



**confederation  
of tomorrow**

# 2019 Survey of Canadians

TOWARD RECONCILIATION: INDIGENOUS  
AND NON-INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

## Executive Summary

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**Environics  
Institute**  
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CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE  
CONSTITUTION FÉDÉRALISME

**Mowat Centre**  
ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY

**CANADAWEST  
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# Introduction

## Background

For much of the late 20th century, Canadian politics was dominated by high-stakes attempts to remake or dismantle the country's federation. First ministers met regularly for mega-constitutional deal-making, while successive Quebec and federal governments wrestled with iterations of pre- and post-referendum strategies. The 1990s alone witnessed a national referendum on the Constitution, a second and closely-contested referendum on Quebec independence, and two new regionally-based political parties – Reform and the *Bloc Québécois* – taking turns as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

In recent years, it has appeared that such storms have now finally passed. A new generation of Canadians has come of age with no direct memories of national unity crises. Regional party fragments have once again coalesced around the traditional left-centre-right national options. And as other countries wrestle with the rise of inward-looking nativism, Canada appears to offer hope as a successful example of multiculturalism and multinational federalism capable of reconciling unity and diversity.

In fact, Canada's sesquicentennial in 2017 marked one of the only times the country has been able to celebrate a significant birthday in the absence of a serious national unity crisis. Canada's 50th birthday fell in the midst of the First World War and a crisis over conscription that split the country between British and French. The country's 75th birthday found it fighting another world war, with a second conscription crisis just over the horizon. The centennial, while full of optimism, coincided with the Quiet Revolution, and preceded the founding of the *Parti Québécois* by only one year. The country's 125th birthday, in 1992, was almost forgotten in the run-up to the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord – with the dramatic electoral gains of the *Bloc Québécois* and the Reform Party, and the re-election of a *Parti Québécois* government soon to follow.

Even though such events have receded into the past, the current political agenda remains full of unresolved issues that can easily divide Canadians along the fault lines of region and identity. Controversies over transnational pipelines are pitting erstwhile regional allies against one another, while the country's plan to meet international climate change obligations is at risk from several provinces challenging the wisdom of carbon pricing. As the resource-led boom in and around Alberta turned to bust, Albertans' support, not only for environmental policies, but also for broader wealth-sharing arrangements within the federation has come into question.

Meanwhile, the Quebec government's position paper on its "way of being Canadian" was launched in 2017 without sparking a serious reply from its partners in Confederation. This was followed by the province's only avowedly federalist political party not only losing power but receiving its lowest ever share of the popular vote. Atlantic Canada, for its part, continues to search for ways to offset its declining demographic and economic clout. In the North, the three territories are implementing different forms of devolution of power, both from Ottawa to territorial governments, and from territorial government to forms of Indigenous self-government. And the lack of concrete actions to match verbal commitments toward reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples threatens to undermine the country's harmony at home, as well as its reputation abroad.

In short, as Canada moves past its 150th birthday, new dimensions and challenges to the country's structure and governance are once again demanding greater attention. These issues are being considered by governments, think-tanks and universities, but it is also important to hear from the rest of Canadians, who have both a say and a stake in the outcomes. And it is important to hear what a new generation of citizens has to say, both about the unresolved challenges they have inherited and the emerging challenges they are called upon to confront.

## Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey

This is the goal of the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey. The name “Confederation of Tomorrow” is taken from the landmark Confederation of Tomorrow conference, convened and hosted in November 1967 by Premier John Robarts of Ontario. The event allowed political leaders from all 10 provinces to share their perspectives on the country’s promising future, and to lay the foundations for a stronger federation amid the energy and excitement of the country’s centennial. It was a conference whose purpose was not to pretend that there were simple solutions to complex problems, but to ensure that there was an opportunity for each region’s distinctive perspectives on the country to be expressed and heard.

It is in that spirit that the 2019 Confederation of Tomorrow survey was conducted with representative samples of Canadians from every province and territory, to hear their perspective on the country’s federal system as it is today and what it might be. The research draws from previous

national surveys conducted over the past several decades to understand not only what Canadians think today, but how public perspectives have evolved over time.

The research was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with five leading public policy organizations across the country: the Canada West Foundation, the Mowat Centre, the Centre D’Analyse Politique – Constitution et Fédéralisme, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at Saint Francis Xavier University.

