

Ballots & Belonging: new national study on new citizens and political participation

2,300+ new citizens share their experiences navigating Canada's political system

September 8, 2015 – This year, the Canadian government will swear in a record number of new citizens. Researching this important block of voters provides fresh insights into how the Canadian political system engages – or doesn't engage – all citizens. *Ballots & Belonging – New Citizens on Political Participation* is a new national study by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) that explores how new citizens participate politically. The report includes firsthand accounts from 2,300+ new citizens – members of the ICC's Cultural Access Pass program – collected from a national online survey and cross-country focus groups.

Two major themes emerged from the study:

- **Barriers to participation are challenges we shouldn't fear**
We're dealing with solvable, structural challenges such as difficulty navigating the systems and lack of information rather than cynicism, language barriers or apathy.
- **Most new citizens are politically engaged**
New citizens shared that, while they understand that working with politicians is necessary for policy change, they find more immediate results of their work and gain greater satisfaction through volunteering and donating to charities.

Ballots & Belonging explores new citizens' experiences as voters and beyond the ballot as politically engaged citizens in their communities:

The new citizen voter

- New citizens vote because they feel it is generally important as an act of citizenship, and they wanted to have their voices heard. They are less likely to be drawn to the polls by a particular candidate or issue.
- New citizens we talked to who have not voted, yet were eligible, expressed concerns around the convenience of voting and difficulties finding information and navigating the system; these are similar issues other Canadians cite as barriers to voting.
- The majority of new citizens have experience with the democratic process in their country of origin.

The politically engaged new citizen

- While new citizens consider voting effective, the types of activities new citizens reported engaging in tended to be activities we would consider civic engagement or activism such as donating money to charity (70%), volunteering for a community organization (55%) and signing petitions (46%).

While 48% of survey respondents support giving permanent residents the right to vote, most focus group participants argued that only citizens should be given the right to vote federally. There was also substantial support (60%) for internet voting, providing that the integrity of the electoral process can be maintained.

The report illuminates how voting and political participation are essential to new citizens' inclusion into Canadian life, and shares how Canada's organizations can more effectively engage new Canadians. Visit ballotsandbelonging.ca to view the report highlights or download the full report [here](#).

To put a face to the results, new citizens who participated in our focus groups are available across the country to share their story. CEO Charlie Foran and Insights Director Heather Steel are also ready to speak about the results.

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