

Gender-Neutral Birth Certificates: Political preference and age drive opinions of Ontario plan

Most Canadians oppose their province issuing this identification document without specifying gender

July 7, 2017 – As activists across the country [push for an end](#) to gender identification on government documents, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians less than enthusiastic about the concept.

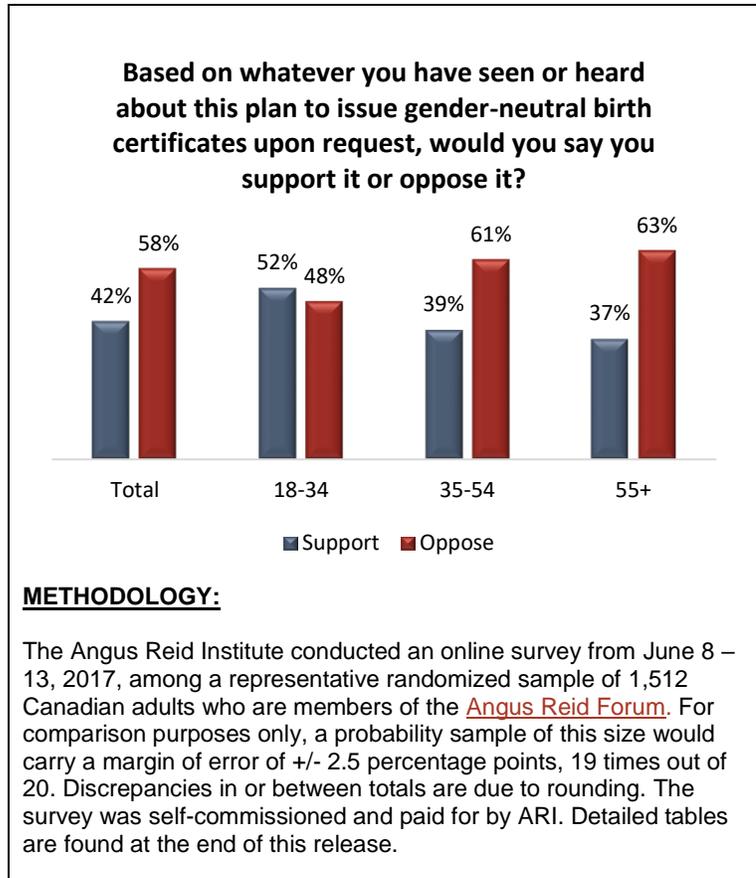
Most are opposed to the idea of allowing residents of their own province to opt for something other than an “M” or an “F” on their birth certificates, and roughly half say allowing gender-neutral identification of all types for those who want it is a “bad thing”.

These findings come as Ontario’s provincial government says it is [working to develop a gender-neutral option](#) for birth certificates, and as a parent in British Columbia [mounts a legal challenge](#) to keep a gender designation off of their child’s birth certificate.

Though these examples – [and others](#) – have prompted their share of headlines, fully half (51%) of Canadians say they haven’t seen or heard anything about Ontario’s intention to begin issuing gender-neutral birth certificates. Among the fewer than one-in-four (22%) who have a higher degree of awareness of the issue, support for Ontario’s proposal is higher.

Key Findings:

- A majority (58%) of Canadians say they oppose their province following Ontario’s lead and issuing gender-neutral birth certificates for those who want them
- While younger Canadians are significantly more likely to favour their province issuing gender-neutral birth certificates, those over the age of 35 are more likely to be opposed



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- Overall, Canadians are divided as to whether allowing gender-neutral identification for those who want it is a good thing. Roughly half (49%) say it is, while the rest (51%) say it isn't, and should be stopped

