

Birthright Citizenship: Plurality of Canadians see it as good policy, but also say some changes are needed

Most would not extend birthright citizenship to babies born to those in Canada on tourist visas

March 14, 2019 – Which babies born on Canadian soil should be granted automatic citizenship?

It's a question that has appended itself to the [Canadian political and policy narrative](#) in this election year; and one on which Canadians share some areas of consensus and others of deep division, according to a new public opinion poll from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute.

Today, most Canadians feel this concept – that anyone born in Canada is a citizen – goes a bit too far. Almost two-thirds (64%) say a child born to parents who are in this country on tourist visas should not be granted Canadian citizenship, and six-in-ten (60%) say changes to Canada's citizenship laws are necessary to discourage birth tourism.

That said, more Canadians are inclined to believe birthright citizenship is a good policy (40%) than a bad one (33%).

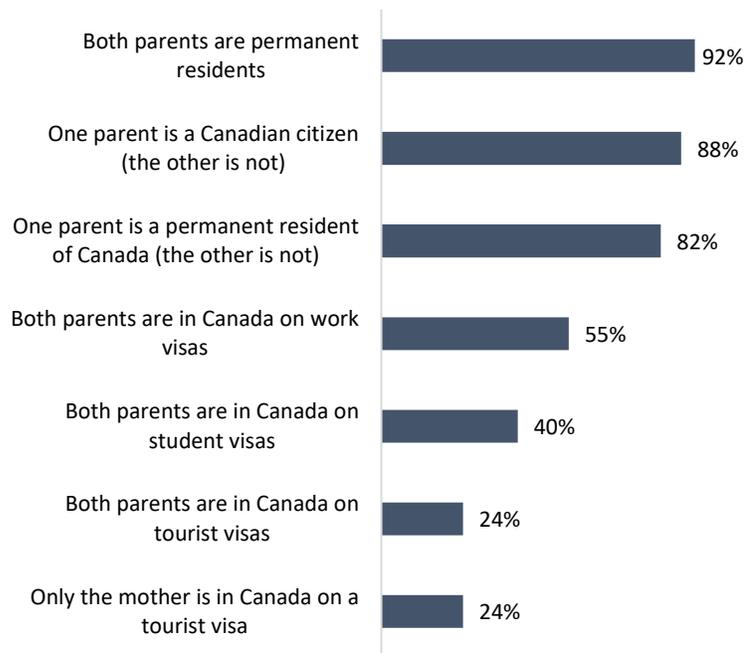
More Key Findings:

- Canadian opinions of when to grant citizenship are nuanced, changing with various scenarios offered.

For example, 55 per cent say a child born to two parents in Canada on work visas should be conferred citizenship. This drops to 40 per cent if both parents are in Canada on student visas.

- Canadians considering the Conservative Party in the coming election, as well as older residents (those ages 55-plus), are inclined to say that birth tourism is serious problem for Canada. Those considering the Liberal and New Democratic Parties – and those under 35 years of age – are more likely to say the problem is not serious.

Percentage of Canadians who say a child should be a Canadian citizen in each of these scenarios:



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from February 21 – 24, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 1,009 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- In the same vein, while three-quarters of Canadians in the Conservative political sphere* say changes are birthright citizenship are necessary, majorities from the Liberal and NDP spheres disagree, and say no changes are needed

*see methodology for notes on Political Sphere

About ARI

*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.*

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Part 1: Birthright Citizenship

A good or bad policy?

Before 1947, there was no such thing as Canadian citizenship. Being a Canadian citizen was not legally distinct from being a British subject. Prime Minister Mackenzie King was the first person ever [to receive a certificate of Canadian citizenship](#), and his government's law created Canadian citizenship in broad, pluralistic terms, extending it to anyone born on Canadian soil after the date the law took effect.

