

# Executive Summary

The findings from this survey reveal that Canadians think about citizenship in a variety of ways, but there is an emerging consensus on some of the important attributes of good citizenship and who can be good citizens in this country. Moreover, the public expresses a notable sense of confidence and comfort with the current state of citizenship in this country.

The main conclusions of this research can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Canadians believe being a good citizen means more than having a passport and obeying the law. Just as important are having an active commitment to the community and being accepting of others who are different.**

Canadians' view of what it means to be a good citizen in this country is not confined to one or two defining criteria. Rather, the public thinks about citizenship in a number of ways, which in part encompasses certain civil requirements such as obeying the law and paying taxes, but also as a social responsibility in the form of being an active participant in one's community, tolerating others who are different and helping others.

In some cases, there is public consensus around certain attributes as essential aspects of good citizenship, and at the top of the list is the equal treatment of men and women, as well as obeying the law, being tolerant of others, voting in elections and being environmentally responsible. By comparison, good citizenship is much less apt to be defined by such things as knowing both of Canada's official languages or being an entrepreneur.

This shared perspective on good citizenship likely comes from peoples' own experiences giving back to their communities. Canadians say they are most likely to *feel* like good citizens when volunteering, or being kind and generous to others. Nor do these actions appear to be limited to certain groups because of cost or not knowing what to do; the primary obstacle to being a good citizen is the time pressures Canadians are feeling today.

- 2. Canadians believe that everyone – regardless of where they are born – can be a good citizen. They expect newcomers to adapt to become good citizens, but many also believe society needs to play a greater role in supporting this process.**

The arrival of newcomers into established communities is often a source of tension, but among Canadians there is clear consensus that foreign-born individuals, whether legal citizens or not, are just as likely to be good citizens as those whose families have been here for generations. This suggests a sense of public confidence in the concept of citizenship as currently defined, and is not under threat from immigration and expanding cultural diversity.

At the same time, being a good citizen is not viewed as an automatic right upon arrival, but rather something that is achieved by adapting to Canadian society and its prevailing values, such as obeying the laws, and treating men and women equally. And there is limited support for allowing newcomers to vote in elections before becoming citizens. However, many recognize that established society also has a responsibility to help newcomers through this process and that more needs to be done in this area (e.g., through reaching out, employment and language skills).

- 3. Most Canadians are comfortable with the current rules, responsibilities and requirements surrounding legal citizenship, including those pertaining to dual citizenship and Canadians living abroad.**

Most Canadians are citizens by birth and have limited exposure to the requirements for legal citizenship, but this is clearly not an issue of broad public concern. A majority are comfortable with the current rules for obtaining Canadian citizenship, and the concerns of the minority are as much about who is being admitted into the country as they are about the rules for becoming a citizen (e.g., adequacy of background checks).

Citizenship entails both rights and responsibilities, and most Canadians seem to feel the current balance is about

right. There is broad agreement that citizenship entails sharing broadly-held values (e.g., gender equity), but there is limited support for expanding the responsibilities of citizenship to include new requirements in the form of mandatory voting or community service.

Moreover, globalization is not perceived to be a threat to the country's citizenship. Most Canadians have no problem with the concept of dual citizenship or the fact that millions of Canadians now live abroad; many see these as positive developments in terms of providing opportunities for personal development and strengthening connections between countries. There is, however, an underlying concern about citizens who do not have a history of residency in Canada and take advantage of their status to access benefits without paying taxes or otherwise contributing to the country.

**4. Canadian-born and foreign-born citizens share a remarkably similar vision of how to be a good citizen in this country. While the point at which foreign-born Canadians start to feel like good citizens varies, lack of English or French makes this process more challenging.**

While foreign-born Canadians may arrive in this country with diverse experiences, beliefs and values, by the time they become citizens, their perspective on citizenship is strikingly consistent with that of native-born Canadians. Not only are they as likely to define citizenship as an active commitment and outlook, they are equally likely to *feel* fully like a good citizen of this country. Most foreign-born citizens say they chose to become citizens out of a commitment to be Canadian, and are even more likely than their native-born counterparts to express strong pride in being part of this country.

Legal citizenship is an important and valued step for most immigrants, but it does not appear to be the principal catalyst for feeling like a good citizen. In fact, a greater proportion felt fully like a citizen the moment they arrived in the country. Overcoming language barriers is seen as the greatest challenge facing newcomers who follow in their footsteps.