

Focus Canada – Fall 2016

Canadian public opinion about immigration and citizenship

As part of its ongoing Focus Canada public opinion research program, the Environics Institute partnered with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation to ask Canadians about immigration and citizenship, to update its ongoing research on these topics dating back to the 1970s. This survey is based on telephone interviews conducted with 2,000 Canadians between October 3 and 16, 2016. A sample of this size drawn from the population produces results accurate to within plus or minus 2.2 percentage points in 19 out of 20 samples.

Executive summary

Migration levels are now at an all-time high worldwide, due in large part to massive numbers of refugees fleeing conflict in such countries as Syria and Iraq. Many are seeking a safe refuge in European countries, where governments are implementing new border controls, and the number of attacks against immigrants is on the rise. Public opinion in many western countries is turning against immigration, including some with a reputation for welcoming newcomers such as Germany and Denmark. In the United States, Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump has notoriously promised to build a wall to keep Mexicans from illegally crossing his country's southern border, and has called for a "total and complete shutdown" of Muslims entering the country.

In light of this global trend and Canada taking in a record number of immigrants (including more than 31,000 sponsored refugees from Syria to date), some are raising questions about whether the growth of anti-immigrant sentiment elsewhere is also happening here. Is growing international xenophobia and racism catching hold in Canada or emboldening Canadians to more explicitly express previously suppressed politically incorrect views? The results of the latest Focus Canada survey of Canadian public opinion confirm the answer is no. This survey – conducted in October 2016 and updating trends dating back to the 1980s – shows that Canadian attitudes about immigration have held steady or have grown noticeably more positive over the past 15 months. Most Canadians continue to believe that immigration is good for the economy, and there is growing confidence in the country's ability to manage refugees and potential criminal elements.

There are differing viewpoints about the country sponsoring 31,000 plus Syrian refugees this year, but a strong plurality of Canadians are comfortable with this number. The one-third who believe that we are taking in too many are concerned primarily about the capacity to support this many refugees or how it may divert resources from other priorities, rather than discomfort about these newcomers not fitting in or posing a security threat.

Of particular note is the finding that fewer now express concern about too many immigrants not adopting "Canadian values"; the proportion articulating this view is now the lowest recorded in more than 20 years. Public expectations for what is expected of newcomers when they settle in Canada mean a number of things – being a good citizen involves obeying the law, active community participation, treating others with respect, and being tolerant of others who are different. But nine in ten continue to say that someone born elsewhere is just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born in this country.

These results apply generally across the country, and the positive trends noted above are evident across most groups. There is some variation across the country, with negative opinions about immigration most prevalent in the Prairie Provinces (where in some cases opinions have worsened since 2015). Residents of Atlantic Canada and British Columbia tend to be the most positive, while opinions in Ontario and Quebec generally fall somewhere in the middle. Perspectives also vary somewhat across generations, with concerns about immigration and integration most widely voiced by older Canadians (especially those 60 plus).