The research consisted of a national public opinion survey conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the Territories) with a representative sample of 5,732 Canadians (ages 18 and over), including 645 persons who identified themselves as Indigenous, between December 14, 2018 and January 16, 2019. Further details on the survey sample are provided in Appendix II.

## About this report

This report is the third of three that presents the results of this research. It focuses on how Indigenous Peoples see the country and their place in it, how non-Indigenous people view the situation of the Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people think that the process of achieving reconciliation should be advanced. The first two reports, *Canada: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?* and *Making Federalism Work*, were published earlier this year. Additional details are provided under separate cover that provides the results for each survey question by region and jurisdiction, demographic characteristics and other population segments. All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

## Acknowledgements

This research was made possible with the support from a number of organizations and individuals. The study partners would like to acknowledge the contributions of Ginger Gosnell-Myers for her comments on an earlier draft; Darcy Zwetko and Tom Hatry at Elemental Data Collection Inc.; and Steve Otto, Elaine Stam and Cathy McKim for their excellent work in the final report production. Finally, much appreciation is expressed to the 5,732 Canadians, including the 645 Indigenous persons, who took the time to share their perspectives on the Confederation of Tomorrow.

## Note on terminology

The term “Indigenous” is used throughout the report to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Those who do not identify as Indigenous (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) are referred to in this report as “non-Indigenous people” or “non-Indigenous Canadians.” When the report refers to all survey respondents, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, they are often described simply as “Canadians.”

The overall survey sample is large enough to allow for results to be presented separately for each province and territory, when relevant. The non-Indigenous sample is large enough to allow for results to be presented separately for each province, but not each individual territory. As the Indigenous sample is smaller, results for Indigenous Peoples can only be broken down geographically by three major regions: Atlantic and Central Canada (comprising the four Atlantic provinces, Quebec and Ontario), Western Canada (comprising the four Western provinces) and the North (comprising the three territories). In this report, the term “North” thus refers to the three territories, and “Northerners” or “Northern Canadians” refer to residents of the three territories.

# Executive Summary

In its most formal sense, the Canadian federation is comprised of 13 provincial and territorial jurisdictions. But Canada as a political entity took shape and developed within the wider context of a series of arrangements with the Indigenous Peoples who lived on its lands for thousands of years before the first European explorers, traders and settlers arrived; arrangements that were elaborated on in the form of treaties, royal decrees and, more recently, constitutional provisions recognizing the distinctive rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Canada's federal structure and division of powers, therefore, is enveloped within the broader constitutional reality that includes Indigenous rights.

More generally, the Canadian political community that emerged after Confederation was always more than a partnership among sub-national units; it was also an attempt to accommodate, within a single state, the needs and interests of different peoples. Though this aspect of Confederation may originally have been conceived of as a partnership between British and French, it has over time been contested and reconceived to become more inclusive, first of a wider group of European and then other non-Indigenous ethnicities, and subsequently of the Indigenous Peoples living within Canada.

For these reasons, no attempt to assess, modernize or reimagine the Canadian federation today is complete without including the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, and addressing issues relating to the prosperity and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and communities. This is the focus of this report, the third in the series presenting the results of the Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 survey of Canadians.

The first report, *Canada: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?*, examined Canadian identities, as well as perspectives on how well the federation is responding to the interests of each of the 13 provinces and territories. The second report, *Making Federalism Work*, focused on the ways in which the country's federal, provincial and territorial governments should work together as federal partners to address key issues.

This third report turns to examine how Indigenous Peoples see the country and their place in it, how non-Indigenous people view the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people think that the process of achieving reconciliation should be advanced. The report finds that most Canadians believe that individuals like themselves have a role to play in moving reconciliation forward. There is also a recognition within Canadian society of the gaps in the standards of living between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and of the need to address them. Most Canadians support a number of specific policies that could improve Indigenous well-being and advance reconciliation, such as increases in government funding for Indigenous schools, as well as the transfer of the powers of self-government to Indigenous communities. And majorities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are confident in the ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences. At the same time, only a minority of non-Indigenous Canadians view Indigenous Peoples as possessing unique rights that differentiate them from other ethnic or cultural groups in Canada, or are certain that resource development on Indigenous lands should not proceed in the absence of consent from the Indigenous Peoples concerned. It thus appears that the support within Canadian society of specific steps to advance reconciliation is not always underpinned by an awareness of the different constitutional and legal realities that affect the status of the country's First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Here is a summary of the specific findings:

## Identity

The first report in this series, *Canada: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?*, confirmed that most Canadians have nested or overlapping identities, combining identification with both Canada and their province or territory, as well as other identities related to their language, ethnicity, gender or religion. This report finds that the same is true for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Three in four Indigenous people express some combination of Indigenous and Canadian

identities (whether Indigenous first, but also Canadian; equally Indigenous and Canadian; or Canadian first, but also Indigenous). Relatively few identify exclusively as one or the other. One in three identify themselves as first or only Indigenous, with this proportion being higher among First Nations peoples, and lower among Métis and Inuit.

At the same time, eight in ten Indigenous Peoples say their Indigenous nation or community is important to their personal sense of identity. And the proportions saying language, region or province, and gender are important to their personal sense of identity are just as high. Those who identify as Inuit are particularly likely to say that their region, gender, language and religion are very important to their own sense of identity.

## **Indigenous Peoples in Canada: Non-Indigenous Perspectives**

Despite the entrenchment of Indigenous rights in Canada's constitution, the understanding of Indigenous Peoples as holders of unique rights is not the predominant perspective among non-Indigenous Canadians. While two in five Canadians see Indigenous Peoples as having unique rights as the first inhabitants of the continent, a slightly higher proportion (almost half) sees them as being just like other cultural or ethnic groups in Canada's multicultural society. In the North, about seven in ten think about Indigenous Peoples as having unique rights as the first inhabitants of the continent – a much greater proportion than in any other part of Canada. Among the provinces, support for the notion of Indigenous people possessing unique rights is higher than average in Quebec and New Brunswick, and lower in the Prairies, Newfoundland and Labrador, and PEI. On this question, views are similar between men and women, across age groups, and among those with different levels of education.

In contrast, there is much broader public recognition among Canadians regarding the gap in the standard of living between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Three-quarters of non-Indigenous Canadians say that, from what they know or have heard, there is either a large or a moderate gap in the standard of living between Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians.

While non-Indigenous Canadians may recognize the disadvantages that many Indigenous Peoples face, many

are reluctant to single themselves or their governments out for blame. A plurality of non-Indigenous Canadians say that the attitudes of the Canadian public, the policies of Canadian governments, and Indigenous Peoples themselves are all equal obstacles to achieving economic and social equality for Indigenous Peoples. But three in ten say that the biggest obstacle is Indigenous Peoples themselves. Combining these two responses reveals that seven in ten non-Indigenous Canadians believe that Indigenous Peoples are at least partially responsible for obstacles to equality. The proportion that says the biggest obstacles is Indigenous Peoples themselves is twice as big as the proportion that singles out the policies of Canadian governments, and more than three times the proportion that points to the attitudes of the Canadian public.

## **Toward Reconciliation**

Large majorities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians support a number of specific policies to address reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, such as providing government funding to ensure all Indigenous communities have clean drinking water and adequate housing, or increasing funding for education in Indigenous schools so that it matches funding for other schools. The main difference between the views of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is that the former are more likely to express strong support for these policies. None of the policies are opposed by more than one in four non-Indigenous Canadians. Support for each of these four policies is highest in the three Northern territories and lowest in the Prairie provinces.

A majority of Canadians also believe that individual Canadians like themselves have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This view is shared by more or less equal proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but is held more strongly among the former. Only about one in seven Canadians do not see a role for individual Canadians in efforts to bring about reconciliation.

## **Indigenous Self-Determination**

A majority of Canadians support the transfer of the powers of self-government to Indigenous communities, although support is both higher and stronger among Indigenous

Peoples compared to non-Indigenous people. Overall support is similar among First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, but the proportion that strongly supports self-government is higher among Inuit and First Nations peoples than among those who identify as Métis.

Canadians are open to the sharing of the wealth generated from the development of natural resources with the Indigenous Peoples on whose traditional lands these resources may be found, but are less certain about the need for Indigenous Peoples to consent to the development of these resources in the first place. Specifically, a plurality of Canadians agree that Indigenous Peoples should be entitled to a fair share of the royalties earned on the development of natural resources that are located on the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples. But while a majority of Indigenous Peoples say that governments should hold off on proceeding with resource development on traditional Indigenous territories until consent is given by Indigenous Peoples, non-Indigenous people are more equivocal: about a third of non-Indigenous people concur, but a slightly higher proportion says it would depend on the circumstances. Fewer than one in four, however, say that development should proceed even in the absence of Indigenous consent.

