sup>

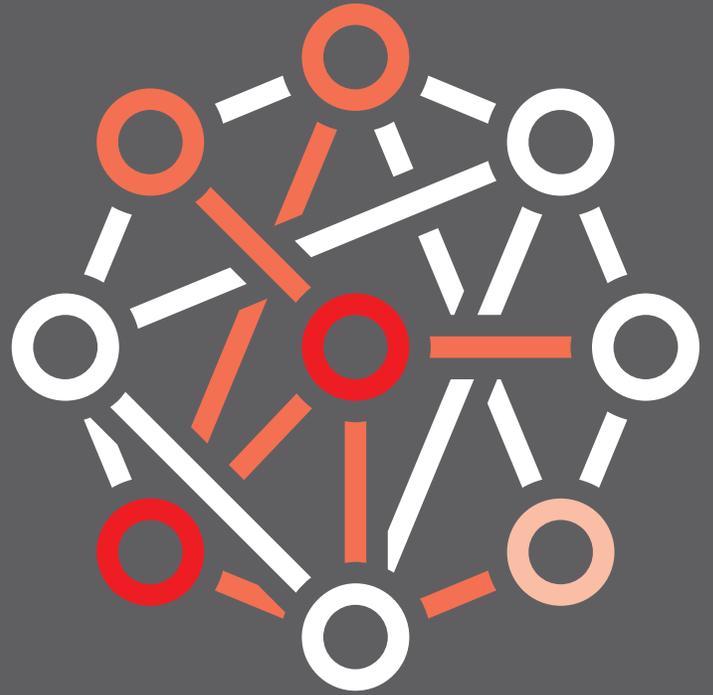
X Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between sense of belonging and age.

Respondents who did not have a very strong sense of belonging to their local community were asked why they felt this way. Over one third (37.5%) of respondents reported lack of time or being too busy to socialize as the main reason for not having a stronger sense of belonging to their local community (**Figure 11**).

**Figure 11: Reasons for not having a stronger sense of community belonging (%)**



*Survey question: (If somewhat strong/somewhat weak/very weak) What would you say is the main reason or reasons you do not have a stronger sense of belonging to your local community? N=809 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)*



## 5.2 SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks are defined as the presence and quality of social connections that individuals have with others, including family and friends. The presence and quality of personal connections that people have with family and friends represent another essential dimension of social capital. Social ties with family and friends provide emotional support and serve practical functions such as “helping out” or making connections to valuable resources such as employment opportunities or health supports. Social networks also contribute to increased trust.

This study examined the extent to which respondents have family members and friends they can count on and the type and frequency of contact.

## Highlights from social network findings:

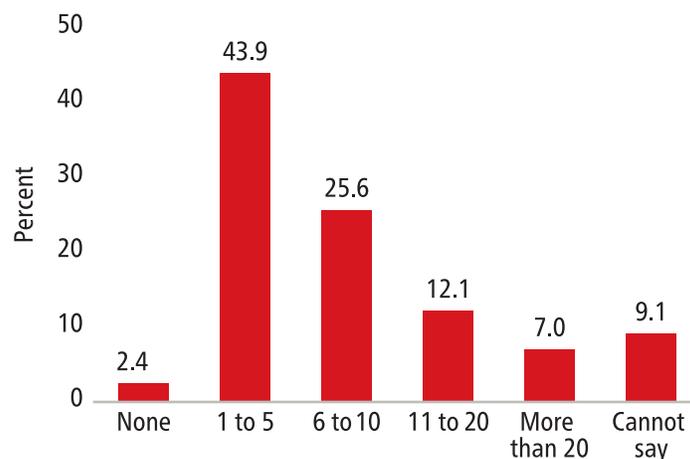
- **Social networks with family and friends:** Networks with family and friends were strong with almost 9 in 10 respondents reporting feeling close to at least one family member and 9 in 10 feeling close to at least one friend. Almost half (46.3%) of York Region respondents had five or fewer of these relatives.
- **Bonding and bridging capital through friends:** The majority of York Region respondents reported that all or most of their friends with whom they had been in contact with recently shared the same age, mother tongue, and education as respondents — reflecting bonding capital.



## 5.2.1 Family connections

York Region respondents showed a high degree of connection to at least one family member. Almost 9 in 10 (88.5%) respondents reported feeling close to at least one family member (e.g. feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help). Almost half (46.3%) of York Region respondents had five or fewer of these relatives (**Figure 12**). Not only did York Region respondents have at least one close family member, almost three quarters (71.6%) had at least one family member who lived in the same municipality. Older adults 65 years of age and over<sup>Y</sup> and people with higher incomes<sup>Z</sup> were more likely to report having more close family members in their social network to rely on.

**Figure 12: Number of close family members (%)**



*Survey question: How many relatives do you have who you feel close to (that is who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)? This may include people you live with. N=1060 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)*

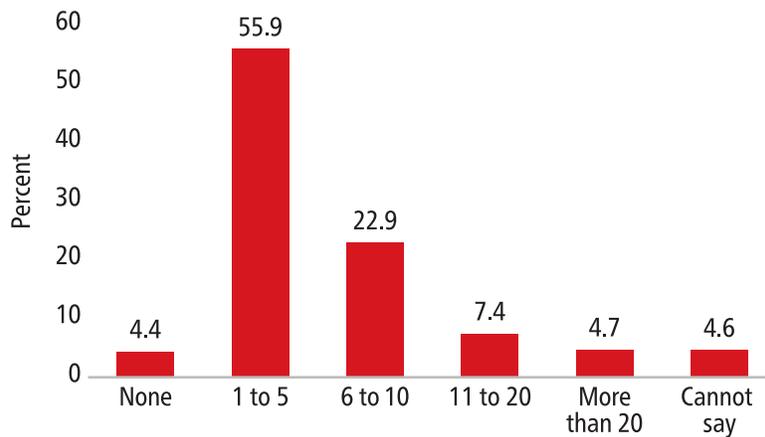
## 5.2.2 Friend connections

York Region respondents also reported a high number of friend connections. Similar to close family members, most York respondents have close friends (people who are not your relatives, but who you are at ease with, can talk with about what is on your mind, or can call on for help). Almost 9 in 10 (87.2%) reported having at least one close friend. 60.3% reported having five or fewer friends and almost a quarter (22.9%) had between 6 and 10 close friends (**Figure 13**).

<sup>Y</sup> Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between age and number of close family members.

<sup>Z</sup> Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between income and number of close family members.

**Figure 13: Number of close friends (%)**

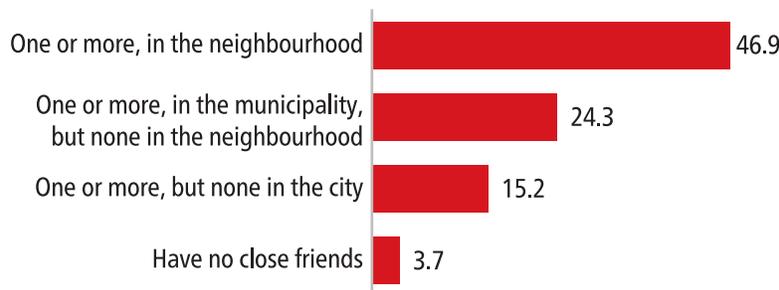


*Survey question: How many close friends do you have (that is, people who are not your relatives but who you can feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)? N=1365 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)*

About half (46.9%) of respondents reported having at least one close friend in the same neighbourhood and a quarter (24.3%) had close friends in the same municipality but none in their neighbourhood (**Figure 14**). People with greater financial security were more likely to have more close friends in their social network.<sup>AA</sup>

Other types of friends are relevant from a social capital perspective as they also offer access to resources and opportunities.<sup>75</sup> Over three quarters (78.2%) reported having at least one ‘other’ friend in addition to close friends.

**Figure 14: Proximity of close friends (%)**



*Survey question: And how many of these close friends live in the same municipality/ neighbourhood as you? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)*

<sup>AA</sup> Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between financial security and close friends in one's network.