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Ontario's plan

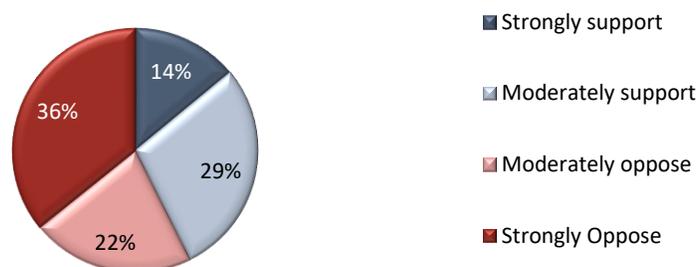
In May, the Ontario provincial government announced plans to begin issuing gender-neutral birth certificates (that is, birth certificates that do not show the sex of the person identified) to people who want them, by 2018. The move comes on the heels of [an application from Joshua M. Ferguson](#) – who identifies as neither male nor female – to have the sex designation on their birth certificate changed to non-binary (that is, something other than “M” or “F”).

Ferguson is not the only Canadian actively pursuing this sort of change. In April of this year, Gemma Hickey of Newfoundland and Labrador [applied for a non-binary birth certificate](#), and Kori Doty – a BC parent who has been part of a [long-standing legal battle](#) with the provincial government over genderless identification – has brought new life to the issue, requesting that the province issue their [newborn a birth certificate without gender](#).

Ontario also allows residents to opt for an X, rather than an M or F on their drivers' licenses, and has removed gender information from health care cards entirely.

When asked about making a similar change to birth certificates, most Ontario residents (57%) say they are opposed to such an effort. Indeed, the largest number (36%) say they are “strongly opposed, as seen in the following graph:

**Based on whatever you've seen or heard about this plan to issue gender-neutral birth certificates upon request, would you say you support it or oppose it?
(Ontario respondents, N=505)**

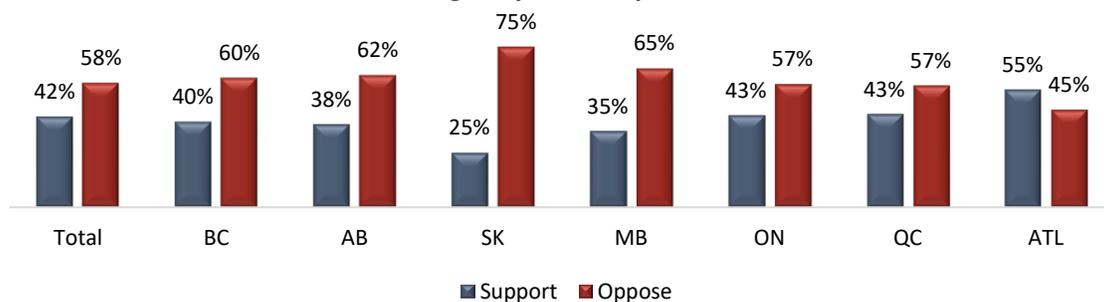


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In Alberta, where the legislature passed a bill at the end of 2016 that [will allow a non-binary option](#) on birth certificates in the province, opposition to such a measure is even higher. Indeed, residents of all regions west of Ontario are more opposed to such a measure in their own province than Ontarians. Only in Atlantic Canada does support for issuing gender-neutral birth certificates on request rise to a majority:

Based on whatever you have seen or heard about this plan to issue gender-neutral birth certificates upon request, would you support or oppose such a change in your own province?