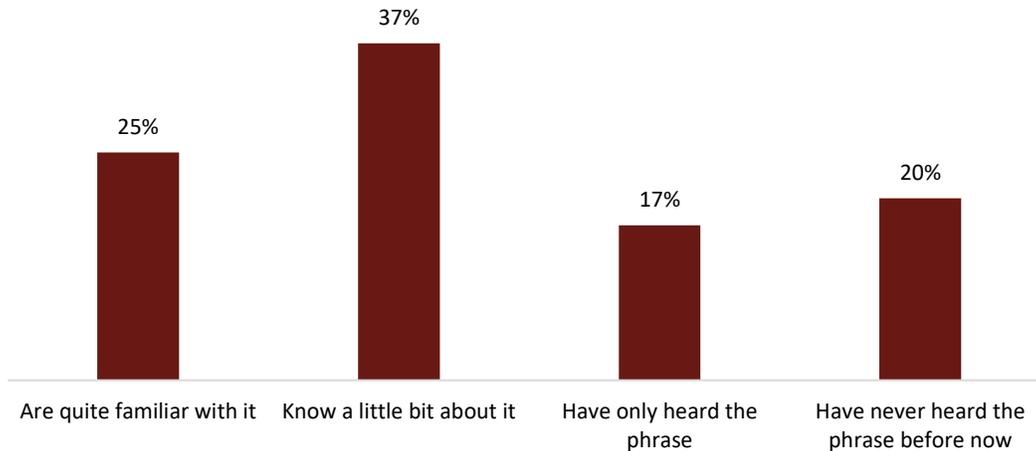
The policy of birthright citizenship has become more relevant in the public discourse in recent years amid headlines about irregular border crossings and rising immigration concerns among the public.

Four-in-ten Canadians are relatively unfamiliar with the term itself, and how it applies in this country:

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**How familiar are you with the term “birthright citizenship”?
(All Respondents)**

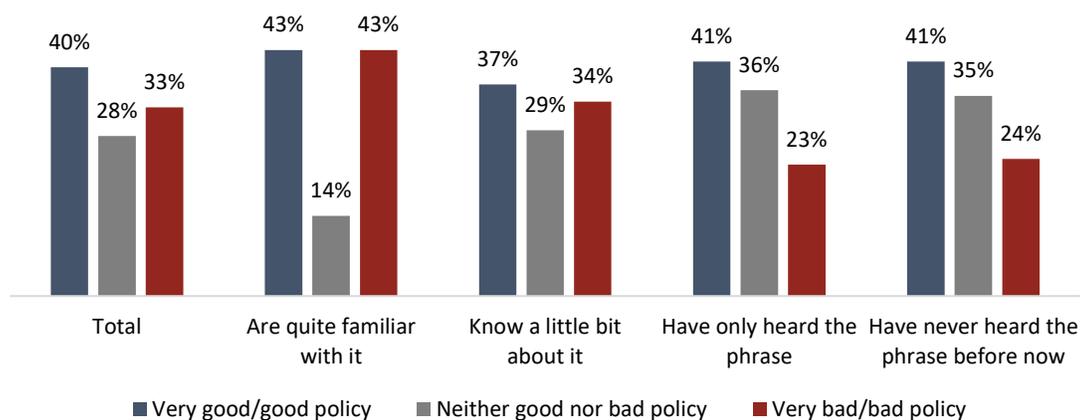


Birthright citizenship means that anyone born on Canadian soil, regardless of their parents’ citizenship or immigration status, is automatically a Canadian citizen.

Overall, Canadians are inclined to believe that this is a positive thing for the country, rather than a negative. Four-in-ten (40%) say it is a good policy, while one-in-three (33%) disagree. Another three-in-ten (28%) remain neutral on the concept.