## **Attitudes toward Government and the Federation**

Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have similar views on many general questions about the role of government and the Canadian federation. Indigenous Peoples are only slightly less satisfied than non-Indigenous people with the way things are going in our country today. Satisfaction is lower among those who identify as Métis, compared to those who identify as First Nations (especially those living on-reserve) or Inuit. When asked about the most important problem facing Canadians today, Indigenous Peoples are most likely to cite income inequality, poverty and homelessness, followed by unemployment, and government and political representation.

With one important exception, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada have similar opinions on how well the Canadian federation is working. The exception relates to the question of the relevance of the federal government. Indigenous Peoples are significantly more likely than non-

Indigenous people to agree that the federal government has become virtually irrelevant to them; the proportion ascribing to this view is especially high among Inuit.

Finally, majorities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada are confident in the ability of Canadians to resolve their internal differences. Inuit and First Nations peoples are more likely to express a great deal of confidence than are Métis peoples; First Nations peoples on-reserve are especially likely to express a great deal of confidence.

## **Varying Perspectives across the Country**

The survey results highlight a number of important differences among groups within both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Among Indigenous Peoples, there are sometimes important differences in the strength of feeling among those who identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. Among non-Indigenous people, there are typically differences among provinces and regions, with residents of the Territories consistently being more supportive of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous rights, and those in the Prairies often being the least so.

In addition, among non-Indigenous people, occasional differences in opinion emerge between men and women, and across age groups. On two questions, these differences intersect, so that the biggest contrast is between the views of older men and younger women. Older men are more than twice as likely as younger women to blame Indigenous Peoples themselves for the economic and social inequality they face. Older men are also the least supportive of postponing natural resource development in the absence of Indigenous consent, while younger women are the most supportive.

These variations notwithstanding, in some cases, it is the absence of significant differences among age groups within the non-Indigenous population that stands out. For instance, on the questions of whether Indigenous Peoples are best understood as having unique rights, and of whether there is a role for individual Canadians in advancing reconciliation, the views of younger and older non-Indigenous Canadians do not differ significantly from one another. A generational gap in views relating to Indigenous Peoples is therefore evident on some but not all of the issues covered in the survey.

This study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the following organizations:

### **THE MOWAT CENTRE**

The Mowat Centre was an independent public policy think-tank located at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto, and Ontario's non-partisan, evidence-based voice on public policy. It undertook collaborative applied policy research, propose innovative research-driven recommendations, and engaged in public dialogue on Canada's most important national issues. The Mowatt Centre ceased operations in June, 2019

### **THE CANADA WEST FOUNDATION**

The Canada West Foundation focuses on the policies that shape the West, and by extension, Canada. Through independent, evidence-based research and commentary, the Canada West Foundation provides practical solutions to tough public policy challenges facing the West at home and on the global stage. <http://cwf.ca>

### **LE CENTRE D'ANALYSE POLITIQUE – CONSTITUTION ET FÉDÉRALISME (CAP-CF) À L'UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL (UQAM)**

CAP-CF's mission is to stimulate research on constitutional politics and federalism, and to advance in innovative ways the analysis and understanding of contemporary constitutional issues in Canada and other federations.

<https://capcf1.wixsite.com/accueil>

### **INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY**

Founded in 1972, the Institute for Research on Public Policy is an independent, national, bilingual, not-for-profit organization. The IRPP seeks to improve public policy in Canada by generating research, providing insight and informing debate on current and emerging policy issues facing Canadians and their governments. <http://irpp.org>

### **THE BRIAN MULRONEY INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT**

Established in 2018, the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at St. Francis Xavier University aims to find creative solutions to complex national and global public policy and governance questions. Its public outreach activities, combined with its four-year undergraduate program in Public Policy and Governance, are intended to inform and shape national and international discourse on political, economic, security, and social issues.

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### **ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE FOR SURVEY RESEARCH**

Environics Institute for Survey Research conducts relevant and original public opinion and social research related to issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it has been changing, and where it may be heading.