### 5.2.3 Type of and satisfaction with connections

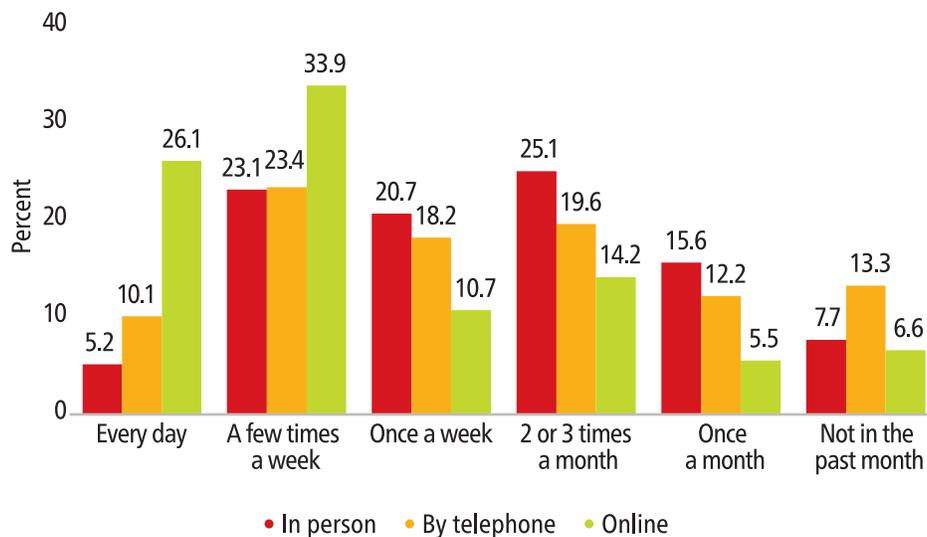
The survey asked respondents how frequently they saw or communicated with relatives and close friends and how satisfied they were with the frequency.

Almost 3 in 10 (28.3%) York Region respondents said that in the past month they saw relatives or close friends frequently (daily or a few times a week). One in 5 had done so once a week (20.7%) and a quarter (25%) saw them two to three times a month (Figure 15).

York Region respondents reported a similar level of contact by telephone — about one third (33.5%) reported frequent contact (daily or a few times a week) and almost 1 in 5 (18.2%) had contact once a week.

Respondents were most likely to communicate with relatives and close friends online, through text, email, or apps such as WhatsApp. Six in 10 (60%) respondents reported contacting relatives and close friends at least a few times a week using these methods, while 6.6% reported infrequent (not in the past month) contact through online media, text, email, or apps.

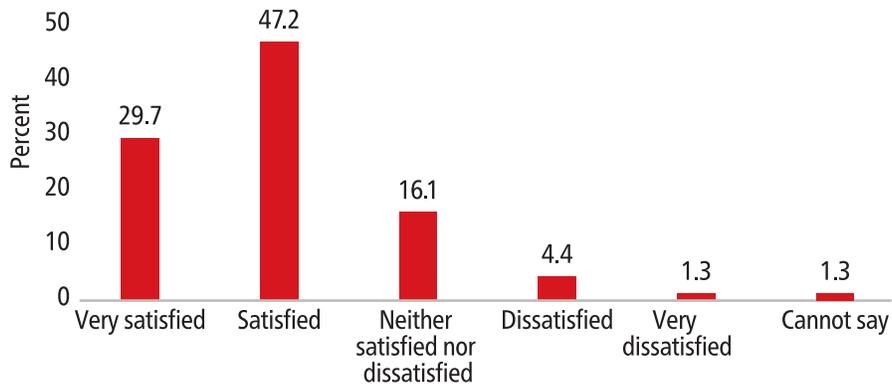
**Figure 15: Frequency of contact with family members and close friends (%)**



*Survey question: And in the past month, how often did you see or communicate with any of your close friends and relatives (outside of people you live with) in terms of...N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)*

Most respondents in York Region were satisfied with the frequency of contact they had with relatives and close friends — almost 3 in 10 (29.7%) were very satisfied and almost half (47.2%) were satisfied, while few (5.7%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Satisfaction with frequency of contact with relatives and close friends (%)**

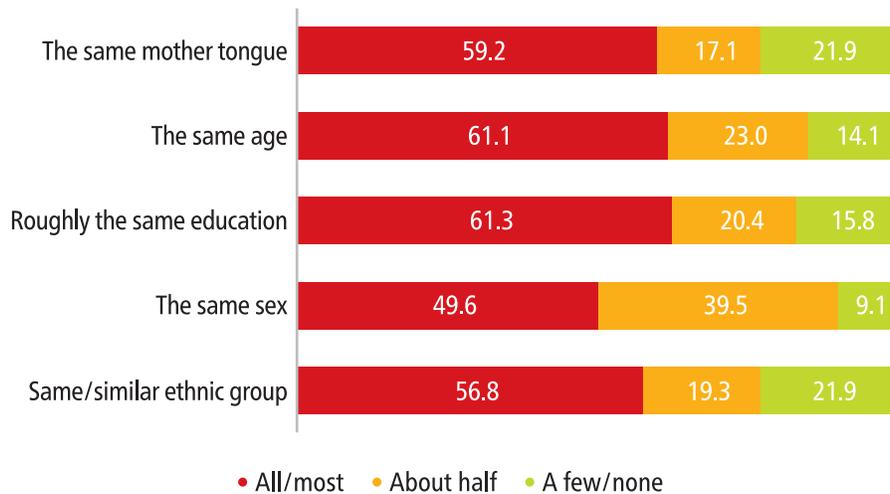


Survey question: Overall, how satisfied are you with how often you communicate with your close friends and relatives? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

### 5.2.4 Bonding and bridging capital through friends

The survey measured the extent to which the friends that respondents had been in contact with over the past month were similar or different from themselves in terms of five personal characteristics: mother tongue, age, education, sex, and ethnic group. (Figure 17).

**Figure 17: Proportion of friends similar to you (%)**



Survey question: Think of all the friends you had contact with in the past month, whether in person, by telephone or online. Of all these people, how many...? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

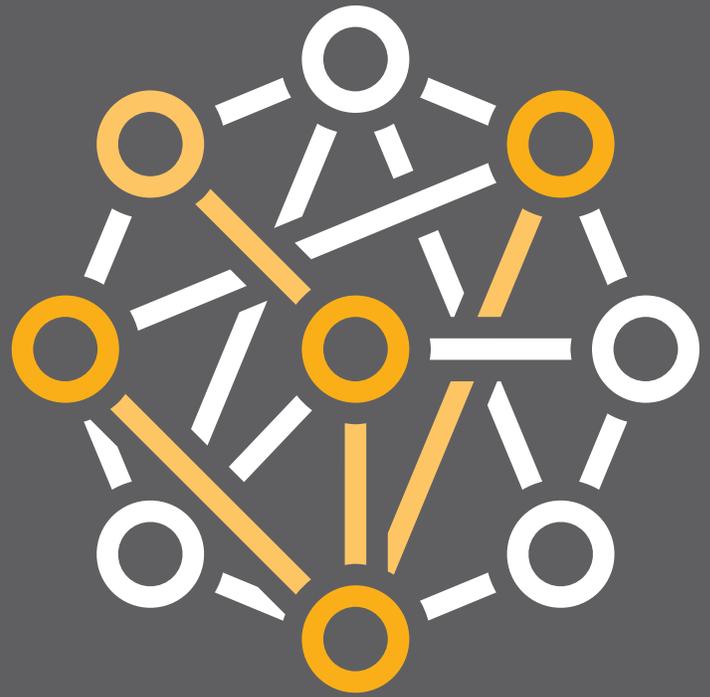
A slight majority of York Region respondents (50% to 60%) reported that all or most of their friends with whom they had recent contact were similar to themselves in their mother tongue, age, and education (Figure 17).

Over half of respondents (56.8%) reported that all or most of their recent contacts were with friends of the same or similar ethnicity. However, over 1 in 5 (21.9%) reported that a few or none of their friends fit this description. Younger people 18 to 24 years of age were more likely to have ethnically diverse friends — 33.3% of them reported that all or most of their friends were from different ethnic groups versus only 17.7% of those 65 years of age or older.<sup>AB</sup>

Overall, the results point towards relatively strong social networks among residents in York Region. Most respondents reported at least a few social contacts; more than a third reported knowing someone in their neighbourhood; and most were satisfied with how frequently they interacted with people in their networks.

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AB Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between age and having friends from different ethnic groups.



