

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

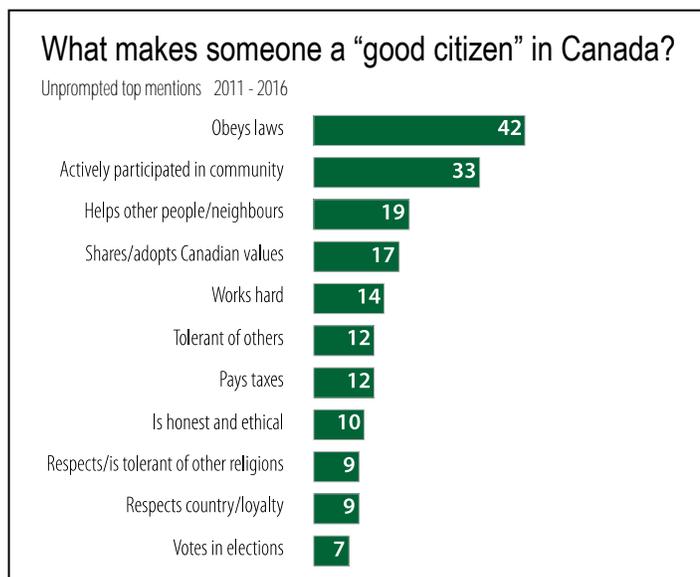
Canadians define being a “good citizen” in a number of ways, including basic obligations (obeying laws, paying taxes) and also in terms of being active participants in one’s community and being tolerant of others who are different.

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).



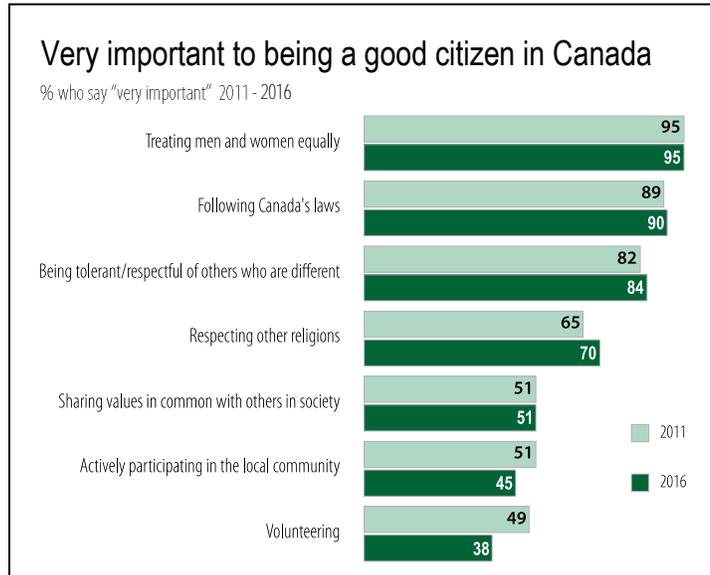
Opinions of native and foreign born Canadians are generally similar. Immigrants are somewhat more likely to identify obeying laws, while native-born individuals are more apt to mention active community participation (as was also the case in 2011). Across the country, Quebecers are a bit less apt to emphasize 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).