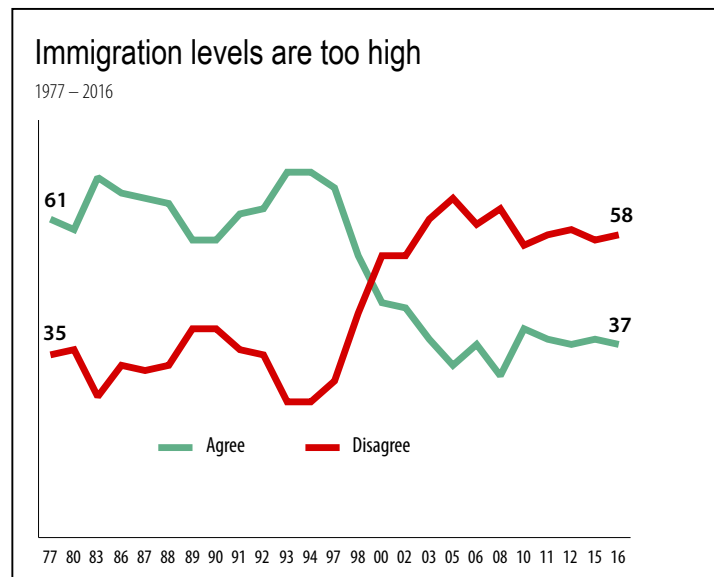
Immigration

Canadians continue to be more positive than negative about immigration. Opinions in some cases have improved measurably over the past year, especially in terms increased public confidence that the system is keeping out criminals, and diminishing concerns about newcomers not adopting Canadian values.

This current survey included questions that have been asked on a number of previous Focus Canada surveys, in some cases dating back more than 30 years. This provides a basis by which to identify how public opinion is changing or not over time. In most cases these questions were most recently asked in June 2016. The results are based on responses to a set of “agree-disagree” statements that serve as key benchmark indicators of public attitudes about immigration.

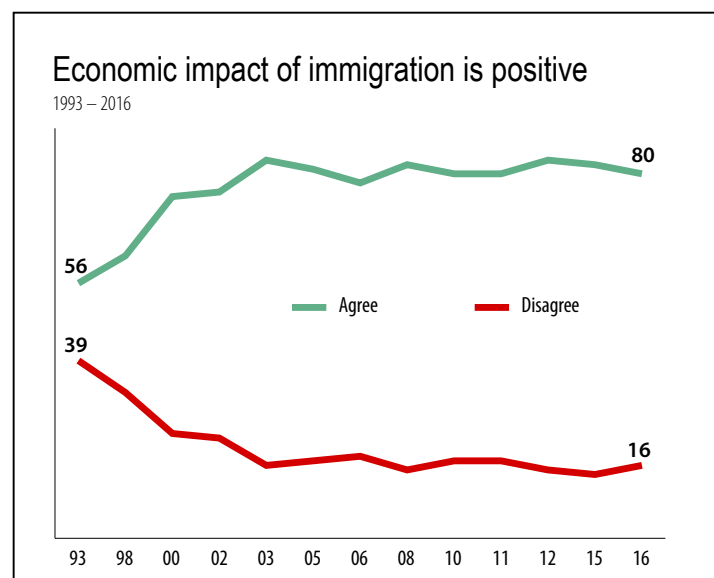
“Overall, there is too much immigration in Canada.” A clear majority (58%) of Canadians disagree with this negative statement about the level of immigration in Canada, unchanged from June 2015 (when it was 57%), and consistent with opinions expressed over the past decade. Fewer than four in ten (37%) agree that immigration levels are too high; as in past surveys, this opinion is somewhat more likely to be expressed by Canadians 45 plus, and those with lower levels of education and income.

Belief that there is too much immigration to Canada is a minority opinion across the population, but is most evident in the Prairie Provinces (46% in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 44% in Alberta), having increased since 2015. By comparison, the view that we are taking too many immigrants is now lowest in British Columbia (26%) and Atlantic Canada (29%), reflecting declines over the past year. Views on this issue in Quebec reflect the national average.