## 5.3 CIVIC CONNECTION

Civic connection encompasses the concept of community or collective vitality — the extent to which people engage with others in groups and organizations (above and beyond family and friends).<sup>76</sup> Civic connection enables people to work together collectively to accomplish goals, creates a floor for social supports for those who need them through volunteering and donations, and contributes to healthy democracy through civic or political engagement.

This study covers three aspects of civic connections:

- Participation in various types of groups and organizations
- Giving back in the form of volunteering and donations
- Civic or political engagement.

## Highlights from civic connection findings:

- **Group participation:** The majority of York Region respondents participated in at least one group or organization (62.8%).
- **Bridging capital through group contacts:** Almost 4 in 10 young people aged 18-24 (38.4%) reported participating in groups with people of different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnically diverse group contacts were also higher for those struggling financially with over half (55.5%) reporting that most or all their group contacts were with individuals of a different ethnic background. The corresponding percentage drops to 27.1% for those who felt financially secure.
- **Giving back:** People were giving back through unpaid volunteer work with 4 in 10 respondents reporting they had volunteered in the past year and a vast majority (77.5%) donating money or goods in the same period. Almost 9 in 10 of those with incomes of \$150,000 or more donated in the past year and a significant portion (49.3%) of those who earned less than \$30,000 a year also reported the same.
- **Political engagement:** About 6 in 10 respondents (59.5%) reported they were very interested or somewhat interested in politics, though the political action that respondents reported tended to be minimal. Almost half of respondents (47.2%) reported searching for information on a political issue and about a quarter boycotted or chose a product for ethical reasons (23.3%).

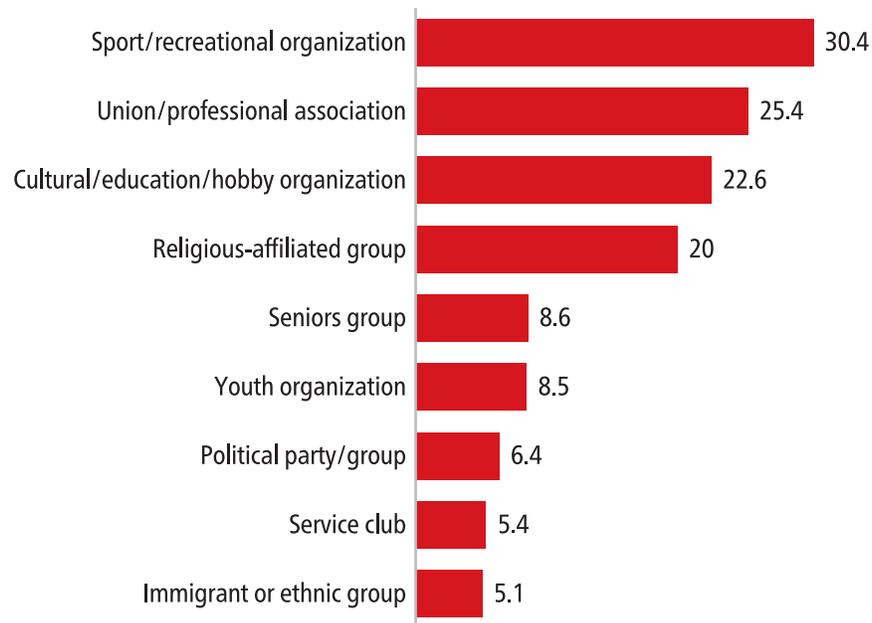


### 5.3.1 Group participation

The survey measured involvement in nine types of groups and organizations in the past year (**Figure 18**). The majority of York Region respondents (62.8%) participated in at least one group or organization in the past year. However, almost 4 in 10 (37.1%) were not involved in any group.

The most common types of group involvement included sports/recreational organizations (30.4%); unions or professional associations (25.4%); cultural; education or hobby organizations (22.6%); or religious-affiliated groups (20%). Much less common was participation in groups targeting specific populations such as seniors (8.6%), youth (8.5%), or immigrants (5.1%). Only 6.4% of respondents were involved in a political group or party.

**Figure 18: Participation in groups/organizations in past year (%)**



*Survey question: In the past 12 months, were you a member or participant in... N=1061. (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding and respondents could choose more than one response.)*

Group participation varied by age, gender, income levels, and financial security.

The youngest group of respondents (18 to 24 years of age) were the most likely to participate in a cultural, educational, or hobby organization,<sup>AC</sup> while the oldest group of respondents were the most likely to participate in a political party or group<sup>AD</sup> and in religious-affiliated groups.<sup>AE</sup> Females were more likely than males to participate in a cultural, educational, or hobby organization,<sup>AF</sup> while there were no differences by gender in involvement in other types of groups or organizations including a political party or group,<sup>AG</sup> a religious affiliated group,<sup>AH</sup> seniors' group,<sup>AI</sup> or youth organizations.<sup>AJ</sup>

Involvement in groups or organizations increased with income levels and financial security. For example, while 14.1% of those with incomes under \$30,000 participated in a sports or recreational organization, three times more (42.9%) of those with incomes of \$150,000 or more participated in this kind of group.<sup>AK</sup> Similarly, only 2 in 10 (21.4%) of those struggling financially were involved in sports or recreational organizations, while 35.7% of people with financial security were involved.<sup>AL</sup>

These numbers highlight that, while group participation rates may be an overall asset that reflects positively on social capital in York Region, this type of social capital is not evenly distributed, with respondents with lower income participating in groups much less than their higher income counterparts.

### 5.3.2 Bonding and bridging capital through group contacts

The survey also examined the extent to which respondents interacted with people similar to themselves ('bonding capital') or different from themselves ('bridging capital') through their participation in groups or organizations.

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AC Significance level of  $p < .10$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between age and participation in a cultural, educational or hobby organization.

AD Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between age and participation in a political party or group.

AE Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between age and participation in a religious-affiliated group.

AF Significance level of  $p \leq .05$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between gender and participation in a cultural, educational or hobby organization.

AG Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between gender and participation in a political party or group.

AH Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between gender and participation in a religious affiliated group.

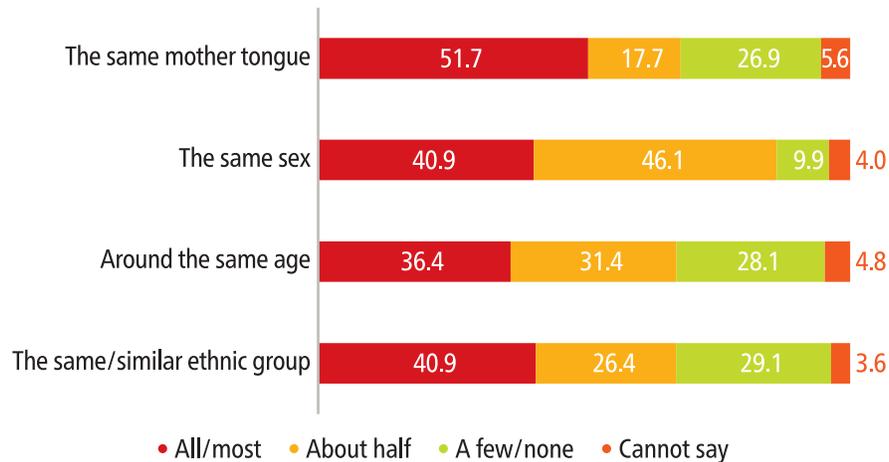
AI Significance level of  $p \leq .05$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between gender and participation in a seniors group.

AJ Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between gender and participation in a youth organization.

AK Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between involvement in sports or recreational activities and income.

AL Significance level of  $p < .10$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between involvement in sports or recreational activities and financial security.

**Figure 19: Proportion of group contacts who are similar to you (%)**



Survey question: Thinking of all the people you met through this organization, how many are...  
 N=672 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

Across the four categories examined, York Region respondents were most likely to say that all or most of their group contacts shared the same mother tongue with them (51.7%). While 4 in 10 (40.9) said that all or most group contacts were of the same or similar ethnicity, 3 in 10 (29.1%) said that few or none of these contacts were from the same ethnic group (Figure 19).