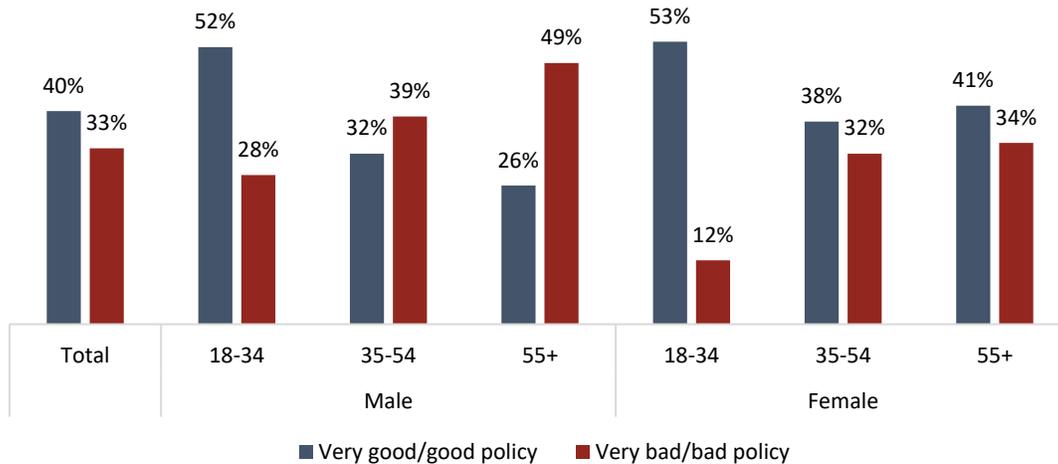
Notably, familiarity with the topic breeds a more jaded view: Those who say they are quite familiar with it are divided, with 43 per cent saying it is good policy and 43 per cent bad:

Based on whatever you may have seen or heard about this policy, what are your views on it?



This issue generates stark division based on age and gender. Both men and women under the age of 35 voice majority support for the policy, but older men (those ages 55-plus) are nearly twice as likely to disagree (26% good vs 49% bad), while older women mirror the national average:

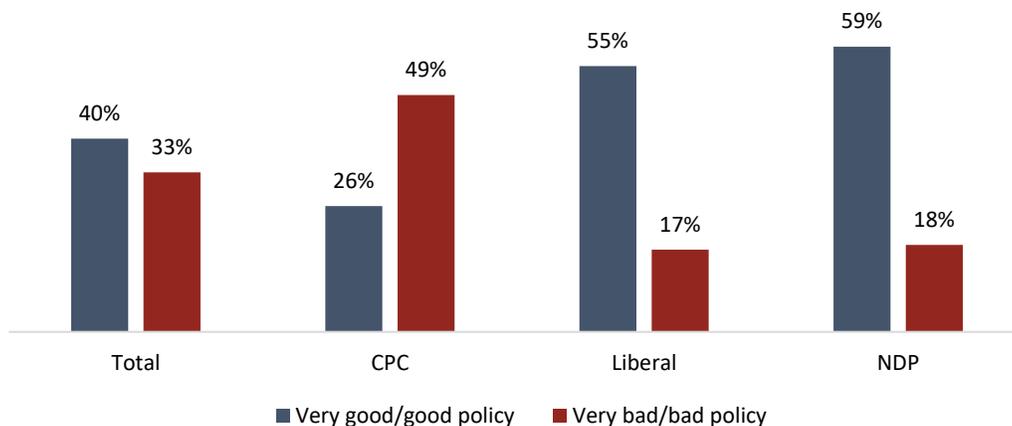
Based on whatever you may have seen or heard about this policy, what are your views on it?



Political affiliation is also important in this discussion. Those considering the Conservative Party in the coming election (see note on methodology at the end of this report), are twice as likely to say that birthright citizenship is a bad policy as they are to say it is a good one. To their left on of the political spectrum, those in the Liberal and New Democratic spheres are vastly more likely to say birthright citizenship is good policy.

Delegates at the 2018 Conservative Party convention [voted in favour](#) of a motion calling for an end to the policy.

