

BACKGROUND

Responsible Citizenship A National Survey of Canadians

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

Purpose:

Prior to the 10th annual Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Conference (November 21-23, 2013), the Environics Institute for Survey Research conducted a national survey of Canadians covering the Foundation's four defining themes, one of which is "responsible citizenship." What is society's responsibility to address the social and economic welfare of people in need, as well as the aspirations of the country's Aboriginal peoples?

Highlights:

- A clear majority of Canadians endorse the principle of "universality" with respect to ensuring the country's social and economic assistance programs are available to everyone, rather than being directed only to those who are most in need. At the same time, the public also expresses clear priorities with respect to which vulnerable groups in the country may be in need of greater assistance from our governments: Seven in ten Canadians say families with children living in poverty should be the top priority, in comparison with young adults having difficulty finding their first job and people who have been unable to find work for more than a year.
- Canadians' initial impressions of the concept of a "guaranteed annual income" as a way to reduce poverty and economic insecurity are mixed. Opinions are divided with a slightly larger proportion who favour such a policy (46%) than who oppose it (42%). Support for a guaranteed annual income is the majority view in Quebec and among Canadians with lower levels of education and income, while most strongly opposed by Albertans and high income Canadians.
- Close to six in ten Canadians believe that the country's Aboriginal peoples should have some form of self government. This opinion has strengthened since 1997 across the country, except in Saskatchewan and Alberta where support has declined to under 50%. In terms of what form self government might take, the public is most likely to say Aboriginal peoples should have the powers comparable to a municipality (i.e. still subject to provincial and federal laws), rather than the powers of a province or a nation.
- By a two-to-one margin, Canadians say the current federal government has a moral responsibility to honour existing treaties with First Nations, regardless of what this might cost. This is a majority view across the country, except in the Prairie provinces where opinion is divided.

Research Findings in Detail

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO THOSE IN NEED

1. ***Do you believe that our country's social and economic assistance programs, such as old age pensions, should be equally available to everyone who may need them, or available only to those individuals and families who are determined to be in most need, based on their current income?***

Universality has been a key principle of government programs aimed at providing social and economic assistance to Canadians. Budget constraints have put this principle under pressure in recent years, but universality continues to be strongly endorsed by the public. Two-thirds (65%) of Canadians say the country's social and economic assistance programs should be available to everyone, versus 29% who believe they should be available only to those most in need.

<i>Do you believe that our country's social and economic assistance programs, such as old age pension?</i>	%
Should be available to everyone	65
Should be available only to those most in need	29
Depends (<i>volunteered</i>)	4
Don't know/no answer	2

Support for the universality of social and economic assistance is the majority view across the country, except among Canadians without a high school diploma (48%). Support is most widespread in Saskatchewan (78%) and Manitoba (75%) as well as among residents of rural communities (72%), while less evident in Quebec (59%, versus 36% who say such assistance should be targeted).

2. ***Which one of the following three groups of individuals in our country are most in need of greater assistance from our governments: Families with children living in poverty; Individuals who have been unable to find work for more than a year; or Young adults having difficulty finding their first job?***

Support for making social and economic assistance available to everyone does not mean that Canadians do not consider some groups to be in greater need than others. When asked which of three specified groups is most in need of greater assistance from governments, a strong majority (69%) say it is families with children living in poverty. By comparison, few consider the top priority to be young adults having difficulty finding their first job (11%) or individuals who have been out of work for more than a year (8%). Another one in ten (10%) insist that the three groups are equally in need of more help from governments.

<i>Which one of the three following groups of individuals in the country is in most need of greater assistance from our governments?</i>	%
Families with children living in poverty	69
Young adults having difficulty finding their first job	11
Individuals who have been unable to find work for more than a year	8
All are equally important (<i>volunteered</i>)	10
Don't know/no answer	2

The strong focus on families with children in poverty is evident across the country, but is marginally higher in Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC than in Ontario, Manitoba and the Atlantic provinces. This view is also more widely held by Canadians with higher levels of education and income, and among those 30 to 44 years of age (80%), compared with those 60 years and older (60%), who are more likely to say that all three groups are equally important (13%). Notably, Canadians 18 to 29 years of age are no more likely than those 45 and older to put the primary emphasis on young adults looking for their first job.

3. *Some people believe the best way to help economically disadvantaged people is to provide them with something called a “guaranteed annual income.”¹ Would you favour or oppose a guaranteed annual income policy for Canadians, to replace the current economic assistance programs?*

A different approach to addressing poverty and economic insecurity is to provide all citizens with a “guaranteed annual income” which provides an income “floor” that ensures everyone has sufficient resources for the basic necessities of life. The income is then clawed back as personal income kicks in, and this program would replace all other forms of economic assistance. This approach was first considered in the 1960s and was tested in a rural Prairie community, but has never been gained traction as broad policy despite the lack of success which current policies have had in eliminating poverty across the country. More recently, Senator Hugh Segal has spoken and written passionately about the merits of a guaranteed annual income.

What do Canadians think of the idea of providing everyone with a guaranteed annual income (a question never before asked on a national survey)? Opinions are evenly split: Just under half say they strongly (19%) or somewhat (27%) favour this type of economic assistance policy, while a comparable proportion somewhat (17%) or strongly (25%) oppose it. One in ten say it would depend (e.g., on how such a policy was implemented) or have no opinion to offer.