Bridging group contacts with people of different ethnic backgrounds was more common for those 18 to 24 years of age, with about 4 in 10 (38.4%) reporting that most or all of their group contacts were of a different ethnic background, whereas the corresponding percentage among seniors was 1 in 4 (25.6%).<sup>AM</sup> Ethnically diverse group contacts were also higher for those struggling financially with over half (55.5%) reporting that most or all of their group contacts were of a different ethnic background.<sup>AN</sup> The corresponding percentage dropped to 27.1% for those who felt financially secure.

### 5.3.3 Giving back

An important aspect of civic connection is how respondents give back to their communities through volunteering their time and making charitable donations.

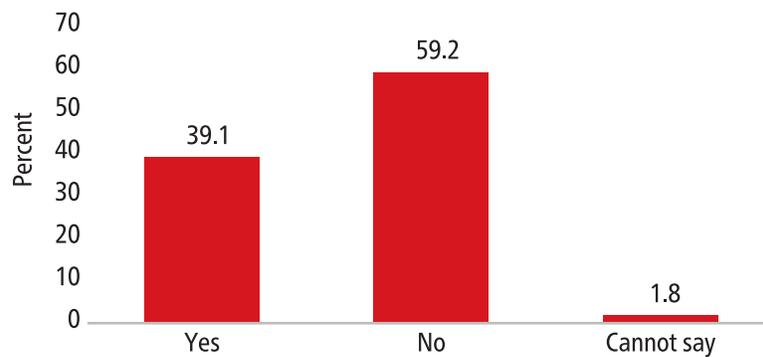
#### 5.3.3.1 Volunteering

About 4 in 10 (39.1%) respondents reported having done unpaid volunteer work for an organization in the past year (Figure 20). One third of respondents volunteered between 5 and 14 hours per month and just over 1 in 6 (17.5%) did intense volunteering of 15 hours or more per month (Figure 21).

AM Significance level of  $p < .10$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between age and group contacts with people of different ethnic groups.

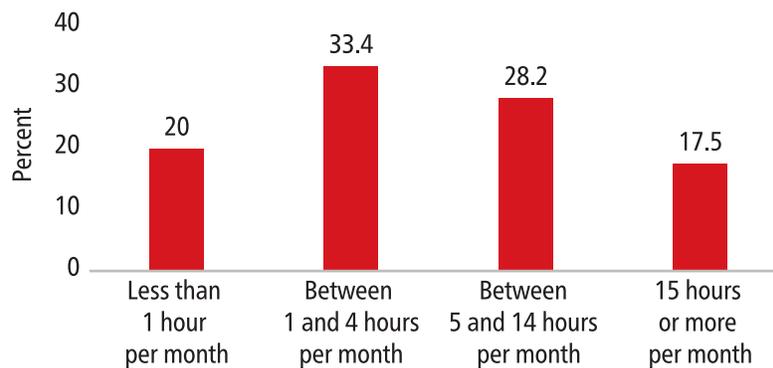
AN Significance level of  $p < .05$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between financial security and group contacts with people of different ethnic groups.

**Figure 20: Volunteer activity in the past year (%)**



Survey question: *In the past 12 months did you do unpaid volunteer work for any organization?* N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

**Figure 21: Volunteer activity in the past year (%)**



Survey question: *(for those who volunteered): On average, about how many hours per month did you volunteer? (if volunteered for less than 12 months in past year, answer for months you have volunteered). N=414 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.) Note: 'Less than 1 hour per month' includes those who volunteered once or twice in the past year.*

Volunteering was more common among female respondents (44.5% versus 32.6% for males) and increased with income and financial security. While a quarter (25.4%) of those with incomes under \$30,000 volunteered in the past month, over 4 in 10 (43.2%) of those with incomes of \$150,000 or more volunteered.

### 5.3.3.2 Charitable giving

Donating money or goods increased with income,<sup>AO</sup> financial security,<sup>AP</sup> and education.<sup>AQ</sup> A significant number (85.9%) of those with household incomes of \$150,000 or more donated while about half (49.3%) of those with incomes under \$30,000 donated. While charitable giving was linked to income and education, the majority of respon-

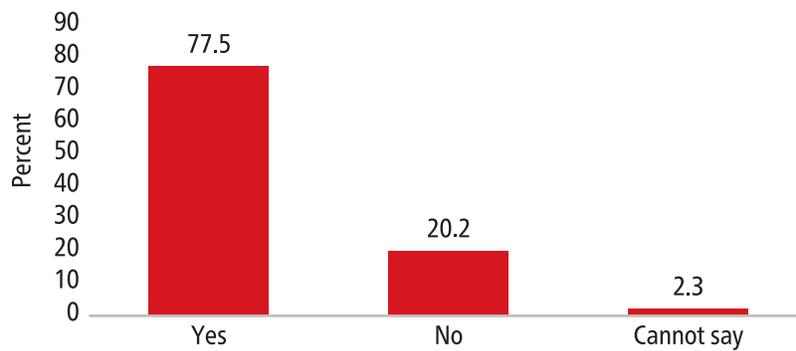
AO Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between donating money or goods and income.

AP Significance level of  $p \leq .05$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between donating money or goods and financial security.

AQ Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between donating money or goods and education.

dents in the lowest income bracket, those who were struggling financially, and those with less than a high school education were also involved with charitable giving.

**Figure 22: Donated money or goods in past year (%)**

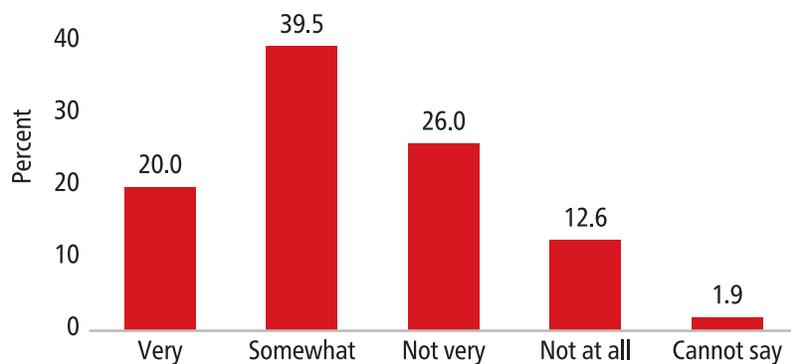


Survey question: In the past 12 months, did you donate money or goods to any organization or charity? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

### 5.3.4 Political engagement

Almost 6 in 10 (59.5%) respondents reported they were very interested (20%) or somewhat interested (39.5%) in politics (Figure 23). Interest in politics was more likely among older respondents<sup>AR</sup> (74.3% for those 65 years of age or older versus 41% for those 18 to 24 years of age) and males.<sup>AS</sup> People with higher incomes also expressed more interest than those with lower incomes (66.7% for those making \$150,000 or more versus 44.3% for those with incomes under \$30,000).<sup>AT</sup> Additionally, those with higher education also expressed more interest in political engagement than those with less education.<sup>AU</sup>

**Figure 23: Interest in politics (%)**



Survey question: Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics (e.g., international, national, provincial or municipal)? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

AR Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between interest in political engagement and age.

AS Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between interest in political engagement and gender.

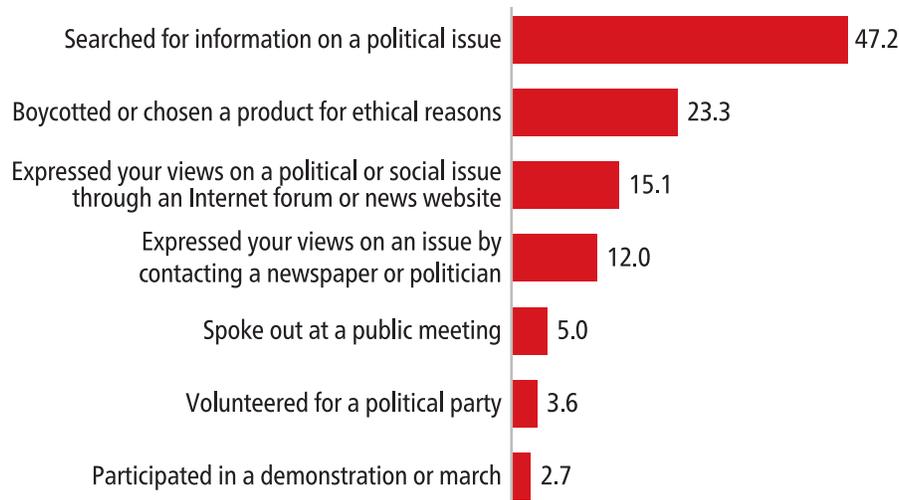
AT Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between interest in political engagement and income.