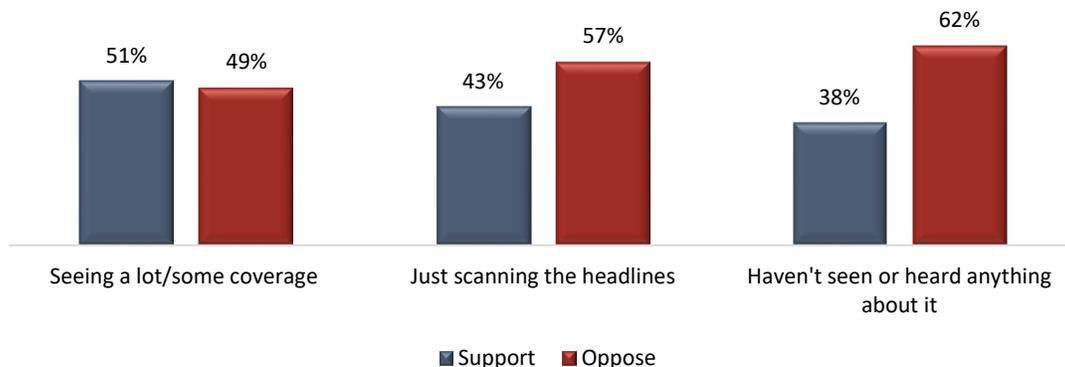


Age, Politics affect support

Although it has attracted some attention, the debate over genderless birth certificates has remained relatively absent from the public conversation. Half of Canadians (51%) report that they haven't seen or heard anything about the issue, and another 27 per cent indicate only coming across it in headlines.

Those who are unaware of the plan are more opposed, while the 22 per cent of Canadians who have been following the issue in the news are roughly evenly divided:

Do you support or oppose the plan to issue gender-neutral birth certificates upon request?



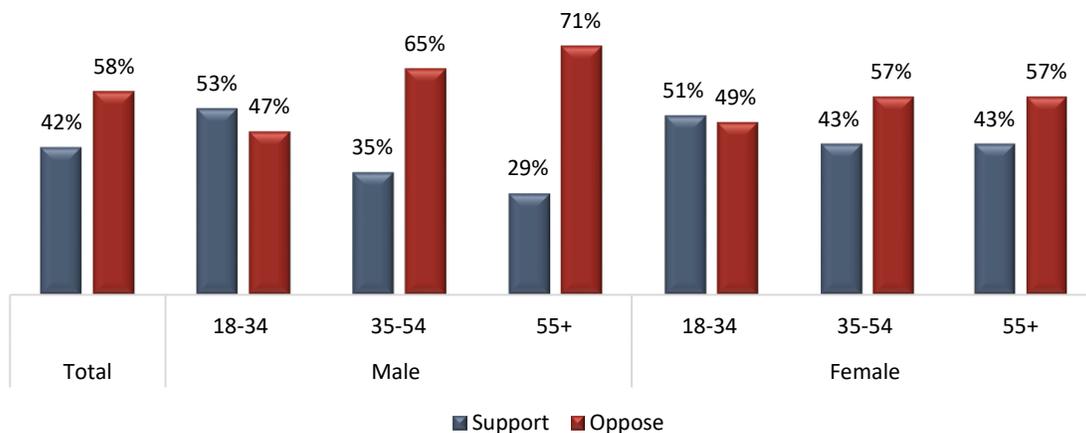
Opposition could be born out of status quo bias – a preference for continuity and a belief that change is synonymous with loss. This may explain why Canadians are more supportive of gender-neutral

identification in theory than they are of putting it into practice in their province. Or, it could be driven by uncertainty as to how the Ontario proposal would work – something the provincial government is [still trying to figure out](#).

Age and politics appear to inform feelings on this issue: while younger Canadians are significantly more likely to favour their province issuing gender-neutral birth certificates, those over the age of 35 are more likely to be opposed ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

A closer look at the data indicates that high levels of opposition among older Canadians are largely attributable to men, particularly those ages 55 and older, 71 per cent of whom oppose genderless birth certificates in their province:

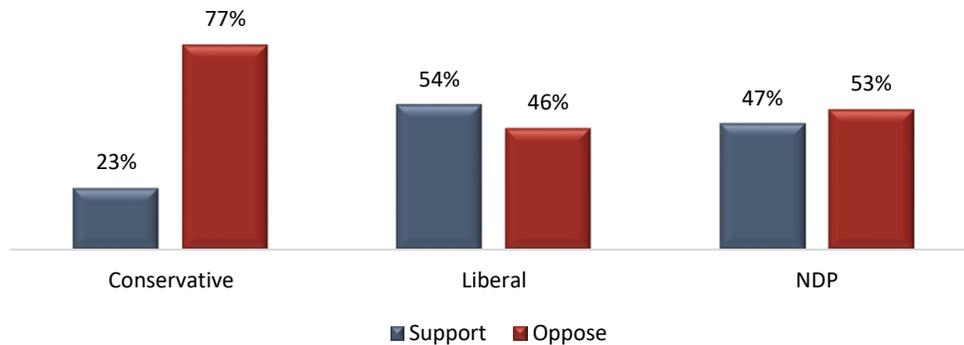
Do you support or oppose the plan to to issue gender-neutral birth certificates upon request?



