

# Reconciliation

## What does reconciliation mean?

*The idea of reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians evokes themes of equality, cooperation, forgiveness and relationship-building. Reconciliation with the Canadian government is also associated with justice, fair treatment and creating a level playing field for all.*

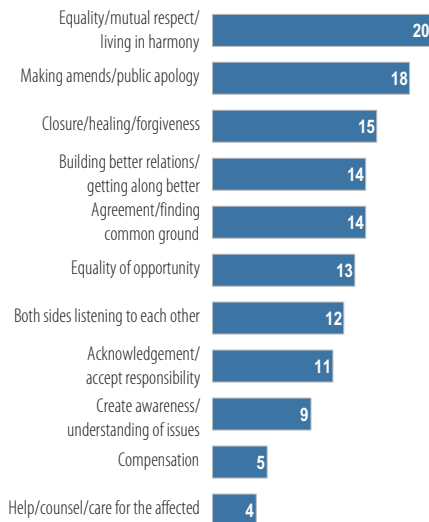
Leading up to the release of Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, reconciliation moved more directly to the front burner of discussions about Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Aboriginal organizations, together with many non-Aboriginal Canadians – individuals, governments, businesses, civil society organizations and churches – raised the banner of reconciliation across the country to move dialogue to action. The survey asked non-Aboriginal Canadians, unprompted, what the term reconciliation means to them, both in terms of relations between Aboriginal peoples and other people living in Canada, and with respect to Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada.

**RECONCILIATION BETWEEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND OTHER PEOPLE IN CANADA.** In defining what they think about reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and other people living in Canada, the following words and phrases emerge:

- **Equality.** This is expressed in terms of equality and mutual respect and living together in harmony (20%), and equality of opportunity (13%).
- **Forgiveness and apology.** Under this theme, Canadians use phrases such as making amends and public apology (18%); forgive, closure, and moving forward (15%); and acknowledgement and accepting responsibility (11%).
- **Building relations.** Some think of reconciliation as getting along better (14%), finding common ground and coming together (14%), both sides listening to each other (12%), and creating awareness and understanding of the issues (9%).
- **Repairing the damage.** Fewer Canadians also spoke about actions to repair the damage caused by Indian residential schools: compensation (5%), help or counsel to care for

What does "reconciliation" between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians mean to you?

Top mentions



Q.26

*What does the word "reconciliation" mean to you, when you think about relations between Aboriginal Peoples and other people living in Canada? Anything else?*

the affected (4%), improving support from government (1%) and recognizing Aboriginal rights (1%).

Notably, a relatively small number of Canadians – just 13 percent – were unable to offer any ideas about what reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians might mean to them.

The meanings attributed to reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians are shared largely to the same degree by Canadians across the country, with a few standouts: Quebecers are much more likely to mention equality, mutual respect and living together in harmony (32%), while those in Saskatchewan emphasize agreement and finding common ground (23%), and Canadians living in the Territories are most likely to mention creating awareness and understanding of the issues (26%). Those age 60+ stand out as being most likely to describe reconciliation as both sides listening to each other (16%).

## RECONCILIATION BETWEEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA.

When Canadians were asked what reconciliation meant to them in terms of relations between Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada, they use many of the same words and phrases from their description of relations with other Canadians. But they also offer a set of new lenses through which to view reconciliation.

**Equality remains a dominant theme.** However, in addition to the idea of mutual respect and living together in harmony (17%), Canadians also describe reconciliation as “fair policies” and a “level playing field” (18%), implying some form of action is required or intended in how they view reconciliation. Canadians also see reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government as cooperation and working together (11%), where both sides are listening to each other, with communication and dialogue (7%).

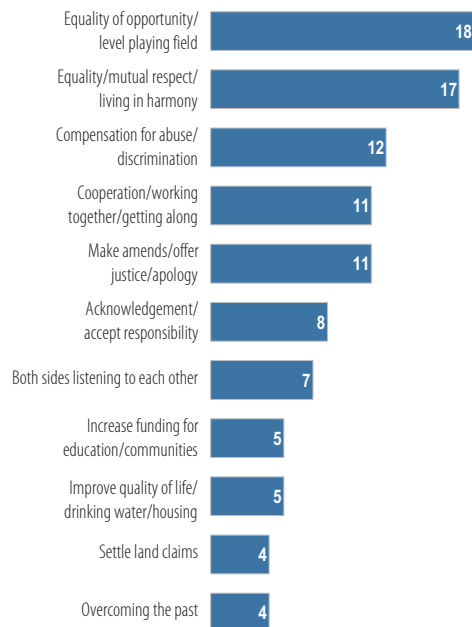
**Concrete actions to address reconciliation** also surface as a theme, and with a similar list of items: general compensation (8%), increased funding for education (5%), improving quality of life (i.e., drinking water) (5%), settling land claims (4%), financial compensation for abuse (4%) and improving financial support from government (3%).