AU Significance level of  $p \leq .05$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between political engagement and education.

### 5.3.4.1 Political activity

The survey asked respondents if they took a range of civic or political actions in the past year (**Figure 24**). Of these actions, respondents were most likely to report searching for information on a political issue (47.2%) and boycotting or choosing a product for ethical reasons (23.3%). Less common were volunteering for a political party (3.6%) and participating in a demonstration or march (2.7%).

**Figure 24: Political action taken in past year (%)**

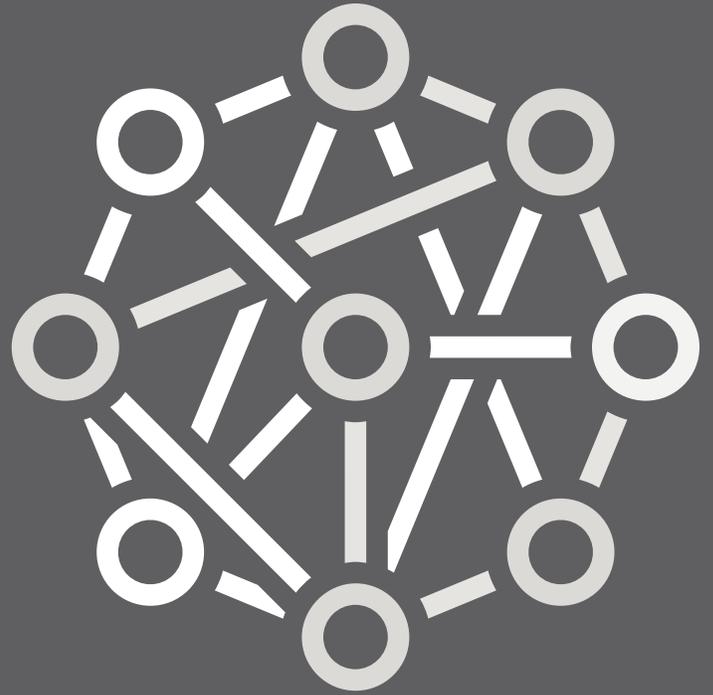


*Survey question: In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following activities...? N=1061 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)*

Engagement in political activities increased with income and education. For example, for the most common activity of searching for information on a political issue, only 2 in 10 (21.1%) respondents with incomes under \$30,000 engaged in this activity, while this was the case for 6 in 10 (61.8%) respondents with incomes of \$150,000 or more.<sup>AV</sup> Similarly, 1 in 5 of those with less than a high school education (20%) searched for information on a political issue in the past year while over half (55%) of respondents with a university degree engaged in this activity.<sup>AW</sup> These results are significant to note given that political engagement is an important way for residents' voices to be heard within government and a space in which communities can advocate for better resources to meet their needs.

<sup>AV</sup> Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between engagement with political activities and income.

<sup>AW</sup> Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between engagement with political activities and education.



## 5.4 NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT

In addition to the three primary dimensions of social capital, the study also addressed an additional aspect called neighbourhood support. It measures how respondents view their neighbourhoods' supportive characteristics. In other words, the study looks at how respondents view the characteristics of their neighbourhood enabling or impeding the type of environment and life they desire for themselves and their families.

This study covers the following aspects:

- The extent to which neighbourhoods have supportive characteristics
- Local agency
- Availability and access to services

## Highlights from neighbourhood support findings:

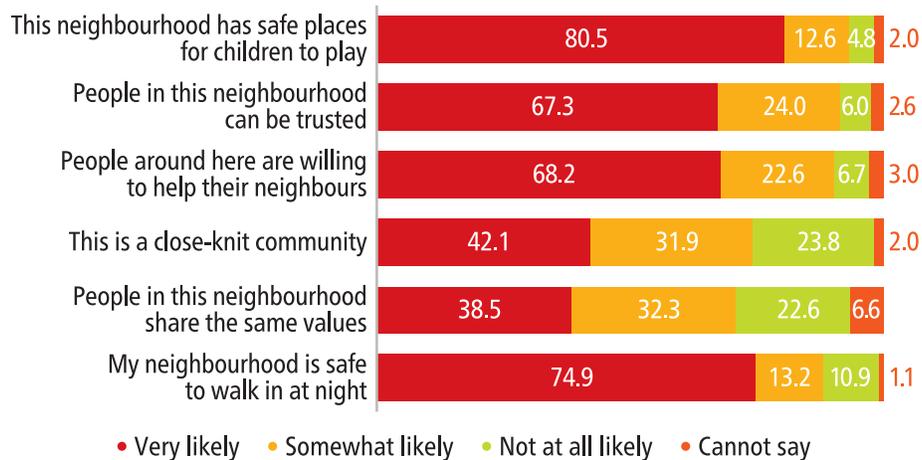
- **Neighbourhood safety:** In general, respondents felt they lived in safe neighbourhoods in York Region with 80.5% agreeing that the neighbourhood had safe places for children to play and 74.9% of respondents identifying their neighbourhood as safe to walk in at night. However, there was an undeniable income gradient, with only 16.9% of those with incomes under \$30,000 strongly agreeing that their neighbourhood was safe for children to play in, far less than the rate reported by those earning \$150,000 or more (47.1%).
- **Neighbourhood help:** Most respondents (68.2%) agreed that their neighbours were willing to help one another.
- **Close-knit neighbourhoods:** Less than half of respondents felt their neighbourhoods were close-knit and had neighbours that shared the same values (38.5%).
- **Local agency:** The majority of respondents believed they could make a big difference (50.2%) or some difference (39.3%) in addressing problems in their community. This is a promising result for the potential of future collective action.
- **Access to services:** Most people reported having access to the services they needed, with 68.1% reporting that they had access to at least 75% of the services they needed. Of those who reported needing a specific service, housing support (41.7%), income support (41.4%), and employment counselling (34.4%) were identified as the top three services that individuals reported not having access to if or when they needed them.



## 5.4.1 Neighbourhood characteristics

The survey asked respondents the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements that might describe their neighbourhood (Figure 25).

Figure 25: How would you describe your neighbourhood (%)



Survey question: How well does each statement generally describes the neighbourhood where you live, to the best of your knowledge and experience? Would you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly agree that?...N=1366 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

## 5.4.2 Neighbourhood safety

The survey asked two questions related to neighbourhood safety: one about perceived safety for children to play and another about safety while walking at night. Most York Region respondents perceived themselves as living in safe communities. Eight in 10 York Region respondents shared the belief that their neighbourhood was safe for children to play (80.5%). Most respondents also believed that their neighbourhood was safe to walk in at night (74.9%). This belief was more common for people with higher socio-economic status. While fewer than 1 in 6 (17.9%) respondents with incomes under \$30,000 strongly agreed that their neighbourhood was safe for children to play, this was the case for almost half (47.9%) of respondents with incomes of \$150,000 or more.<sup>AX</sup> Perceptions of safety increased with knowing one's neighbours. Respondents who reported knowing most or many of their neighbours reported higher levels of safety (45.2% strongly agreed that their neighbourhood was safe to walk at night versus 32.6% of those knowing few of their neighbours).

Most respondents viewed their neighbours as helpful. Almost 7 in 10 (68.2%) respondents agreed with the statement that their neighbours were willing to help each other. Agreement with this statement was most common among residents with higher incomes (83.7% among those with incomes of \$150,000 or more versus

AX Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between belief that neighbourhood is safe to play in and income.