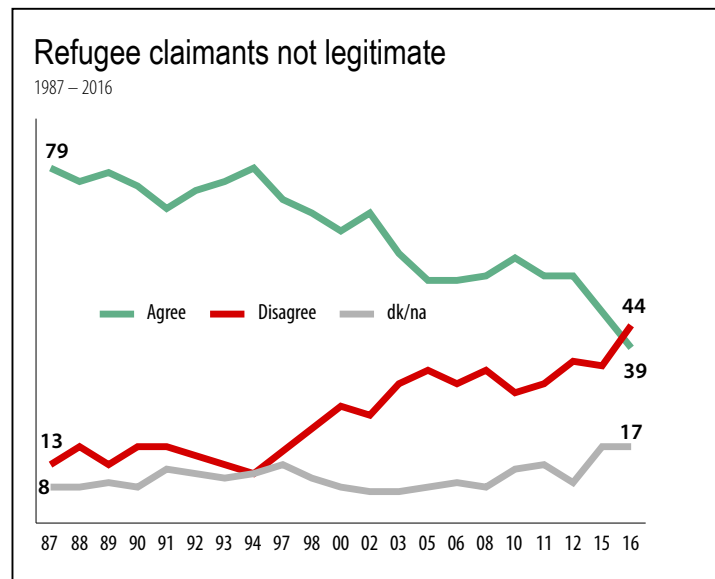


“Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada.” Eight in ten (80%) Canadians continue to believe that immigration is good for the country’s economy, essentially unchanged from 2015 (82%), and consistent with findings dating back more than a decade and a half.

As before, this view is shared by at least three-quarters in every identified group across the country. Opinions have been largely stable since 2015, except for a decline in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (77%, down 12 percentage points) which reverses a comparable rise between 2012 and 2015. Strong agreement about the positive impact of immigration is most widespread in Toronto, among foreign-born Canadians, and those with a university degree.

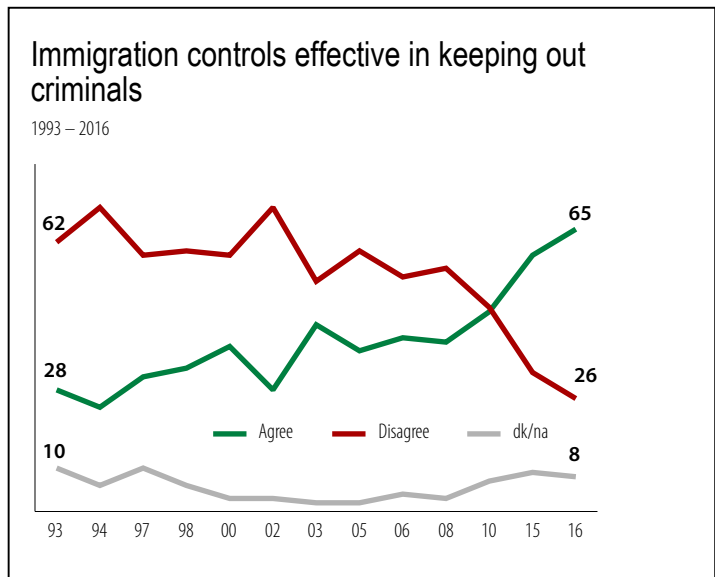


“Most people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees.” For much of the past three decades it has been the majority view that many refugees coming to Canada are not legitimate, but the breadth of these concerns has been steadily declining over time. Only four in ten (39%) now agree with this negative statement about most refugees not being legitimate, the lowest proportion to express this view since Focus Canada started asking this question in 1987. More than four in ten (44%) now disagree with the statement, while another 17 percent are uncertain or have no opinion.



This shift in public opinion has taken place across almost every identified subgroup of the population, but most noticeably among Canadians aged 45 and older. Concerns about refugees not being legitimate is most evident in Ontario (46%), among foreign-born Canadians (49%) and men (45%), with this view least apt to be shared in Quebec (32%) and Atlantic Canada (33%), among Canadians younger than 45 (31%) and those with a university degree (33%).

“Canada is doing a good job of keeping criminals and suspected criminals out of the country.” Canadians are also expressing increased confidence in the capacity of the immigration system to keep criminals out of the country. Two-thirds (65%) now agree with the statement (up 6 percentage points), which is the highest level recorded since the statement was first asked in 1993. This continues an upward trend dating back to 2008 (when only 39% expressed confidence in the immigration system).