Finally, **apology and acceptance** is another common theme, which refers to acknowledgement and acceptance of history (8%), apology (7%), making amends and offering justice (4%), and making peace (3%). One in five (19%) is unable to offer any ideas about what reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and the federal government might mean to him or her.

These associations with reconciliation are similar across the country and population groups, with a few notable exceptions: A much greater proportion of Northerners mention increased funding for education (21%), while Albertans are more likely than others to talk about general compensation (14%). Saskatchewan and Atlantic Canada residents are least able to offer any description of reconciliation (28% and 25%, respectively).

What does "reconciliation" between Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada mean to you?

Top mentions



Q.27

And what does "reconciliation" mean to you, when you think about relations between Aboriginal Peoples and the Government of Canada? Anything else?

## Role of individual Canadians in bringing about reconciliation

*More than eight in ten believe that individual Canadians have a role to play in helping to bring about reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples, and the strength of this sentiment has increased noticeably over the past eight years.*

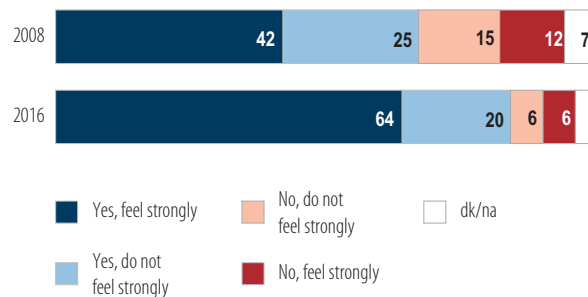
Non-Aboriginal Canadians are divided on the state of their relations with Aboriginal peoples, but most are now aware of the residential schools legacy, and express strong interest in learning more about Aboriginal history and cultures. This suggests an opening for greater understanding between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians as a means to improve relations, but does it mean that non-Aboriginal Canadians see themselves as active participants in reconciliation? The answer appears to be a resounding “yes.”

More than eight in ten (84%) non-Aboriginal Canadians say they believe individual Canadians have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. Moreover, 64 percent feel strongly about this, and this proportion has jumped a significant 22 points since 2008 (42%). This rise in feeling about the public’s role in reconciliation is evident across the country, but most significant among Canadians 18 to 29 (up 31 points).

Part of what might be driving this commitment to reconciliation is views about anti-Aboriginal sentiment and discrimination. Among those who feel strongly that individual Canadians have a role to play in reconciliation, fully 69 percent also agree that most Canadians are prejudiced against Aboriginal peoples whether or not they are conscious of it, and 75 percent believe mainstream Canadian society today benefits from ongoing discrimination against Aboriginal peoples.

The public’s sentiment about the role of individual Canadians in reconciliation is shared across all regions in the country, and among all population groups. The strongest proponents are in Quebec (71% “feel strongly”) and British Columbia (68%), along with women (69% vs. 58% of men), and those who earn less than \$60K annually (70% vs. 61% of those who earn more than \$60K). Canadians who pay a great deal of attention to Aboriginal news and stories (82%), and those who are aware of residential schools and the TRC (71%), also stand out as feeling strongly about the role for individual Canadians in bringing about reconciliation.

Do individual Canadians have a role in bringing about reconciliation?



Q.25

*Now thinking about Canadians generally? Do you believe that individual Canadians do or do not have a role to play in efforts to bring about reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Peoples? Do you feel strongly about this or not?*

## Support for Aboriginal rights and reconciliation

*There is majority public support for a number of policies related to Aboriginal rights and reconciliation, with the strongest support in areas dealing with education and improving the quality of life on reserves, and less so when it comes to settling land claims and giving Aboriginal communities control over natural resources.*

In its June 2015 final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission listed 94 “Calls to Action” to federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments “in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.” The survey gauged public support for six areas, some of which tie directly into the TRC’s calls to action while others relate to longstanding issues that remain unresolved. All six areas receive majority support, although the strength of support varies by recommendation.