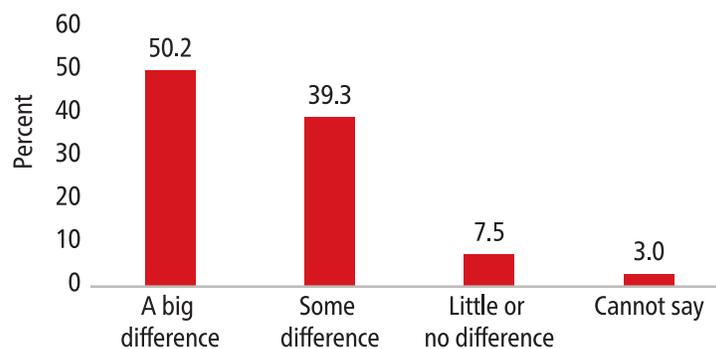
52.1% among those with incomes less than \$30,000)<sup>AY</sup> and those who knew most or many of their neighbours (39.0% strongly agree versus only 12.1% among those who knew few neighbours).<sup>AZ</sup>

Less than half of respondents described their neighbourhood as close-knit (42.1%) and agreed that their neighbours shared the same values (38.5%). In fact, almost one-quarter disagreed with each of these statements. Those who knew most or many of their neighbours were about twice as likely to agree that their neighbourhood was close knit compared to those who only knew a few of their neighbours (67.5% versus 33.2%).<sup>BA</sup> Similarly, those who knew most or many of their neighbours were more likely to agree that people in their neighbourhood shared the same values compared to those who only knew a few of their neighbours (52.8% versus 33.0%).<sup>BB</sup>

### 5.4.3 Local agency

Local agency represents an essential aspect of neighbourhood support, capturing the confidence people have to address the issues that affect them in their community effectively. Half (50.2%) of York Region respondents believed that people working together as a group could make a big difference in solving local problems, with approximately 40% believing it was possible to make some difference (Figure 26). This means that almost 9 in 10 respondents believed that people could make at least some difference working together to address problems in their communities.

**Figure 26: How much difference can people working together make in addressing problems in your community (%)**



*Survey question: Thinking about problems in your community, how much of a difference do you believe people working together as a group can make in solving problems that you see? N=1366 (NB: Values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.)*

AY Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between viewing neighbours as helpful and income.

AZ Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between viewing neighbours as helpful and knowing neighbours.

BA Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between viewing neighbourhood as close knit and knowing neighbours.

BB Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between agreeing that people in their neighbourhood share the same values and knowing neighbours.

Most respondents (about 9 in 10) believed it is possible for groups of people working together to make some or a big difference. Belief in making a big difference was most evident among those with higher incomes<sup>BC</sup> and those who knew most or many of their neighbours.<sup>BD</sup> While one third (33.3%) of those with incomes under \$30,000 believed it was possible to make a big difference, this was the case for 3 in 5 (60.7%) of those in the highest income bracket. Almost half (45.8%) of those who knew few of their neighbours believed it was possible to make a big difference; however, over 3 in 5 (62.5%) of those who knew most or many of their neighbours thought this to be true.

#### 5.4.4 Access to services

Access to services that people and their families might need at different stages in their lives plays a crucial role in individual well-being. The survey asked whether respondents needed a range of services and whether those who reported they needed a specific service had access to these services when needed. The majority of residents who needed services (68.1%) had access to at least 75% of their needed services.

Some services were more in need than others. Of those who reported needing a specific service, housing support (41.7%), income support (41.4%), and employment counselling (34.4%) were identified as the top three services that individuals reported not having access to if or when they needed them.<sup>BE</sup> (**Figure 27**).

These are services that could be provided by different levels of government, the community sector, and even the private sector. In some cases, services (such as housing support and income support) may have eligibility criteria or waitlists. As such, it is essential for all sectors to reflect on areas where they could provide more support.

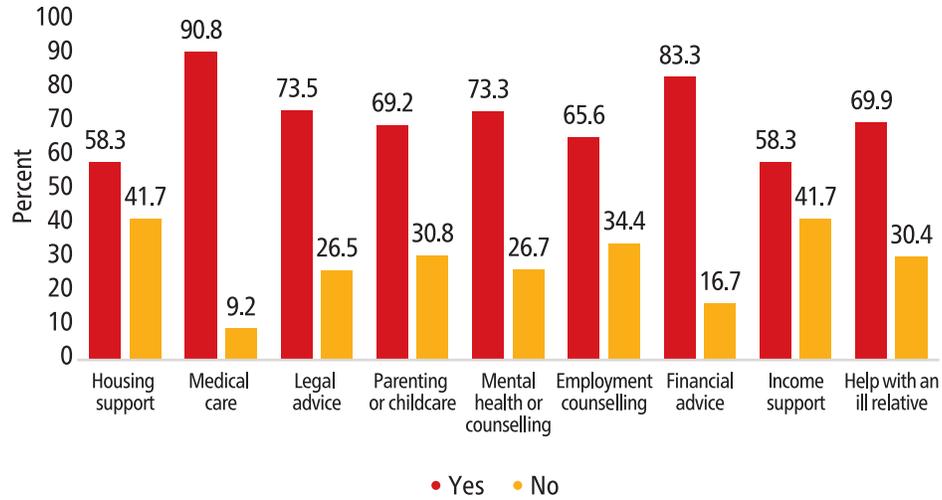
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BC Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between belief in making a difference and income.

BD Significance level of  $p \leq .01$ . Significance levels measure the significance of the association between belief in making a difference and knowing neighbours.

BE It is unclear *why* people did not have access to these services and there is an opportunity to unpack this further in future research.

**Figure 27: Access to supports or services when needed (%)**



Survey question: Do you have access to each of the following types of support or service if or when you need it? N=669-1298. (NB: Values vary by question; they may also not add up to 100 due to rounding. Question applicable only to those who reported they need a specific service).



## 6. COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Community conversations were led with the three largest ethnocultural communities in York Region—the Chinese, South Asian and West Asian communities—given their lower representation in the survey. Community conversation participants had not participated in the survey but engaged with the findings and discussed their experiences with particular social capital aspects. The community conversations helped illuminate the uneven distribution of social capital for some groups and the need for more in-depth research into social capital in York Region as it pertains to particular demographics of people.

## Conversations:

- Probed the possibility of regional differences and whether there may be very different experiences based on rural versus urban communities.
- Analyzed trust in institutions like the police and city councillors and discussed challenges that community members have personally experienced with both institutions.
- Uncovered agreement that building trust among residents in the same neighbourhood or region takes time, and could be facilitated through shared educational, employment-related, or community-based opportunities (such as faith-based services). People may tend to stay within their ethnocultural group with limited opportunities for engagement and rely on media for their understanding of others within their neighbourhoods or communities.
- Acknowledged more significant connections and networks within their ethnocultural communities than across the diverse communities they lived in. In the discussions, participants recognized the tensions within and across communities and raised the need for a more nuanced look at inter-community and intra-community relationships. In addition, participants cautioned that one's immigration status could play a significant role in the different responses of those from racialized ethno-cultural groups.
- Noted the value of community events as opportunities (similar to work or school) to create networks and friendships across ethnocultural communities. A caution was noted around language and how limitations around English proficiency or perceived stigma related to having an accent could impede these efforts.
- Explored the meaning of volunteering and how it is interpreted differently based on a person's background. For example, some participants noted that people routinely give back through religious or local organizations that may serve their specific ethnocultural communities, but do not define their activities as volunteering.
- Highlighted that safety in one's community varies based on geographical location and population characteristics.
- Explored the role of public events and noted that they are a critical way that communities could build trust and connections at the neighbourhood level.



## 7. NEXT STEPS

York Region is a vibrant, diverse, and growing region with assets such as a large job market and low unemployment rate. However, York Region is also being impacted by some challenging social trends, the most prominent of which is currently the COVID-19 pandemic and the deepening inequities emerging from it. The pandemic is building on the existing social trends evident in the social capital data: people are becoming more and more divided into haves and have nots with some having more access to opportunities that come from social capital and others experiencing more and more barriers to these opportunities.<sup>77</sup> For those for whom the system is working, such as those with higher incomes, and those who are more financially secure, access to opportunity may be enabled by their social capital. For those with lower incomes and who are struggling financially, there tends to be less access to the opportunities that can come from social capital.<sup>78</sup>

The partners in this report all support the needs of low-income people and neighbourhoods in different capacities. One thread that unites us is the desire to remove barriers to opportunity for those with less access to it. To truly fight poverty in all its forms and make sure we have an equitable recovery — we need to look at who needs access to social capital.

This report points to three areas of opportunity:

- Address the systemic issues impacting the uneven distribution of social capital
- Mitigate the impact of less access to opportunity
- Conduct additional research to understand the nature of social capital in York Region.