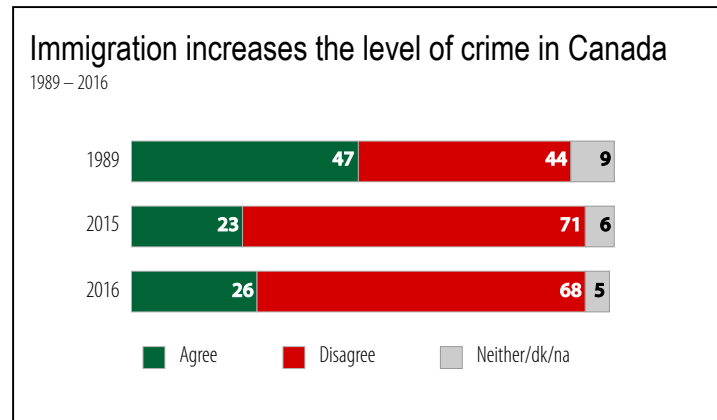


This positive trend has taken place across all regions except Manitoba and Saskatchewan (64%, unchanged), but especially in BC (63%, up 14 points). Opinions are most strongly influenced by age: A positive view of immigration controls is most widespread among Canadians 18 to 29 (81%) and lowest among those 60 plus (although still a majority view at 58%).

“Immigration increases the level of crime in Canada.” One in four (26%) Canadians agrees with this statement, with more than twice as many (68%) expressing disagreement. Agreement levels are marginally higher than in 2015 (up 3 points), but well below the proportion who agreed with this statement almost 30 years ago (47% in 1989).

Belief in a link between immigration and higher crime rates is most evident in Alberta (37%) and among those without any post-secondary education (35%), and lowest among Canadians under 45 years of age (20%) and those with a university degree (17%).

Across the country, this view has increased since 2015 in Ontario (31%, up 8), Alberta (37%, up 7) and Manitoba/Saskatchewan (26%, up 5), while declining in B.C. (23%, down 5).



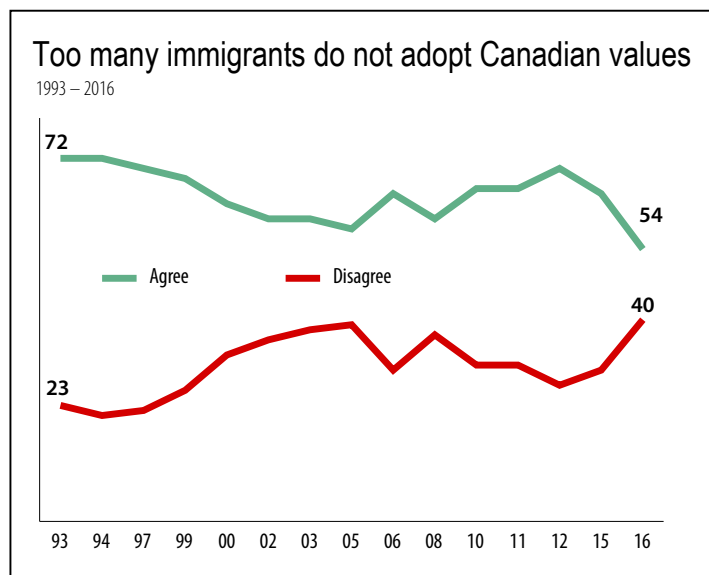
“There are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values.”

While most Canadians express pride in the country’s ethnic diversity and see immigration as strengthening the economy, many are also ambivalent about quickly newcomers are fitting in. But the latest survey indicates this concern is diminishing.

Just over half (54%) of Canadians now agree with this statement about how too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values, down 11 points from 2015 and continuing a downward trend starting in 2012. Agreement with this statement is now at its lowest level since this question was first asked 23 years ago.

Diminishing concerns about immigrants and Canadian values has taken place across all identified groups in the population, but most noticeably among British Columbians (47% agree, down 17 points since 2015) and women (52%, down 14). Those most likely to agree with the statement continue to be Canadians 45 years of age and older (60%), and those with no post-secondary education (66%), although these proportions are down from 2015.