**Based on whatever you may have seen or heard about this policy, what are your views on it?
Based on Political Sphere***



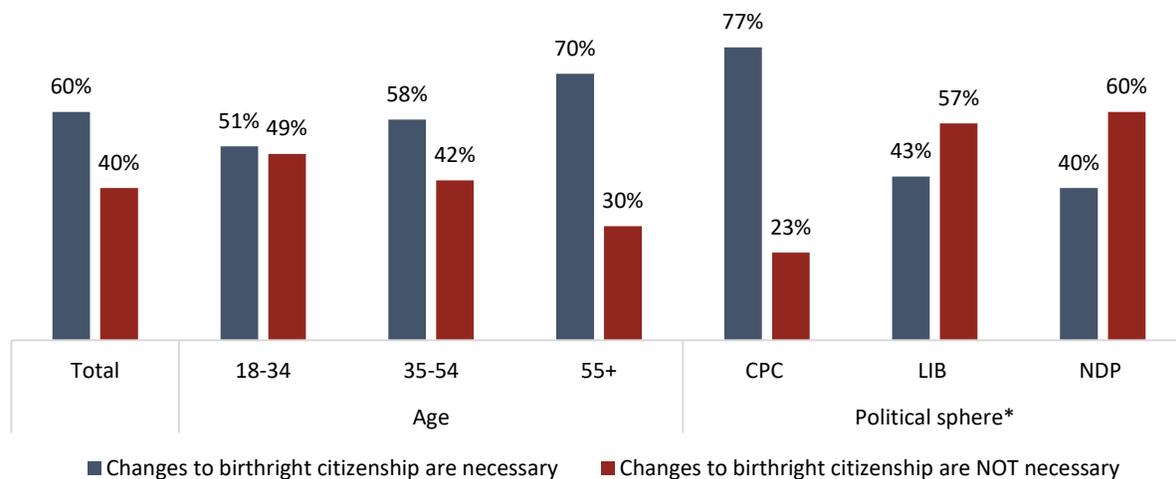
Age and politics drive differing views

While Canadians are more inclined to believe that birthright citizenship is either good policy or – at minimum – not *bad* policy, most still see room for changing it. Supporters of changing the policy argue that doing so is necessary to discourage people from coming to Canada on visitor visas specifically for the purposes of giving birth so that their children will be Canadian citizens (a practice known as “birth tourism”).

Opponents of changing birthright citizenship rules say doing so is unnecessary because “birth tourism” – while a phenomenon in some Canadian cities – particularly Richmond in B.C. – is not a serious enough problem nationwide to justify changing Canada’s citizenship rules.

Canadians lean toward changing the policy – six-in-ten (60%) say this is necessary. Notably, seven-in-ten Canadians over 55 and three-quarters of those in the Conservative political sphere hold this view. Millennials are divided evenly on each side of the debate:

Which of these perspectives is closer to your own – even if neither is exactly how you feel?



In which cases should a newborn be a citizen

In order to dig deeper into this issue and the numerous ways that it can be manifest, the Angus Reid Institute offered Canadians eight different scenarios and asked them about each case. Some scenarios generate near unanimous favour for automatic citizenship, while others are significantly more contentious, as seen in the table that follows.

<i>For each situation, should the child be a citizen or not</i>			
	Yes, should be a citizen	No, should NOT be a citizen	Not sure
Only the mother is in Canada on a tourist visa	24%	58%	17%
Both parents are in Canada on tourist visas	24%	64%	13%
Both parents are in Canada on student visas	40%	48%	12%
Both parents are in Canada on work visas	55%	34%	11%
One parent is a permanent resident of Canada (the other is not)	82%	10%	8%
One parent is a Canadian citizen (the other is not)	88%	5%	6%
Both parents are permanent residents	92%	4%	3%
Both parents are Canadian citizens	97%	1%	2%

Just as they have an impact on views of birthright citizenship overall, age and politics play a role in Canadian opinions of each. Notably, however, Canadian opinions do not change drastically based on gender.

Age is particularly interesting when considering each of the four least supported scenarios for citizenship. In each case, as show below, those between the ages of 18 and 34 are considerably more likely to see the validity of citizenship for the child born compared to those over 55.