### 7.1 Address the systemic issues impacting uneven distribution of social capital

This study's findings provide an opportunity for all sectors to review their diversity, inclusion, and equity strategies and assess how uneven social capital distribution may impact this work. For example, United Way Greater Toronto, the Regional Municipality of York, York Regional Police, local municipalities, and other local agencies have endorsed the Inclusion Charter for York Region and are working together to increase a sense of community belonging in the region. This report's findings provide an empirical basis for reviewing and building initiatives and investments to strengthen local social capital resources.

COVID 19 has further illuminated and accelerated the trend of growing inequality, and the vulnerability of historically marginalized communities points to gaps in social capital and the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities. It is more important than ever to continue engaging in innovative cross-sectoral partnership work that brings each sector's strengths and connections together to address these profound challenges. For example, United Way Greater Toronto, the Regional Municipality of York, local municipal partners, community agencies, and other key stakeholders have worked together on the COVID-19 Community Coordination (3C) initiative to address the needs of the most vulnerable residents in York Region during COVID-19.

In addition, the Inclusive Local Economic Opportunity (ILEO) Initiative brings together the private, public, community sectors, and labour to find innovative ways to reduce gaps in economic prosperity in the Greater Toronto Region and to create lasting inclusive economic vitality at the neighbourhood level by driving a virtuous cycle of public and private investment in neighbourhoods.

Another local cross-sectoral partnership is the Human Services Planning Board of York Region, a multisector collaborative of vital human services agencies, government, private sector, and community leaders like United Way Greater Toronto. This Board advises York Regional Council and undertakes initiatives to address human services issues in the region.

York Regional Police also continues to make community engagement an organizational priority. Members from York Regional Police regularly check-in with local businesses, attend cultural ceremonies, mentor and play sports with students, and foster a sense of belonging and trust while welcoming new Canadians at various York Region locations. Ensuring police visibility and engaging in meaningful interactions in the community, in-person and with an online presence, help residents feel safe and secure. In sum, these multi-sectoral efforts aim to bring stakeholders together to address some of the root causes of inequitable distribution of social capital.

## **7.2 Mitigate the impact of less access to opportunity**

Part of the intent of conducting this research was to give partners in government and the community sector a better understanding of what social capital in York Region looks like and who has access to the types of social capital that can help people get by and get ahead. This has become especially critical during planning for response, recovery and rebuild after COVID. Now that we have this data and can understand the importance of social capital and the uneven distribution of different elements of social capital, a next step is for institutions to reflect on how existing strategies can use this knowledge to improve programs, policies, and strategies that serve the community. For example, the Regional Municipality of York's Vision 2051 blueprint for the future identifies goals to ensure that York Region is a place where everyone can thrive and is made up of livable cities and complete communities. The findings could further enhance and inform other partners' strategies such as investments in the community sector.

Community services help mitigate the impact of less access to opportunity by providing resources and supports to low-income and marginalized groups who are unable to access opportunities due to low social capital. The social and human services sector has been working behind-the-scenes since the onset of COVID-19 to sustain and strengthen social capital through supportive networks and other trust-building activities. This is a critical time: rebuild efforts are only just beginning and will require significant and long-term coordination of strategies and resources.

The Government of Ontario has mandated municipalities to develop and implement Community Safety and Well-Being Plans to create "communities where everyone is safe, has a sense of belonging and opportunities to participate, and where individuals and families are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression".<sup>79</sup>

Municipalities and regional governments working on these plans, including York Region, can use the social capital findings from this study to identify risk factors and preventative actions to reduce the incidence and mitigate severity of crime, victimization, and harm.

The findings could further enhance collective strategies to reduce risk factors, especially those developed in conjunction with community sector partners such as the United Way and its network of agencies. For example, partners could conduct a review of community programs to determine whether they are sufficient to encourage bridging gaps between people of different backgrounds.

Similarly, the uneven distribution of social capital, and the opportunities that are associated with it for marginalized populations, especially those living in poverty, points to the importance of funders across the Region in assessing how they can best provide tailored support to low-income residents in York Region. Low-income respondents consistently reported lower levels of social capital across multiple indicators, which reveals a need for additional supports and services that build trust, foster greater networks, and enable more connections and supports. York Region and United Way both support a network of community service agencies that meet residents' immediate needs in York Region. This includes community service agencies like the Canadian Mental Health Association, York Region Food Network, 360°kids, and the Blue Door shelter. Community service agencies can help connect people with housing, employment supports, and other services to help people get by and get ahead. This is mutually beneficial, as investments in the community also generate social capital that can generate more investment.<sup>80</sup>

### **7.3 Identify and conduct additional research to understand the nature of social capital in York Region**

The year 2020 saw the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic and furthered discussions of what has been called another global pandemic — racism. Both have undoubtedly impacted social capital and the inequitable distribution of social capital. Crises, like the pandemic, magnify already existing differences and inequities between groups, and provide unique opportunities to build solidarity and social capital as communities identify focusing on common goals to overcome essential challenges. Future research on social capital should consider the impact of COVID-19 and use this research to inform plans for an equitable recovery. Wellesley Institute's in-depth work on equity, racism, and inequitable outcomes and how these connect to the social determinants of health are foundational sources of knowledge.

In addition, there is a critical need for disaggregated data that can provide more robust evidence on the differential impacts and outcomes for groups of people beyond "white" and "racialized" categories. This is true of social capital data as well. This study did not disaggregate findings based on the representativeness of the sample. Future work may consider oversampling by race in quantitative projects.

This would ensure that enough racialized persons are interviewed in documenting racial disparities. There is also an opportunity to conduct more in-depth, detailed qualitative research with York Region respondents, especially those who are most negatively impacted by anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. Through richer, more in-depth community level conversations, we can better understand variations in how social capital is experienced across diverse communities.

## 8. CONCLUSION

As we plan for an inclusive, equitable, and just recovery and rebuild from COVID-19, incorporating social capital as a lens for planning is a bold and beneficial way forward. This perspective can enable governments, businesses, and the non-profit sectors to engage with communities in ways that establish trust, shared values, and positive outcomes.

In this increasingly divisive time, it is evident that multi-sectoral research partnerships, such as the one leading to this study, are crucial to moving the needle on the complex issues facing our communities. This set of next steps includes identifying principles that stakeholders across all sectors can adopt to turn these findings into concrete actions. Coordinated strategies at the systems level can lead to better tailored programs supports and policies for diverse communities in a way that addresses their unique needs.

For strong communities, healthy democracies, economic growth, and individual well-being, we must pay attention to the uneven distribution of social capital among key groups in our communities, particularly those who are lower income and have less financial security. By providing support and resources to compensate for lower access to social capital, we can help eliminate these imbalances and create more equitable access to social capital, leading to more cohesive and resilient communities.

# 9. APPENDIX A

## 9.1 Methodology Overview

The study is based on a combination of two methods: a survey and follow-up community conversations.

The survey was implemented by R.A. Malatest & Associates and guided by a sampling strategy developed with the objective of yielding as representative a sample of York Region respondents as possible.<sup>BF</sup> There were three sampling criteria for the survey — municipality, age, and ethnicity, attempting to get sufficient representation from the top three ethnic groups by population size in York Region — South Asian, West Asian, and Chinese. Sample quotas for each sub-group were established based on statistics from the most recent census of the population. The survey was conducted in English with 1,210 respondents between December 2018 and March 2019 by phone and online.

We faced significant challenges reaching South Asian, West Asian, and Chinese groups, despite trying different approaches such as stratifying the sample. As a secondary measure, community conversations with participants from these ethno-cultural groups were conducted to complement the survey data.

Three community conversations were conducted between August and October 2019. Ten to twenty individuals were recruited per community conversation through United Way's network of funded community service agencies.

Generally, the sample size is representative geographically by municipality. However, when looking at specific issues, such as social trust by ethno-cultural groups, the sample size was found to be too small for smaller municipalities like Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury, Aurora, and Georgina. Therefore, it was suggested grouping the municipalities as follows: Whitchurch-Stouffville/Markham and Aurora/King/Newmarket/East Gwillimbury/Georgina. The demographic composition of Whitchurch-Stouffville today is closer to Markham (especially in ethno-cultural composition). For this reason, it was decided to group it with Markham and not the northern municipalities to analyze social trust.