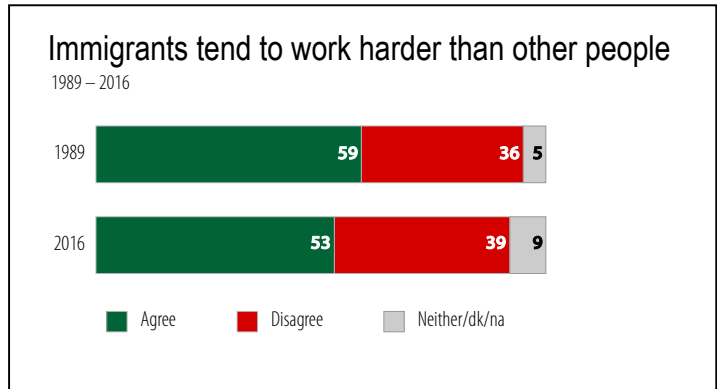
Across the country, agreement is highest in Quebec (57%) and the Prairies (57%), and lowest in B.C. (47%) and Atlantic Canada (48%) (all are lower proportions than in 2015). Native born Canadians (55%) are marginally more likely than immigrants (51%) to agree with the statement.



“Immigrants tend to work harder than people born in Canada.” One concern sometimes voiced about immigrants is that they rely on generous government support programs and are less likely to embrace the work ethic of native-born citizens. Canadians are more likely than not to believe the exact opposite.

Just over half (53%) agree with the statement that immigrants tend to work *harder* than people born in Canada, compared with four in ten (39%) who disagree. This question was last asked in 1989, when the level of agreement was somewhat higher (59%).

Opinions do not vary significantly across the population, except that agreement is noticeably greater among foreign-born (67%) than among native-born Canadians (48%).

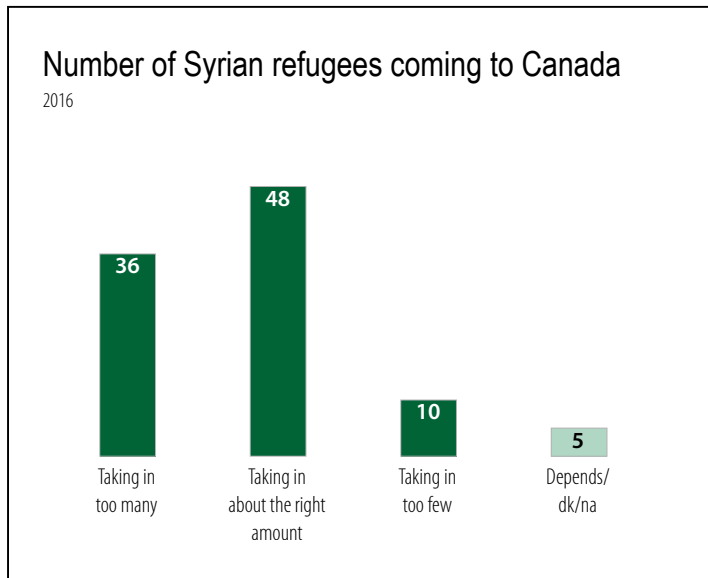


Syrian Refugees

A strong plurality of Canadians express approval with the number of Syrian refugees being accepted by Canada this year. Those who believe there are too many are most concerned about the capacity to support the number arriving or about diverting resources from other important priorities.

Number of Syrian refugees being accepted into Canada. The conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria has prompted a major response by both the federal government and the Canadian people that has resulted in more than 30,000 Syrian refugees being accepted into the country to date, with plans for an additional number by the end of 2016. This represents the most significant influx of refugees into Canada since the late 1970s when more than 50,000 South-east Asians were sponsored.