<i>Would you favor or oppose a guaranteed annual income policy for Canadians, to replace the current economic assistance programs?</i>	%
Strongly favor	19
Somewhat favor	27
Somewhat oppose	17
Strongly oppose	25
Depends (<i>volunteered</i>)	6
Don't know/no answer	5

The division of opinion about a guaranteed annual income nationally masks notable differences across the population. This concept receives majority support among residents of Quebec (55%) and Vancouver (52%), as well as among Canadians with household incomes under \$100,000 (52%) and those with no post-secondary education (56%). By comparison, this policy is least apt to be favoured by Canadians earning \$100,000 or more (39%) and by Albertans (38%), 36% of whom “strongly” oppose it.

¹ The question included the following description of “guaranteed annual income:” *This would involve every Canadian receiving a specific amount of money from the government each year, which would then be “clawed back” with every dollar of income people earn. Such a program is intended to ensure everyone has enough money for the basic necessities, and would replace other forms of economic assistance, like welfare and unemployment insurance.*

ABORIGINAL SELF GOVERNANCE

4. *Some Aboriginal peoples in Canada are seeking a form of self-government that would allow them to make decisions that affect their own community. Do you think that these Aboriginal peoples should, or should not, have a form of self government*

For more than 50 years, the country's Aboriginal peoples have been striving to achieve greater autonomy and self-determination over their communities and ancestral lands, with very limited progress to show for it. But the Canadian public-at-large is, in principle at least, open to this aspiration. Close to six in ten (58%) say they believe Aboriginal peoples should have self-government that allows them to make decisions affecting their communities, compared with one-third (35%) who do not agree. At the national level this level of support is essentially unchanged since 1997 (56%), although it is above the level recorded in 1990 (47%) and 1992 (54%).

<i>Aboriginal peoples <u>should</u> have a form of self government.</i>	Total %	BC %	AB %	SK %	MB %	ON %	QC %	ATL %
1997	56	52	56	62	72	56	57	55
2013	58	57	44	49	56	59	63	59

Public support for Aboriginal self-government varies noticeably across the country. Support is strongest in Quebec (63%), as well as among Canadians with the lowest incomes (68%) and a university education (62%), and those 18 to 29 years of age (64%). This view is least prevalent among residents of Saskatchewan (49%) and Alberta (44%). Since 1997, public support for Aboriginal self government has increased in all provinces except the Prairies (where it has declined).

5. *If some Aboriginal peoples achieve self government, what form should this take? Should native governments: Have complete independence from all the federal and provincial laws in Canada; Have powers like a province within Canada, still subject to federal laws; or Have powers like municipalities, still subject to federal and provincial laws?*

What form of self government would the Canadian public consider most appropriate? When presented with three options, the clear balance of opinion is for a form of self government comparable to the powers of municipalities, that is still subject to federal and provincial laws (66%). A smaller proportion (24%) believe Aboriginal self government should be akin to that of provinces (subject to federal laws), while very few (4%) say Aboriginal peoples should have full sovereignty, with independence from federal and provincial laws.

<i>If some Aboriginal peoples achieve self-government, what form should this take?</i>	1993 %	1997 %	2013 %
Have powers like municipalities	58	53	66
Have powers like a province within Canada	28	20	24
Have complete independence	3	5	4
Other options/none/no opinion	11	21	7

This ordering of options is consistent with opinions expressed in 1990 - 1997, although since 1997 opinion has shifted toward the municipal level jurisdiction (from those who previously advocated other permutations of self government, or rejected the concept altogether), with a much smaller increase in support for provincial level powers (up 4 points).

Approval of a municipal level form of Aboriginal self government is most widespread among western Canadians, while provincial-level powers are most apt to be favoured in Quebec (30%) and especially in Montréal (37%). Since 1997, support for municipal level powers has increased across the country, but especially in Atlantic Canada, Ontario and BC, while support for provincial level powers has also increased most noticeably in Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and BC.

6. *In previous generations, Canadian governments signed numerous treaties with the country's First Nations, but in many cases has not honoured them, with respect to providing land, resource rights and other benefits that were promised at the time. Do you believe the current Canadian government does, or does not, have a moral responsibility to fully honour existing treaties with the country's First Nations People, regardless of what this might cost*

By a two-to-one margin (58% versus 29%), the Canadian public believes the current Canadian government has a moral responsibility to fully honour existing treaties with the country's First Nation's peoples, regardless of what this might cost. The remainder say that this depends (e.g., on treaties, on what it may cost) (8%) or has no opinion (5%).

<i>Does the current gov't have a moral responsibility to fully honor existing treaties regardless of the cost?</i>	Total %	BC %	AB %	SK %	MB %	ON %	QC %	ATL %
Yes	58	57	48	41	43	61	63	53
No	29	25	37	42	46	25	27	34
Depends	8	10	9	6	4	10	6	9
No opinion	5	7	6	11	7	5	4	3

This sentiment is the majority view except in the three Prairie provinces (especially Manitoba (43%) and Saskatchewan (41%) where opinion is evenly divided. Belief in the government's moral obligation is most widespread in Toronto (68%), Montreal (66%), and among Canadians with the lowest incomes (69%) and immigrants from outside of Europe/the USA (68%).

Survey Methodology

The results are based on a telephone survey conducted for the Environics Institute by Research House with a representative sample of 1,501 Canadians (18 years and older) between September 17 and October 13, 2013. The sample was stratified by province and community size to ensure adequate coverage of jurisdictions for analysis purposes. A sample of this size will produce a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.5 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 the Environics Institute, in conjunction with representatives from the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and Concordia University.