

Defining Good Citizenship

Definition of a “good citizen”

Canadians define “citizenship” as more than having a passport, obeying the law and paying taxes. These are widely seen as key aspects of citizenship, but just as important are being active participants in one’s community, helping others and accepting differences.

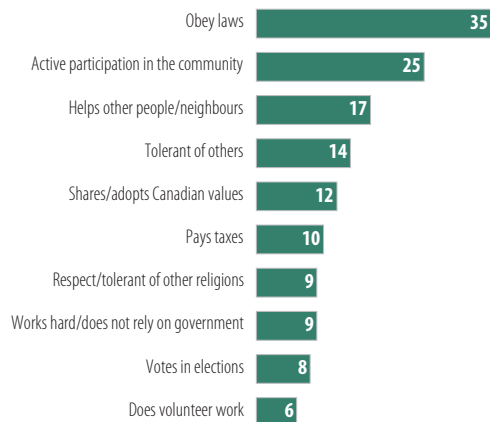
DEFINING GOOD CITIZENSHIP. Aside from the legal definition of citizenship, which is based on rules set by the federal government, what does it mean to be a “good” citizen in Canada today? When asked (unprompted), the Canadian public identifies a range of attributes and actions. Some are the basics of obeying the law (35%), paying taxes (10%) and voting in elections (8%). But even more prominent are responses that speak to an active commitment and outlook, such as active participation in one’s community (25%), helping others (17%), being tolerant of others (14%), sharing Canadian values (12%) and respecting other religions (9%).

Canadians’ views on what makes a good citizen are generally consistent across the country and among segments of the population, with a few exceptions. Quebecers, and particularly Montrealers, are more likely than others to cite tolerance of others, religious tolerance and the adoption of Canadian values as attributes of a good citizen. Canadians in the highest socio-economic bracket are most likely to identify active community participation as an integral element of good citizenship.

How do native-born and foreign-born Canadians compare in their definitions of good citizenship? The two groups identify a largely similar set of attributes of a good citizen. The one exception is that foreign-born Canadians (41%) are more likely than native-born (33%) to say good citizenship means obeying laws. Active engagement is more commonly associated with good citizenship among immigrants in Canada for 10 years or longer (30% vs. 13% of those here less than 10 years) and those who have become citizens (29% vs. 14% of permanent residents).

What makes someone a good citizen?

Top ten mentions (unprompted)

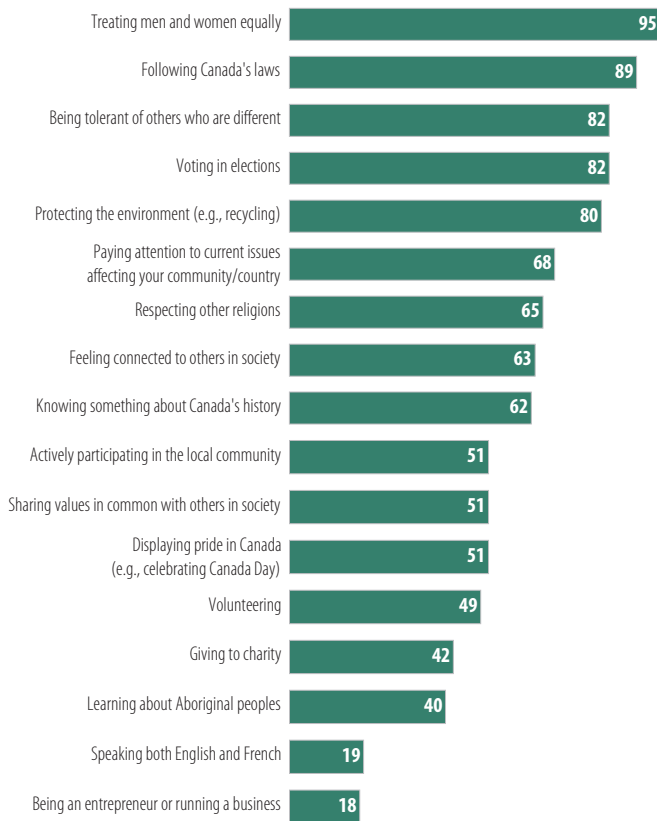


Q.3

We have a few questions about citizenship. There is the legal definition of a citizen, which is based on rules set by the government. But there is also another way to think about citizenship that has to do with what it means to be a good citizen in Canada today. I'd like to ask you now about this other way of thinking about citizenship. In your opinion, what is it that makes someone a good citizen, in terms of what they do and believe? Anything else?

Very important to being a good citizen in Canada

% who say very important



Q.7

Please tell me if you think each of the following are very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important to being a good citizen in Canada ...

IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTES OF GOOD CITIZENSHIP.

In addition to a “top-of-mind” definition of citizenship, the survey further explored this topic by presenting a list of 17 candidate attributes and asking respondents the extent to which they believed each is important to being a good citizen in Canada. Some of the same main attributes emerge high on the list, but others also emerge upon prompting.

At the top of the list, there is essentially a consensus among Canadians that good citizenship means treating men and women equally (95% say this is very important to being a good citizen in Canada), obeying Canada’s laws (89%), being tolerant or respectful of others who are different (82%), voting in elections (82%) and protecting the environment (80%).

