



BACKGROUND

The Making of Citizens: A National Survey of Canadians

*Commissioned by The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation
in collaboration with Dalhousie University*

Purpose

Prior to the eighth annual Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Conference, entitled “The Making of Citizens: Beyond the Canadian Consensus on Immigration” (November 17-19, 2011), the Environics Research Group was commissioned to conduct a national survey of Canadians about their views on immigration in Canada today. How well are immigrants fitting into their new country, what should be required of them as a condition for acceptance as immigrants, and what categories of immigrant should be given priority?

Highlights

- The Canadian public is more likely than not to believe that immigrants are doing well in fitting into their new country, with respect to finding gainful employment, participating in civic institutions like voting, and adopting Canadian values.
- Canadians are much more likely to be positive than negative about the overall impact that 250,000 new immigrants each year are having on the country.
- There is broad agreement about what should be required of new immigrants who want to live in Canada. At the top of the list are: adopting Canadian values of tolerance and gender equity; accepting the preeminence of Canadian law over religious laws; and becoming familiar with Canadian history and culture. By comparison, the public is more forgiving in terms of expecting immigrants to become economically self-sufficient within their first year.
- Despite the emphasis on adopting Canadian values, there is no public consensus on which values are the most important for new immigrants to adopt. Those values most apt to be identified include respect for Canadian history and culture, and fluency in one of the two official languages, followed by tolerance of others and respect for the law.
- While most immigrants settle in the country’s three largest urban centres, most Canadians believe it would be best for everyone if immigrants were evenly distributed across the country. Views are notably similar among residents of urban and rural communities.
- Canadians place the highest priority on immigrants who qualify based on education and employability, and least so on political refugees. Opinions are divided on the current policy of increasing the proportion of temporary foreign workers.

- The opinions of immigrants surveyed are notably similar to those of native-born Canadians. The group that stands out clearly in holding a negative view of immigrants is the small proportion of native-born Canadians who believe that immigration is making Canada a worse place.

Research Findings in Detail

INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS

1. *How well do you think that immigrants coming to Canada are fitting in, with respect to: a) finding jobs and gainful employment; b) participating in civic institutions; and c) adopting Canadian values and ways of living?*

Canadians are more likely than not to believe that immigrants are succeeding in settling into their adopted country. Modest majorities believe they are doing well in finding jobs and gainful employment (59%), participating in civic institutions (like voting and volunteering) (57%), and adopting Canadian values and ways of living (55%), although few say they are doing “very well” as opposed to “generally well.” Sizeable minorities disagree with this viewpoint, although less so in the case of civic participation as one in six (15%) are unable to offer an opinion.

Attitudes about this issue vary somewhat across the country. Across the three areas of integration, the most positive assessments are given by Atlantic Canadians and residents under 30 years of age. In terms of finding gainful employment, success is most widely mentioned by residents of the Prairie provinces, and least so by those living in Ontario and Quebec and by allophones and immigrants themselves. In terms of civic participation, positive assessments are most widespread among Quebecers and least so in the Prairie provinces. In terms of adopting Canadian values and ways of life, immigrants are most likely to be seen as fitting in by Canadians with a university degree, while those least apt to share this view live in Ontario and rural Canada.

2. *Do immigrants who come to Canada do so with the hope of making Canada little more like where they came from, in terms of values and cultural practices?*

A majority of Canadians believe that immigrants coming to this country aspire to maintain at least some of their values and cultural practices, and in doing so make their new country a bit more like home. More than half strongly agree (14%) or agree (43%) with this viewpoint, compared with four in ten who disagree (32%) or strongly disagree (7%).

Agreement with this perspective is most widespread in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and among those with the lowest levels of education. Agreement is least evident in Quebec (especially in Montreal), among urban Canadians more generally, and among those with more education.

3. *On balance is the effect of 250,000 immigrants coming to Canada each year making the country a better or worse place?*

Canadians are much more positive than negative about the overall impact of immigration on the country. By a three to one margin, the public says that immigration is making Canada a better place (47%) rather than a worse place (16%), while the remainder says it is not making a difference either way (29%) or is unable to offer a definitive response (8%).

Opinions on this question vary noticeably across the population. A positive view of the impact of immigration is most clearly expressed by residents of Toronto and Vancouver, as well as among Canadians with higher levels of education, allophones and immigrants themselves. This perspective is least apt to be shared by residents of Manitoba, those without a high school diploma, and native-born Canadians who do not know any immigrants.

No more than one in five from any group says the impact of immigration has made the country a worse place. However, this minority stands out as having the most negative perspective on immigrants and immigration across most of the issues covered in this survey.

4. What should immigrants be expected to do a condition to being accepted into the country?

The survey asked Canadians about whether each of seven specific requirements should apply as conditions for immigrants to be accepted into the country. In each case a clear majority believes the requirement should apply, although the size of this majority varies considerably. Virtually all Canadians believe new immigrants should be required to adopt Canadian values of tolerance of others and gender equity (97%), and close to nine in ten feel the same way about accepting the preeminence of Canadian law over any religious laws (89%) and becoming familiar with Canadian history and culture (88%).

Almost eight in ten say immigrants should be required to raise their children as Canadians (79%), should be fully fluent in either English or French (78%) and should make an effort to create ties with non-immigrants outside their own ethnic group (77%). By comparison, just six in ten (59%) believe immigrants should be required to become economically self-sufficient within their first year.

Views are similar across the country, but Quebecers are most likely to emphasize fluency in English or French and creating ties with non-immigrants, while residents of Ontario and BC are most apt to mention the importance of accepting the preeminence of Canadian law.

5. What do you consider to be the Canadian values most important for immigrants to learn and adopt when they move to this country?