Political affiliation is also related to opinions on genderless birth certificates. Those who voted for the Conservative Party of Canada in the 2015 federal election are far more likely than other Canadians to oppose the plan. Almost four-in-five (77%) oppose their province issuing gender-neutral birth certificates.

That said, more than half of past New Democratic Party supporters (53%) say they oppose gender-neutral birth certificates in their province, as seen in the following graph:

Do you support or oppose the plan to issue gender-neutral birth certificates upon request?



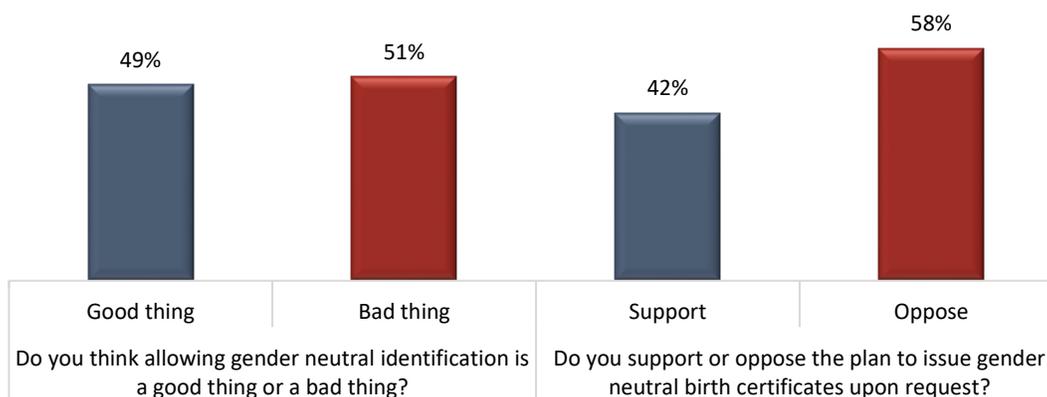
Are birth certificates a special case?

The opposition to gender-neutral birth certificates found in this survey may indicate a belief that such documents are fundamentally different from other types of identification. When the Angus Reid Institute asked [a question about identification documents in general](#) last year, most Canadians said IDs should either offer a third, non-binary option for gender (39%) or should not include gender at all (20%).

Likewise, when asked a question about gender-neutral identification as a concept at the end of this survey, Canadians are divided. Roughly half say governments allowing gender-neutral identification is a good thing that should continue (49%), and the rest (51%) say it is a bad thing that should be stopped.

Only on the question of gender-neutral birth certificates does public opinion shift to clear opposition, a response that suggests Canadians view such documents differently than they view the more abstract concept of “gender-neutral identification.”