## 9.2 Weighting

Given that weighting decisions were made concurrently for Peel and York, this section refers to the process of weighting for both the *York Region Social Capital Study* and *Peel Region Social Capital Study*.

Despite concerted efforts to target respondents, the final sample was not entirely representative by age and ethnicity. The sample under-represented the three largest visible minority groups in York Region (Chinese, South Asian, and West Asian) and in Peel Region (South Asian, Afro-Canadian, and Chinese). Further, while targets for some age categories were obtained (25-29, 55-64 and 65+), they were not in others (18-24, 30-39 and 40-54).

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<sup>BF</sup> Within the constraints of time, budget, and the challenges associated with identifying and surveying hard-to-reach groups within the population.

As a result, the data was weighted by age (as 6 groups: 18-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-54, 55-64, and 65+) and ethnicity (as four groups: 1. South Asian, 2. Chinese, 3. in York West Asian, in Peel Afro-Canadian, and 4. all other ethnicities). As the ethnicity question allowed for multiple responses, there were respondents that straddled these groups. For instance, a respondent may have answered that they were both South Asian and Chinese. For the purposes of weighting, these individuals were placed into the most under-represented group that they selected. In other words, since South Asians were the most under-represented group in Peel Region, Peel Region respondents that selected South Asian were placed into the South Asian group regardless of any other ethnicity they may have selected.

The data was weighted using Statistics Canada Census 2016, which provided accurate figures for age and ethnicity for both York Region and Peel Region. However, Statistics Canada did not provide data by age and ethnicity (i.e. it did not provide the number of 18-24-year-olds in York Region that were South Asian). As a result, the weighting assumed equal age proportions across all sub-groups. For instance, since Census data showed that 16% of York Region respondents were 18-24 years old, the weighting assumed that 16% of South Asians in York Region were 18-24 years old.

The resulting weight ranged from 0.28 (for all other ethnicities in York aged 65+) to 4.11 (Chinese respondents in York aged 65+). Respondents that did not provide a response to the age question were given a weight of 1. Respondents that did not provide an ethnicity were placed into the all others group.

### 9.3 Limitations

As with any population level survey data, there are methodological limitations to acknowledge in this study. The principal limitation here is the under-representation of racialized populations. The research team worked hard to recruit people across diverse backgrounds. However, the number and proportion of racialized and Indigenous persons who took part in the survey was less than we hoped or aimed for. This impedes our ability to make robust generalizations to the entire region, especially regarding these communities. As a result, we have chosen to emphasize that findings are based on the surveyed respondents as opposed to residents. Community conversations were part of the strategy to mitigate the problems of non-response. However, this is a different methodology, and the voices of participants in these conversations are not a replacement for what we would have heard from racialized survey participants. Moreover, as other researchers have warned, analyzing qualitative data to achieve a 'representative' picture of a population is generally problematic. The conversations provided the research team with a more nuanced understanding of the survey data, but they do not validate or invalidate the survey findings. They are, in short, designed to contextualize the findings from the survey, and not to be a second, auxiliary survey.

## 9.4 Descriptive statistics for York Region respondents

	Unweighted N	Weighted N	Weighted Percent
<b>Total</b>	1217	1061	
<b>Ethno-cultural group/Ethnicity</b>			
White	831	468	44.1
South Asian	49	123	11.6
Black	134	252	23.8
Chinese	24	24	2.3
West Asian	17	42	4.0
Other	117	118	11.1
Cannot say	45	35	7.5
<b>Income</b>			
<\$30,000	74	71	6.7
\$30,000-\$60,000	160	131	12.3
\$60,000-\$80,000	132	110	10.4
\$80,000-\$100,000	130	112	10.6
\$100,000-\$150,000	199	205	19.3
>\$150,000	200	191	18.0
Cannot say	322	243	51.9
<b>Education</b>			
Less than high school	49	35	3.3
High school	151	114	10.7
College, vocational, or some university	337	279	26.3
BA or more	653	608	57.3
Cannot say	27	25	2.4
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	514	475	44.8
Female	684	564	53.2
Other	4	5	0.5
Cannot say	15	17	1.6
<b>Sexual orientation</b>			
Heterosexual	1120	951	89.6
Homosexual	10	13	1.2
Bisexual	9	12	1.1
Another category	6	9	0.8
Cannot say	72	76	7.2
<b>Immigration status</b>			
Canadian born	525	351	33.1
Not born in Canada	291	286	27.0
Cannot say	2	3	0.6

	Unweighted N	Weighted N	Weighted Percent
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married	715	593	55.9
Common law	61	52	4.9
Never married	221	309	29.1
Divorced/separated	82	35	3.3
Widowed	107	39	3.7
Cannot say	31	33	3.1
<b>Mode</b>			
Telephone	720	470	44.3
Online	497	592	55.8
<b>Age</b>			
18-24	60	162	15.3
25-29	84	71	6.7
30-39	91	145	13.7
40-54	288	291	27.4
55-64	258	162	15.3
65+	385	179	16.9
Cannot say	51	51	4.8
<b>Municipality</b>			
Aurora (York)	80	61	5.7
East Gwillimbury (York)	80	44	4.1
Georgina (York)	81	47	4.4
King (York)	80	48	4.5
Markham (York)	244	294	27.7
Newmarket (York)	161	115	10.8
Richmond Hill (York)	170	199	18.8
Vaughan (York)	240	200	18.9
Whitchurch-Stouffville (York)	81	53	5.0

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- 19 Li et al., 2018
- 20 Vice Chairman's Staff of the Joint Economic Committee at the Request of Senator Mike Lee, 2018.
- 21 Uslander, 2002.
- 22 Messner, et al., 2017.
- 23 Duncan, 2010; Jordan et al., 2010.
- 24 Paraskevopoulos, 2010; Stiglitz et al., 2009.
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- 29 Stiglitz et al., 2009.
- 30 Kanas et al., 2012.
- 31 Uslander, 2002; Putnam, 2001.
- 32 van Tubergen and Volker, 2015.
- 33 Dinca-Panaitescu, et al., 2019.
- 34 Dalziel et al., 2018.
- 35 Regional Municipality of York, 2016c.
- 36 Regional Municipality of York, 2021b.
- 37 Regional Municipality of York, 2021a.
- 38 Regional Municipality of York, 2021a.
- 39 Statistics Canada, 2017b.
- 40 Regional Municipality of York, 2018a.
- 41 Statistics Canada, 2017a; Regional Municipality of York, 2018a.
- 42 Regional Municipality of York, 2017.
- 43 Regional Municipality of York, 2018a.
- 44 Regional Municipality of York, 2018a.
- 45 Subedi et al., 2020.
- 46 Hou et al., 2020.
- 47 Statistics Canada, 2017b; Well Living House, 2016.
- 48 City of Toronto, 2017a; Well Living House, 2016.
- 49 Regional Municipality of York, 2016a.
- 50 Regional Municipality of York, 2018c.
- 51 Statistics Canada, 2021.
- 52 Dinca-Panaitescu, et al., 2019.
- 53 Duncan, 2010.
- 54 York Regional Municipality, 2015.
- 55 Regional Municipality of York, 2016a.
- 56 Regional Municipality of York, 2016b.
- 57 Dinca-Panaitescu, et al., 2017. Note: Middle income status is within 20% above or below the CMA average.
- 58 Dinca-Panaitescu, et al., 2019.
- 59 Dinca-Panaitescu, et al., 2019.
- 60 Lewchuk et al., 2015. See pepso.ca for a more comprehensive look.
- 61 Lewchuk et al., 2018.
- 62 Paraskevopoulos, 2010.
- 63 Uslander, 2002.
- 64 Toronto Foundation & Environics Institute, 2018; Putnam, 2000 in Galley, 2015.
- 65 Toronto Foundation & Environics Institute, 2018; Putnam, 2000 in Galley, 2015.
- 66 See: Mignone, 2003; Ledogar et al., 2008.
- 67 Cotter, 2015.
- 68 Turcotte, 2015; Toronto Foundation & Environics Institute, 2018.
- 69 Turcotte, 2015.
- 70 Dinca-Panaitescu, et al., 2019.
- 71 Toronto Foundation & Environics Institute, 2018.
- 72 Cotter, 2015.
- 73 Statistics Canada, 2020.
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