<i>Percentage who say a child should be a Canadian citizen in each scenario:</i>						
	Total (994)	Gender		Age		
		Male (472)	Female (517)	18-34 (306)	35-54 (347)	55+ (341)
Only the mother is in Canada on a tourist visa	24%	21%	26%	32%	24%	17%
Both parents are in Canada on tourist visas	24%	21%	26%	36%	23%	13%
Both parents are in Canada on student visas	40%	38%	42%	57%	39%	26%
Both parents are in Canada on work visas	55%	53%	57%	76%	51%	40%

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One parent is a permanent resident of Canada (the other is not)	82%	83%	82%	92%	85%	72%
One parent is a Canadian citizen (the other is not)	88%	91%	86%	94%	91%	81%
Both parents are permanent residents	92%	93%	92%	96%	92%	90%

In a similar manner, the views of those in the Conservative political sphere are at odds with those who would consider the Liberal Party and/or the NDP. There are, however, two scenarios where opinions do not differ greatly – where at least one parent is a Canadian citizen, or both parents are permanent residents.

<i>Percentage who say a child should be a Canadian citizen in each scenario:</i>				
	Total (994)	Political Sphere*		
		CPC (384)	Liberal (342)	NDP (243)
Only the mother is in Canada on a tourist visa	24%	13%	36%	36%
Both parents are in Canada on tourist visas	24%	14%	35%	37%
Both parents are in Canada on student visas	40%	25%	55%	61%
Both parents are in Canada on work visas	55%	41%	72%	74%
One parent is a permanent resident of Canada (the other is not)	82%	77%	93%	92%
One parent is a Canadian citizen (the other is not)	88%	88%	95%	94%
Both parents are permanent residents	92%	90%	98%	95%

Part 2: Birth Tourism

Mixed views on seriousness of Birth Tourism

“Birth tourism” is the practice of pregnant women from other countries coming to Canada to give birth so that their children will be Canadian citizens.

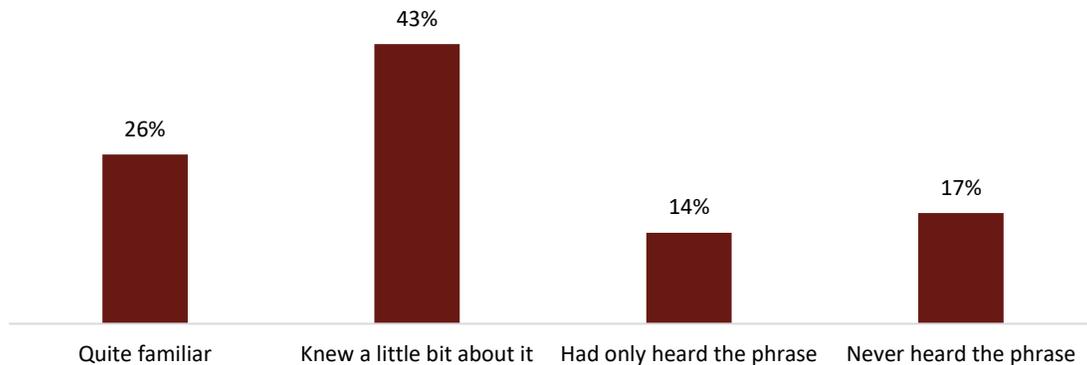
The practice has generated media coverage in recent years after [an investigation](#) in Richmond, British Columbia found more than two dozen “baby houses” were operating in the province, offering rooms and services for mothers who had flown in to give birth. While the number of babies born to non-Canadian mothers in Canada was reported to be [313 in 2016](#) according to Statistics Canada, a recent study found that birth tourism is increasing, and in fact [considerably higher](#) than StatsCan is projecting.