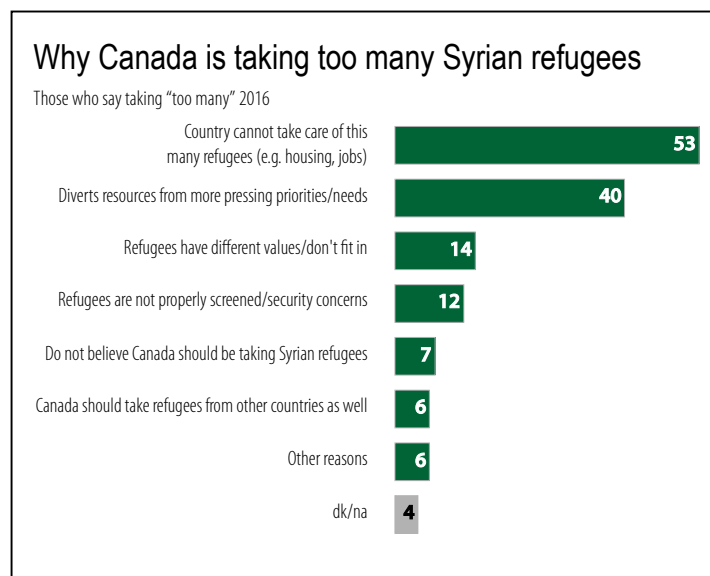
A strong plurality of Canadians are comfortable with the number of Syrian refugees that have been accepted to date. Close to half (48%) believe it is about the right number, and another one in ten (10%) believe we should take in even more, compared with one-third (36%) who say the country is taking in too many refugees from Syria.



Opinions about the number of Syrian refugees being accepted into Canada varies across the country. It is in Alberta (49%) and Manitoba/Saskatchewan (43%) where people are most likely to say the number is too many, while this sentiment is least evident in Atlantic Canada (28%) and B.C. (29%). This concern is also more prevalent among Canadians 45 plus (41%; versus 28% of those 18 to 29), and by those with lower levels of education and income. Opinions are the same whether people are born in Canada or in another country.

Why too many Syrian refugees are being accepted. Those who say that Canada is taking in too many Syrian refugees were asked why they believe this to be the case (unprompted, without offering response options). This group is most likely to say “too many” because they believe the country cannot take care of this many refugees (e.g., in terms of housing, jobs, other forms of support) (53%) or because it diverts resources and attention away from other more pressing priorities (40%).

Smaller proportions of this group who say “too many refugees” cite reasons pertaining to refugees having different values or lifestyles that don’t fit well with the Canadian way of life (14%) or because refugees are not being adequately screened for security reasons (12%). Others say Canada should not be taking in any Syrian refugees (e.g., they should go elsewhere) (7%) or that Canada should take more refugees from other countries and not favour those from Syria (6%).



What does it mean to be a good citizen in Canada?

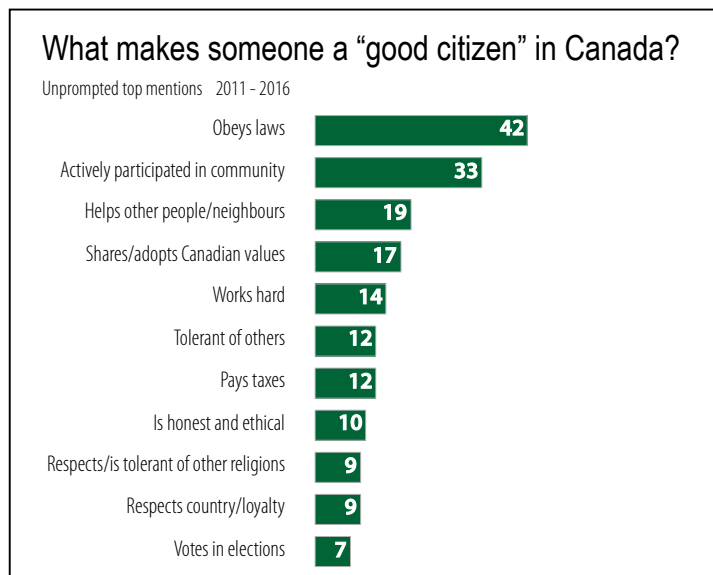
Canadians define being a “good citizen” in a number of ways, including basic obligations (obeying laws, paying taxes) and also in terms of being active participants in one’s community and being tolerant of others who are different.