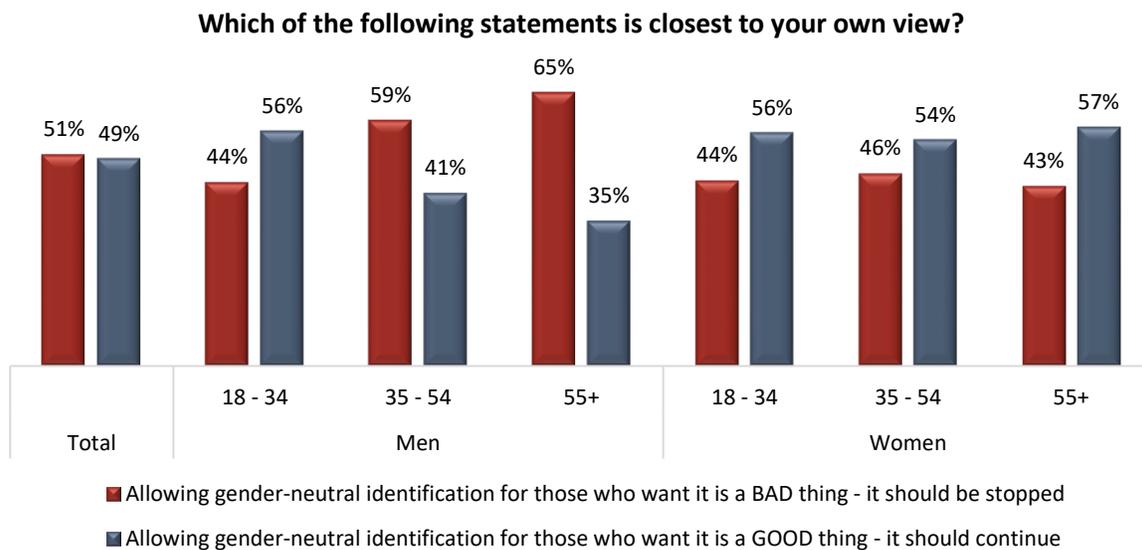
Gender neutral identification vs. gender neutral birth certificates



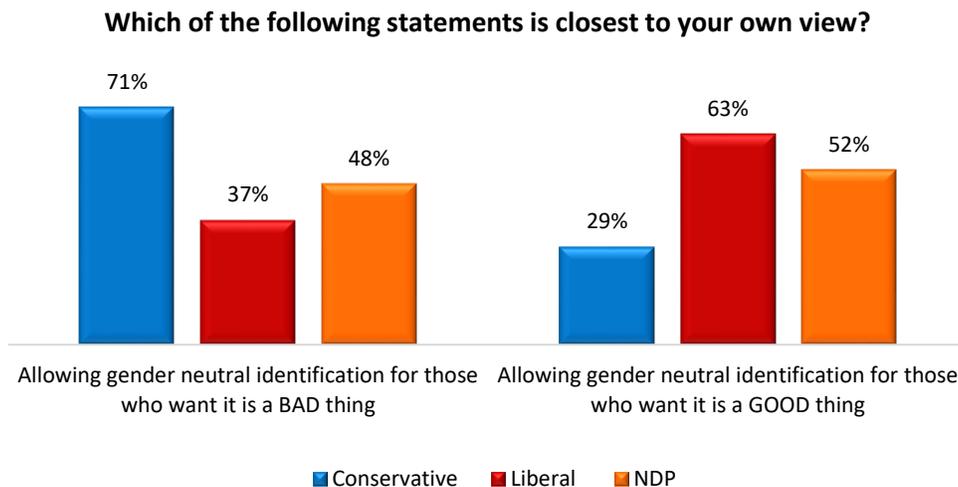
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Looking at respondents by their age and self-described gender, one sees young men (those ages 18 – 34) and women of all ages more inclined to say allowing gender-neutral identification is a good thing than to say it is a bad one. Only men ages 35 and older believe allowing gender-neutral identification is bad, but they are more unified than other groups in this belief:



This question also generates a high degree of political divergence, with past Conservatives more likely to say gender-neutral identification is a bad thing, while Liberal supporters are significantly more likely to think a gender neutral option for those who request it is a good thing, generally.



The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

And, based on whatever you have seen or heard about Ontario's plan to issue gender-neutral birth certificates upon request, would you support or oppose such a change in your own province?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1512)	Awareness of Ontario's plan		
		Seeing a lot/some coverage (339)	Just scanning the headlines (403)	Haven't seen or heard anything (769)
Strongly support	14%	18%	14%	12%
Moderately support	28%	32%	29%	26%
Moderately oppose	23%	16%	24%	24%
Strongly oppose	35%	33%	33%	38%

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