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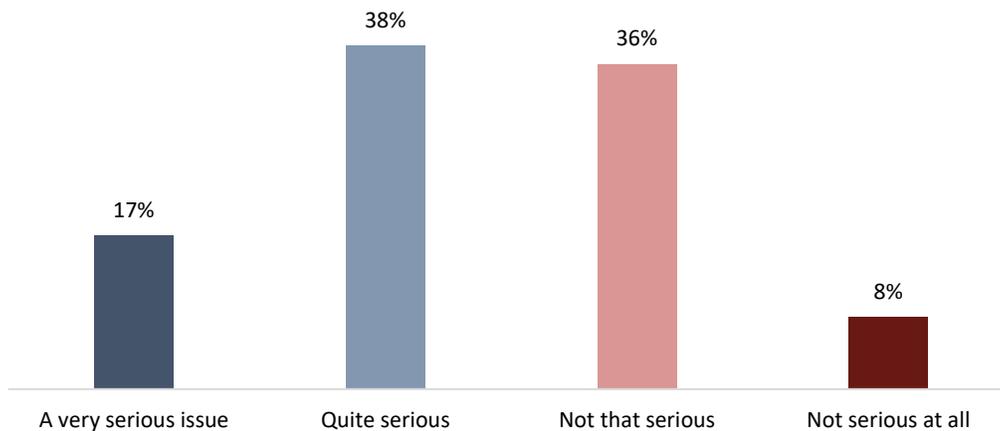
About one-in-four Canadians (26%) say they are quite familiar with this concept:

**Before starting this survey, how familiar were you with “birth tourism”?
(All Respondents)**



As to its seriousness, Canadians tend to be divided. Close to one-in-five consider the issue to be very serious (17%) while an equal number say that it is either quite serious (38%) or not that serious (36%):

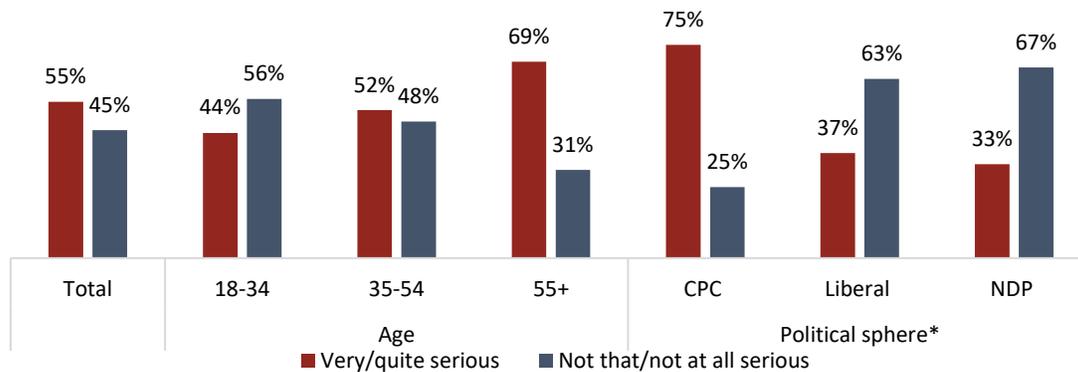
**And, based on whatever you may have seen, read, or heard about
birth tourism, would you say it is ...
(All Respondents)**



The degree to which Canadians are concerned about birth tourism appears to depend heavily on their age and political affiliation. Generationally, it is older Canadians (55+) who consider the issue more serious, while those under the age of 55 are evenly divided.

Similarly, two-thirds of Liberal- and NDP-inclined Canadians say that this is not a serious issue, while those considering the CPC say it is serious by a ratio of three-to-one:

And, based on whatever you may have seen, read, or heard about birth tourism, would you say it is ...



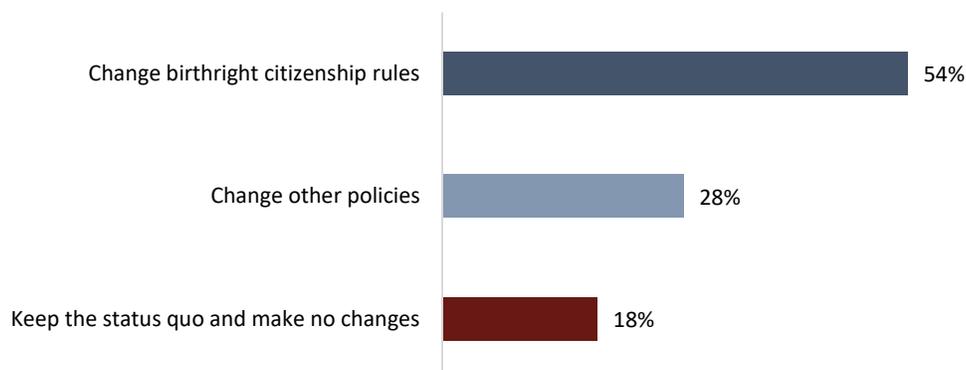
Half would change birth citizenship rules to prevent birth tourism

Broadly speaking, there are three general types of responses Canada could take to dealing with this issue of birth tourism: It could change birthright citizenship rules; it could change other policies to discourage people from coming here to give birth, but leave current birthright citizenship rules in place; or it could keep the status quo and make no changes.