Aside from the legal definition of citizenship (which is based on federal government legislation), what does it mean to be a “good citizen” in Canada today? This is a relevant question in the context of current public discussion about the expectations for immigrants who come to Canada from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This question was first addressed in a landmark public opinion survey of Canadians ([Canadians on Citizenship](#)) conducted by the Environics Institute in 2011, in partnership with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, Maytree, RBC and the CBC.

Defining good citizenship. When the survey posed this question about what makes someone a good citizen in Canada in an unprompted fashion (without offering response options), a range of attributes and actions are identified that are largely the same ones mentioned in 2011. Some include the basics of obeying the law (42%), paying taxes (12%) and voting in elections (7%).

Even more prominent are responses that speak to an intentional commitment and outlook, such as actively participating in one’s community (33%), helping other people (such as neighbours) (19%), being tolerant of others (12%), working hard (14%), and being tolerant of others’ religions (9%). Some emphasize adhering to a Canadian way of life, such as sharing Canadian values (17%) and respecting the country/being loyal (9%) (Note: survey respondents were encouraged to provide as many responses as they felt appropriate).

Responses to this question are notably similar to those given in 2011 and in roughly the same order. In 2016 Canadians give somewhat greater emphasis to obeying laws (up 7 points), active community participation (up 8), sharing Canadian values (up 5), working hard (up 5), and respecting one’s country/being loyal (up 9).



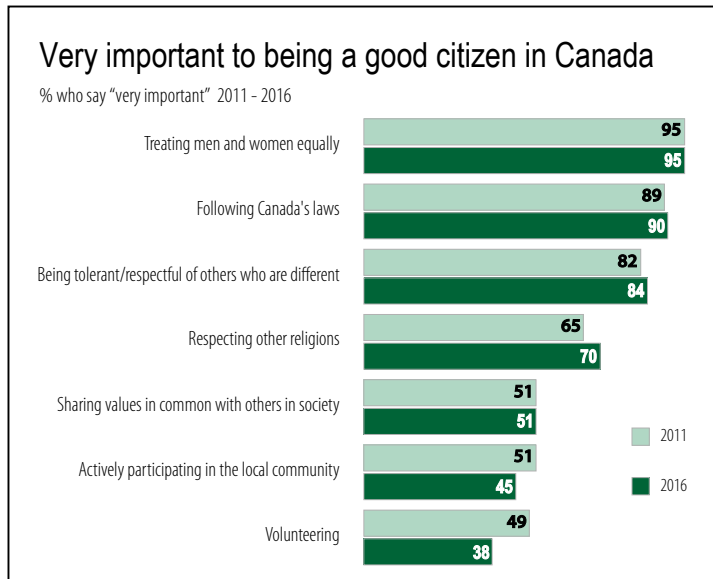
Opinions of native and foreign born Canadians are generally similar. Immigrants are somewhat more likely to identify obeying laws, while native-born individuals are more apt to mention active community participation (as was also the case in 2011). Across the country, Quebecers are a bit less apt to emphasize obeying laws (36%) and sharing Canadian values (11%), but provide views comparable to the national average on other aspects of being a good citizen. Views about being a good citizen also vary somewhat by generation; older age cohorts are somewhat more likely to emphasize obeying laws and sharing common values, while it is Canadians under 45 who are most apt to mention active community participation.

Important attributes of good citizenship. This survey further explored this question by presenting a list of seven candidate attributes and asking respondents the extent to which they believe each is important to being a good citizen in Canada (this question was also asked in 2011, to provide the basis for identifying how opinions may have changed over the past five years). Some of these attributes also appear in the unprompted responses (see above), while others emerge only upon prompting.