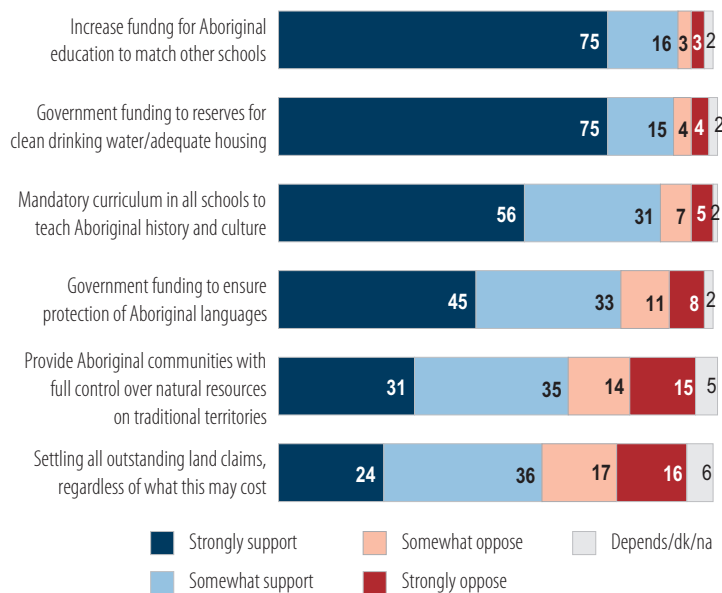
The two areas that garner the strongest public support are increased funding for Aboriginal schools so that it matches funding for non-Aboriginal schools in the same province or territory (91% support, with 75% in strong support), and increased government funding to reserves to ensure clean drinking water and adequate housing (90% support, 75% in

strong support). Very few oppose either recommendation, although opposition to increased education funding in Aboriginal schools is most evident in Manitoba (13%) and Saskatchewan (15%).

Strong majorities of non-Aboriginal Canadians also support recommendations aimed at introducing mandatory curriculum in all schools to teach Aboriginal history and culture (87%), and providing government funding to ensure the preservation of Aboriginal languages (78%), with relatively few expressing opposition.

There is somewhat less consensus on calls to action that deal with land and natural resources. Two-thirds (66%) endorse providing Aboriginal communities full control over the natural resources on their traditional territories, while six in ten (60%) support settling all outstanding land claims with First Nations, Métis and Inuit people regardless of what this might cost. In both cases, levels of strong support are lower than for other calls to action tested (31% and 24%, respectively), with three in ten expressing opposition.

### Support for Aboriginal rights and reconciliation



Q.28

*Please tell me whether you would strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose each of the following steps to address reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?*

Across Canada, there is consistent majority support for all six of the recommendations covered in the survey. However, the level of support varies depending on where one lives. For example, recommendations related to education and quality of life on reserves elicit stronger levels of support in Quebec, Ontario, Atlantic Canada and the Territories than in the four Western provinces. This also applies to support for providing government funding to preserve Aboriginal languages, except that British Columbians join those living east of Manitoba in their strong support of this measure.

When it comes to land claims and control of natural resources, however, regional differences in public opinion are a bit more nuanced. Settling all outstanding land claims regardless of cost generates stronger support among Atlantic Canadians, Ontarians, and those living in the Territories, with Saskatchewan and Alberta residents much more divided on this recommendation. Giving

Aboriginal communities full control over natural resources on traditional territories garners the strongest opposition in Quebec (35%), Alberta (36%), Saskatchewan (34%), and the Territories (36%).

Levels of support for specific calls to action also vary somewhat across different population groups. Recommendations related to education – equal funding for Aboriginal schools and mandatory Aboriginal history and culture in the curriculum – are strongly supported by all non-Aboriginal Canadians regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics. However, women lend stronger support to both than men, and the same is true for funding to preserve Aboriginal languages. It is also interesting to note that immigrants are more likely to support both mandatory curriculum to teach Aboriginal history and culture, and funding to preserve Aboriginal languages, in comparison with those born in Canada.

### IMPORTANCE OF CONTROL OVER LAND AND RESOURCES.

A number of Supreme Court decisions over the past decade have brought victories to Aboriginal peoples in their struggle to have a say in, or control over, what happens on their lands, particularly with respect to resource development. But non-Aboriginal Canadians are divided on the need for communities to have such control over their lands and resources. More than four in ten strongly (17%) or somewhat (28%) agree with the statement “Aboriginal communities do not need control over their land and resources to be successful,” while half somewhat (26%) or strongly (25%) disagree.

The underlying tension in Canadian public opinion on the need for Aboriginal peoples to have control over their traditional territories is further revealed by the fact that, among those who say this control is not necessary for Aboriginal peoples to be successful, a majority (56%) nonetheless supports the idea of providing Aboriginal communities full control over the natural resources on their traditional territories, a key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

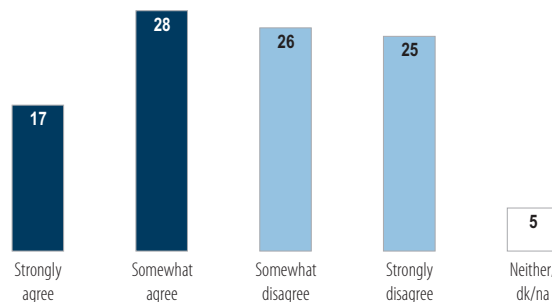
Canadians in all regions of the country display a divided view on this issue. But Atlantic Canadians are more inclined than others to link Aboriginal control of land and resources to the success of Aboriginal communities (57% disagree with the statement), while Saskatchewan residents (38%) are least likely to share this opinion.

### IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING HISTORY OF TREATMENT OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES.

If reconciliation is, in part, about accountability, apology and making amends, then developing a greater appreciation of the history of the treatment of Aboriginal peoples is an important first step. Consistent with the broad public support for introducing mandatory education curriculum in all schools, nine in ten say it is very (62%) or somewhat (30%) important for all non-Aboriginal Canadians to understand the true history of how Aboriginal peoples have been treated by governments and society in this country.

This sentiment has strengthened among Canadians living in major cities since 2009 (with those saying very important increasing by 10 percentage points). This view is shared across all regions and population groups, but is strongest in Atlantic Canada, Ontario and British Columbia, as well as among women, younger Canadians (18-29), low income earners and people born outside Canada.

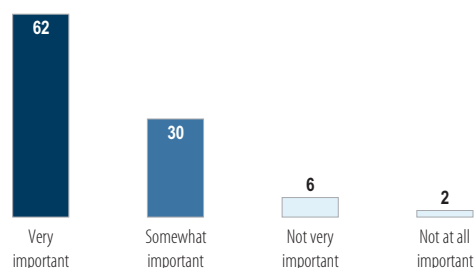
Aboriginal communities do not need control over their land and resources to be successful



Q.31f

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: Aboriginal communities do not need control over their land and resources to be successful?

Importance of understanding true history of how Aboriginal peoples have been treated in Canada



Q.29

In your opinion, how important is it for all non-Aboriginal Canadians to understand the true history of how Aboriginal Peoples have been treated by governments and society in this country?

## Prospects for reconciliation

*Non-Aboriginal Canadians are cautiously optimistic about meaningful reconciliation happening in their lifetime. At the same time, most believe that reconciliation will be impossible as long as there continues to be social and economic disparities between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians.*

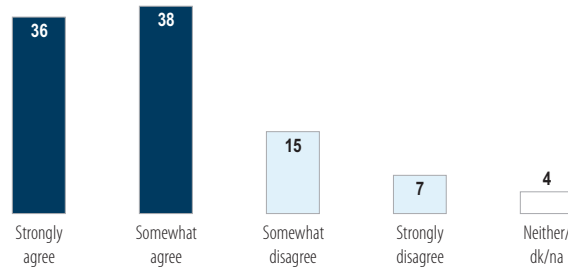
The public acknowledges a sizeable standard of living gap between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, and most believe this represents a major obstacle standing in the way of reconciliation. Three-quarters strongly (36%) or somewhat (38%) agree with the statement “Reconciliation will be impossible as long as Aboriginal peoples remain socio-economically disadvantaged,” compared with one in five who disagrees.

Non-Aboriginal Canadians across all regions share this perspective, with particularly strong views held among those living in the Territories (64% strongly agree). Disagreement is most evident in Alberta (33%) and Saskatchewan (28%). University graduates, and Canadians who pay a great deal of attention to news and stories about Aboriginal peoples are more likely to strongly agree with this statement than others.

**OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE.** This survey reveals widespread public support for meaningful reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. What are the prospects for meaningful progress? Two-thirds say they are very (17%) or somewhat (51%) optimistic that there will be meaningful reconciliation in their lifetime, compared with three in ten who are somewhat (23%) or very (7%) pessimistic.

Optimism (very or somewhat) is evident across the country, but most widespread in Toronto (76%) and Atlantic Canada (73%), as well as among women (71%), Canadians 18 to 29 (79%), those in the lowest income bracket (76%), and immigrants (78%). This view is least apt to be shared in Saskatchewan (59%), where positive views about Aboriginal peoples generally, and with respect to reconciliation, are least evident.

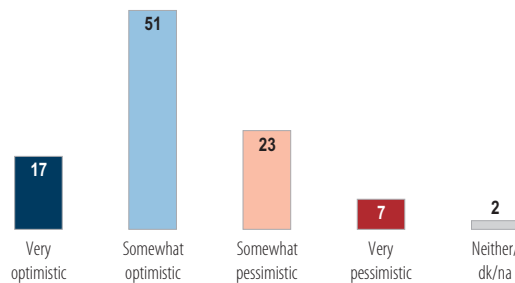
Reconciliation will be impossible as long as Aboriginal peoples remain socio-economically disadvantaged



Q.31d

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: Reconciliation will be impossible as long as Aboriginal Peoples remain socio-economically disadvantaged?

Prospects for meaningful reconciliation happening in your lifetime



Q.30

Are you very optimistic, somewhat optimistic, somewhat pessimistic or very pessimistic that there will be meaningful reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in your lifetime?