A number of countries, France in 1993, Ireland in 2005, and more recently New Zealand and Australia, have [changed their citizenship laws](#) to eliminate birthright citizenship. Those jurisdictions now require at least one parent to be a citizen in order to automatically grant citizenship to the child.

Half of Canadians say they would prefer to see birthright citizenship rules changed, while another three-in-ten (28%) favour amending policies to address the birth tourism issue, but do not believe birthright citizenship needs to be changed overall. One-in-five Canadians say they do not see the need to change anything:

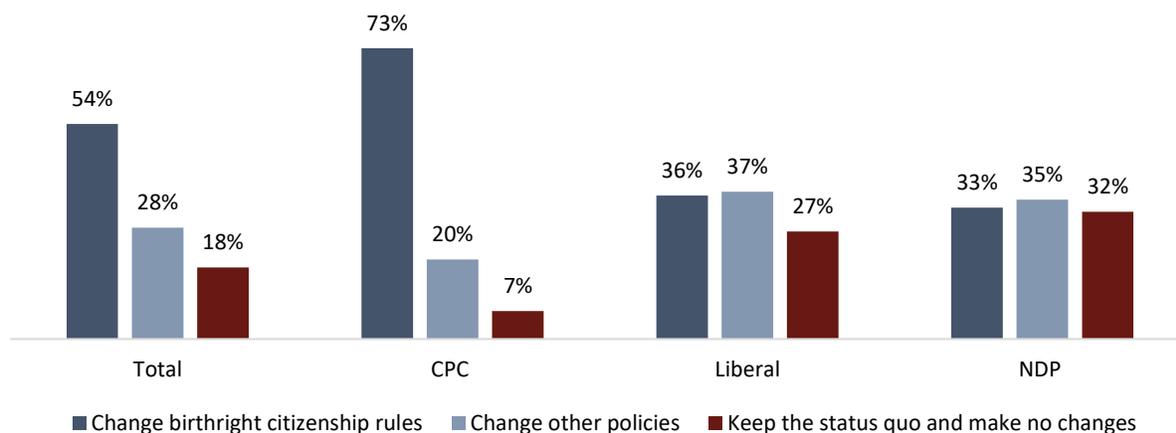
Which of these broad approaches to the issue of birth tourism would you prefer to see Canada take?



Those in the Conservative political sphere are much more likely to support a change to birthright citizenship rules, something the [CPC explored](#) during former Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government and [recently supported](#) at its party convention in 2018.

Notably, those in the Liberal and New Democratic spheres are divided near evenly on the three broad options:

**Which of these broad approaches to the issue of birth tourism would you prefer to see Canada take?
(By Political Sphere)**



Political Sphere Methodology

Rather than rely on respondents’ potentially faded memories regarding their vote in the 2015 federal election, ARI researchers constructed a measure of political partisanship based on willingness to vote for the main federal parties in a future election under their current leaders.

The question specifically asked respondents how likely they would be to vote for “The Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau,” “The Conservative Party led by Andrew Scheer,” and “The New Democratic Party led by Jagmeet Singh” in a future election. The response options were “definitely support” the party and leader in question, “certainly consider” them, “maybe consider” them, and “definitely not even consider” them.

Respondents choosing either of the first two options (definitely support or certainly consider) are considered to be a party’s “sphere.” They represent potential supporters of that party, not necessarily decided voters.

It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents were asked to give an opinion on each of the main parties and had the option to say they would “certainly consider” each one.

Thus, respondents may appear in the spheres of more than one party.

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