Majorities of between six and seven in ten each say a good citizen pays attention to current issues (68%), respects other religions (65%), feels connected to others in society (63%) and knows about Canada’s history (62%).

Half of Canadians each say being a good citizen means actively participating in the local community (51%), sharing common values (51%), displaying pride in Canada (e.g., by celebrating Canada Day) (51%) or volunteering (49%), while four in ten each say it includes giving to charity (42%) and learning about Aboriginal peoples (40%). At the bottom of the list are being bilingual (English and French) (19%), and being an entrepreneur or a small business owner (18%).

The perceived importance of these attributes of good citizenship varies in a consistent manner by population segment. In general, many (but not all) are considered more essential to being a good citizen by women and older Canadians, and less essential by Quebecers. A key exception is being bilingual, which Quebecers are much more likely than others to associate with good citizenship in Canada.

Foreign-born Canadians are more likely than native-born to rate several attributes as very important to being a good citizen, including obeying Canada’s laws, being tolerant, protecting the environment, respecting other religions, feeling connected to others, sharing values and learning about Aboriginal peoples.



How Canadians and Americans compare

How might citizenship be defined in the U.S., where there is a very different set of traditions and identities? In fact, Americans are notably similar to Canadians in the way they define a good citizen. U.S. residents are slightly more likely to say good citizenship means following the rules (i.e., obeying laws, paying taxes and voting in elections). However, they are just as likely as Canadians to characterize a good citizen as someone who actively participates in their community, and even more likely to say it means helping others.

What makes someone a good citizen?

Top mentions Canada and U.S.A.

	CANADA	U.S.A.
Obeys laws	35	41
Active participation in the country	25	22
Helps others/neighbours	17	26
Tolerant of others	14	10
Shares/adopts Canadian/U.S. values	12	6
Pays taxes	10	14
Respect/tolerant of other religions	9	6
Works hard/doesn't rely on government	9	6
Votes in elections	8	13
Does volunteer work	6	7
Proud of being Canadian/American	5	8
Honest/integrity/moral	5	7
Religious faith/belief in God	3	7

Feeling like a good citizen

Canadians emphasize volunteer work and helping others as what makes them feel like a good citizen. Lack of time is identified as the main limitation to doing these things.

FEELING LIKE A GOOD CITIZEN. From a more personal perspective, what things do Canadians themselves do that make them *feel* like a good citizen? When asked (without prompting), Canadians are most likely to emphasize doing volunteer work (34%), and being kind and generous to other people (26%); ahead of paying taxes (21%), obeying the law (20%) and voting in elections (17%). Other things that make people feel like a good citizen include being employed (14%), donating to charities (12%), being an active participant in their community (10%), and participating in a religious or faith community (8%).

There is some variation across the population. Quebecers are most likely to emphasize that paying taxes and working to support themselves make them feel like good citizens. Canadians with greater socio-economic status (education and income) are more apt to identify several things that make them feel like good citizens. Volunteering and being kind to others are more likely to make women feel like good citizens, while paying taxes is more apt to do the same for men. Being kind and generous, obeying laws and donating to charities are all more commonly mentioned as evidence of good citizenship by older Canadians, while those under 60 are more likely than others to say working to support themselves makes them feel like a good citizen.

Consistent with their general definition of citizenship, foreign-born Canadians are more likely than native-born to say obeying laws makes them feel like good citizens. Immigrants in Canada for 10 years or longer are more likely than newer immigrants to emphasize volunteering and being kind to others as ways they feel like a good citizen.

BARRIERS. What makes it difficult for Canadians to be good citizens? In fact, most do not identify major constraints to doing things that make them feel like a good citizen, as they define it. The main obstacle identified (without prompting) is lack of time (21%), followed by cost (9%). No other barrier is identified by more than five percent of Canadians, and more than four in ten (44%) could not identify anything preventing them from feeling like a good citizen.

What do you do that makes you *feel* like a good citizen?

Top mentions



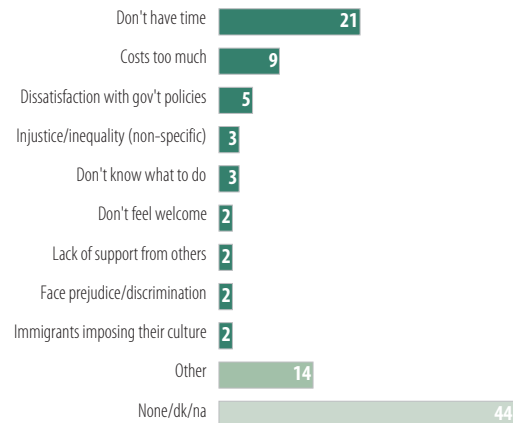
Q.5

Thinking about this broader definition of citizenship, what kinds of things do you, yourself, do that make you feel like a good citizen? Anything else?

Subsample: Those who feel they are fully or partly a citizen

Obstacles to feeling like a good citizen?

Top mentions



Q.6

In what ways, if any, do you sometimes find it difficult to do the things that make you feel like a good citizen? Anything else?

Subsample: Those who feel they are fully or partly a citizen

Time constraints to feeling like a good citizen are more commonly identified by Canadians under 60, and those with more education and higher incomes. Native-born and foreign-born Canadians identify similar barriers to good citizenship.