When asked (unprompted, without response options provided), Canadians identify a number of values they consider to be important for new immigrants to adopt when they settle in this country. At the top of the list are respect for Canadian history and culture (28%) and fluency in one of the country's two official languages (26%). Other common values identified include tolerance for others (19%), respect for the law (17%), respect for religion (9%), the importance of assimilation (9%), gender equality (7%), a healthy work ethic (5%), and democracy/freedom/peace (5%). One in six (16%) could not identify any particular Canadian values they consider to be important for new immigrants to adopt.

Opinions about important Canadian values are strikingly consistent across the population, with only minor variations. Language fluency is somewhat more apt to be emphasized by British Columbians, low income Canadians and those 60 years and older. Respect for history and culture is most widely mentioned by those 45 and older, while respect for other religions is a bit more prominent in Quebec. It is Atlantic Canadians and Canadians under 45 who are least apt to identify any important values. Perhaps most notable is the fact that opinions about important values are essentially the same among native-born Canadians and immigrants themselves.

URBAN VERSUS RURAL SETTLEMENT

6. *Is the current pattern of most immigrants settling in the country's biggest cities best for everyone, or would it be better if immigrants were more evenly distributed across the country?*

Survey respondents were told that most immigrants coming to Canada settle in the biggest cities of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Only one in six (15%) agrees that this settlement pattern is the best approach, compared with three-quarters (74%) who say that it would be better if immigrants were more evenly distributed across the country. Another 10 percent are unable to offer an opinion.

A preference for having immigrants more evenly distributed is the dominant view across the country, although it is most widespread in Manitoba (87%) and less so among Vancouver residents (64%) and Canadians 30 to 44 years of age (68%). Residents in the country's largest urban centres are only marginally more supportive of the current pattern (19%) of immigrant settlement compared with those living in smaller communities (13%). There is no difference in the perspectives of native-born Canadians and immigrants.

IMMIGRATION CATEGORIES

7. *What priority should be placed on accepting new immigrants from specific categories?*

Few Canadians are likely to be familiar with categories under which immigrants are accepted into the country, or the proportion that is currently accepted under each category. But they can and do express opinions about the priority that should be placed on each class, when specifically prompted.

Economic Class. Of the three current categories, the public is most likely to say that a higher priority should be placed on immigrants who qualify based on education and employability (51%), with most of the remainder indicating that this should remain the same priority as now (42%); only four percent maintain that this category should be a lower priority. The emphasis given to this class of immigrants is somewhat stronger among immigrants, Canadians living in major urban centers, men, those 60 years and over, and those with higher levels of education and income. Least apt to share this view are residents of Atlantic Canada and Quebec.

Family Class. One-third (35%) believe Canada should give higher priority to accepting immigrants who have family members living in Canada, with the remainder indicating the same priority (55%) or a lower priority (8%). Views on this question are similar across the country, but a higher priority is somewhat more likely to be indicated by Quebecers and immigrants, and least so by Vancouverites. No more than 12 percent from any group advocates lowering the priority on accepting immigrants in the family class.

Refugee Class. Three in ten Canadians (30%) say the country should place a greater priority on accepting political refugees, compared with 45 percent who say the priority should remain as now, and another one in five (21%) who believe the priority should be lower. Support for increasing the priority placed on this class is most evident in Alberta, among Canadians with a university degree, among those 18 to 29 years of age, and among native-born Canadians with immigrant friends and family. In contrast, those most likely to advocate lowering the priority include Canadians without a high school diploma, those 60 and over, and immigrants themselves.

8. *Should refugees who want to stay in Canada be entitled to legal aid services to help them pay for their claims?*

The public's weaker support for political refugees as a class of immigrant is further reflected in the lack of consensus around whether or not such individuals should have access to legal aid services to help pay for their claims to remain in the country. Opinions are largely split between those who support such entitlements (48%) and those who do not (44%). The remainder say it depends (e.g., on the circumstances of the individual, on the country of origin) (3%) or have no opinion to offer (5%).

Support for legal aid for refugees is most widely voiced in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, as well as among Canadians with the lowest incomes and the highest education. Age appears to be the strongest predictor of attitudes on this issue, with legal aid supported by 70 percent of Canadians under 30 years of age, declining to only 36 percent among those 60 and older. Notably, native-born Canadians who have immigrant friends and family are somewhat more supportive of such support, than either native-born Canadians without such connections or immigrants themselves. Opposition is most widespread among Canadians who believe immigration is making the country a worse place (77%).

9. *Do you approve or disapprove of increasing the proportion of foreign temporary workers to fill job vacancies in Canada?*

The survey indicated that in the past few years, an increasing proportion of immigrants has been entering Canada as temporary workers who are hired to fill job vacancies in particular industries, and then return to their home countries when the work is done. Public opinion about this trend is decidedly mixed: Three in ten (33%) say they approve of the policy of accepting an increasing number of temporary workers, compared with one-third (35%) who disapprove and a comparable proportion (32%) who have no clear opinion either way.

Approval of increasing the intake of temporary workers is most evident in Quebec (especially in Montreal) and among Canadians with higher levels of education and income. Disapproval is most widespread in Manitoba, as well as in Ontario, among Canadians 45 to 59 years of age, and among those who believe immigration is harming the country.

Survey Methodology

The results are based on a telephone survey conducted by the Environics Research Group with a representative sample of 2,000 adult Canadians 18 years and older between October 11 and 22, 2011. The sample was stratified by province and community size to ensure adequate coverage of jurisdictions for analysis purposes. A sample of this size produces a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is greater for results for regional and socio-demographic subgroups of the total sample.

The survey questions were designed by Environics senior researchers in conjunction with representatives from the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and Dalhousie University.