Among the seven attributes, one stands out on which there is virtual consensus among Canadians: That good citizenship means treating men and women equally (95% say this is very important; unchanged from 2011). Nine in ten (90%) place this level of importance on following Canada’s laws (up 1 point), followed closely by being tolerant or respectful of others who are different (84%, up 2). Seven in ten (70%, up 5) say respecting other religions is a very important attribute of being a good citizen.

Smaller proportions say being a good citizen means sharing values in common with others in society (51%, unchanged) and actively participating in one’s local community (45%, down 6). Just under four in ten (38%, down 11) say it is very important to do volunteer work.

The general pattern of results is similar across the country, but there are notable variations in the extent to which some attributes are deemed to be “very important” in being a good citizen.

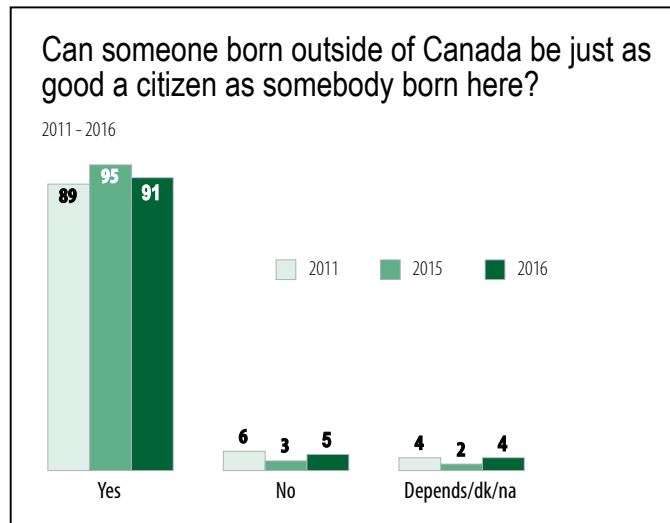


- **Region:** Atlantic Canadians are among those most likely to place strong importance on active community participation, respecting others’ religions and volunteering, while these attributes are least apt to be given prominence by Quebecers.
- **Country of birth:** Foreign-born are more likely than native-born Canadians to emphasize all of the attributes presented, except for gender equality and obeying laws (where there is no difference by country of birth).
- **Age cohort:** The importance placed on sharing values in common with others, active community participation and volunteering all increase with age (lowest among Canadians 18 to 29, and highest among those 60 plus). Younger Canadians, however, are more likely to emphasize tolerance of others who are different and respecting other religions.

Can someone born outside Canada be just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born here? On this question (first posed in 2011, and repeated again in 2015), there is a clear public consensus in the affirmative.

Nine in ten (91%) Canadians say that immigrants are just as likely to be good citizens as native-born individuals (compared with 95% who expressed this view in 2015, and 89% in 2011). This view is held consistently across the population, voiced by more than eight in ten from every identifiable group.

Across the population, this opinion is largely unchanged since 2015, except for a decline among Canadians 60 plus (88%, down 7 points) and those with household incomes of under \$30K (84%, down 8).



Environics Institute for Survey Research

The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established by Michael Adams in 2006 to promote relevant and original public opinion and social research on important issues of public policy and social change. The focus of the Institute's mandate is to survey individuals and groups not usually heard from, asking questions not normally asked. For further information see www.EnvironicsInstitute.org, or contact Dr. Keith Neuman at 416-969-2457 or keith.neuman@environics.ca

Canadian Race Relations Foundation

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation is Canada's leading organization dedicated to the elimination of racism and the promotion of harmonious race relations. Its underlying principle in addressing racism and racial discrimination emphasizes positive race relations and the promotion of shared Canadian values of human rights and democratic institutions. It strives to coordinate and cooperate with all sectors of society, and develop partnerships with relevant agencies and organizations at the local, provincial and national levels. For further information see www.crrf-fcrr.ca. or contact Anita Bromberg at 416-508-9033 or abromberg@crrf-fcrr.ca.
