

FOREIGN POLICY BY CANADIANS.

Conclusions and Implications

JUNE 2021



Executive Summary

In March and April 2021, a large representative sample of the Canadian population gathered online to debate Canada's global engagement. This gathering marked the largest deliberative democracy exercise in our country's history.

Organized by the Canadian International Council (CIC), the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWaCH) and Global Canada, *Foreign Policy By Canadians* demonstrated that citizens have high levels of interest in foreign policy and are ready for meaningful engagement on some of the most significant issues facing Canada in the world.

Over the course of eight to twelve hours, 444 participants deliberated in 39 small groups on proposals related to global public health, security, prosperity and human dignity. A survey taken before the exercise showed Canadians to be instinctively international in their outlook and broadly in favour of global engagement to pursue objectives in collaboration with other nations. A survey of the same questions taken afterward showed that when participants were exposed to competing viewpoints, their support changed in some areas while holding firm in others. The patterns of where support rose or fell offer insight into the attitudes the whole population of Canada has toward international issues.

An analysis of the transcripts of the 39 small groups showed a strong sense of national identity, but not in the sense of flag-waving or profile-seeking for our country on the world stage. Rather, participants demonstrated real concern for fellow citizens and a preference for policies that bring benefit to them as well as to people beyond our shores.

Participants showed both principle and pragmatism in their preferences for Canada's global engagement. The principles that seemed most consistent were a commitment to human rights, and an insistence on consistency between our advocacy abroad and our own performance at home and by our Canadian companies abroad. The participants' pragmatism showed through in their support in the pursuit of economic opportunity, their focus on the influence Canada can realistically exercise, and their determined focus on impact when considering the investment of public funds.

Canadians appear ready for more serious engagement on foreign policy. While they are not asked to vote based on foreign policy issues, they certainly appear interested in them. They bring strong convictions to the subject but are open to contrary views. In the deliberations of *Foreign Policy By Canadians*, there were few signs of polarization, with strong majorities of participants agreeing on many issues across geographic, partisan and linguistic divisions.

Perhaps most encouragingly, citizens responded very favourably to being engaged. Faith in the system of democracy in Canada rose through the process. Before deliberation fewer than 70% thought democracy was working well. This rose to an impressive 80% after deliberation. Trust in citizens with opposing views increased, as did tolerance of disagreement and openness to compromise.

Rapid and dramatic changes in international relations will force Canada to continue adapting our foreign policy. If Canada is to count on deep public support for new directions in foreign policy, deliberative democracy offers a promising approach. Repeated engagement with citizens could help this country to better adapt its policies to the emerging international environment - and strengthen Canadian democracy in the process.

Objective

In October 2019, Canadian leaders with a wide range of interests in global affairs met in Toronto following the federal election of that year. Most shared their concern that while our country's influence in world affairs is not what it once was, the election campaign included minimal discussion of foreign policy. Do voters genuinely not care about international issues? Or is the current framing of foreign policy failing to capture their concerns and perspectives?

The CIC, Global Canada, and CanWaCH resolved to inject the perspectives of everyday citizens into the national debate on foreign policy. Our objective is to reframe Canada's global engagement in terms that citizens can understand and support. Equipped with the informed perspectives of Canadians, policymakers and political actors can mobilize the aspiration and resources required for Canada to secure the outcomes in international affairs that our citizens need to thrive.

Relating Foreign Policy to Everyday Citizens

How should we insert the views of 38 million Canadians into a coherent discussion of foreign policy? By convening a replica of the entire population and engaging them on the key issues facing Canada. The larger the sample, the more representative this microcosm of Canadians will be of the whole nation.

We set out to organize the single largest sample population of Canadians ever assembled for a deliberative democracy exercise. Until recently, this has been prohibitively expensive for Canada, given the travel and housing costs it would entail. However, we were fortunate enough to find an implementing partner with the technology and the experience to conduct an effective deliberation online at a fraction of the cost. Stanford University's Center for Deliberative Democracy had experimented with online deliberation for eighteen years, long before the pandemic drove so much human conversation to video screens.



We secured the participation of 444 Canadians, from all walks of life. A breakdown can be found in Figure A. The Canadians that participated in *Foreign Policy By Canadians* were a broadly accurate reflection of our experiences and diversity. All 10 provinces were represented in proportion to their populations. The exercise was offered in both official languages. The distribution of incomes was identical to those of the broader population, as was the education level of our participants. Exactly 23% had no higher than a high school education; 46% had a university degree. Ethnic diversity was broadly proportional to the population, with 74% white, 11% Asian, 6% Black and 3% First Nations, Inuit or Métis. Preference for speaking in French was 14% among participants (19% in the control group), which is lower than the 23% of the population for whom French is the first official language.

The participants gathered via videoconference in real-time, divided into 39 small groups who remained together throughout the entire 8 to 12 hours of deliberation. Moderators did not facilitate these groups. Instead, the groups managed their conversations guided only by an automated prompt from the Stanford University software, which helped keep time and spot any disrespectful communication (of which there was very little).

Findings

The Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University conducted the deliberation exercise, and has reported on what participants think about Canada's global engagement. To access the Stanford report, please visit: <https://thecic.org/research/1375019-2/>. The present document analyzes why Canadians came to the conclusions they did, and what implications their views carry for foreign policy.

Citizens demonstrated a keen appreciation of the importance of international affairs. The discussion guides and explanatory videos they watched appear to have prepared them adequately for their deliberation.

Renewed faith in democracy In these polarizing times, Canadians demonstrated an ability to discuss their differences in a constructive fashion		
QUESTION	PRE-DELIBERATION	POST-DELIBERATION
Those who I strongly disagree with are not thinking clearly	48% agree	38% agree
I respect the views of those who disagree strongly with me	70% agree	71% agree
I believe the system of democracy in Canada works....	70% say "well"	80% say "well"

Canadians are conscious of the distinction between outcomes that benefit our country and those that don't. But they do not often invoke a particular desire to see Canada do better than others or a claim that Canada is somehow exceptional. When they looked to the international arena they saw a series of

problems to be solved and challenges to be overcome. They tend to approach each issue on its merits, weighing competing objectives and demonstrating flexibility in how Canada should respond.

It was striking how many issues the majority of Canadians agreed on. Participants supported proposals on improved responses to online threats (93%), corporate responsibility abroad (88%); Arctic sovereignty (85%), human rights considerations in trade deals (80%), advancing the same rights abroad that we are practicing at home (85%).

How Should Canada Engage in the World to Advance the Health of Our Citizens?

As 444 Canadians gathered online to deliberate in March and April, the COVID-19 pandemic was in its third wave with quickly rising case numbers across the country. It was a time when the world was grappling with the impact of the disease and the spectre of vaccine nationalism as countries competed for the supply of doses. During the discussions, many provinces were reinstating lengthy lockdowns. Borders were closed, and the vaccination drive was just beginning to roll out.

While global public health is not an issue traditionally at the top of the international agenda, COVID-19 is undeniably an international issue. The pathogen originated overseas, and the vaccines to combat it come from overseas.



The deliberations reflected demand for decisive policy action at the international level as well as within Canada. A strong majority of citizens expressed their desire to restrict international travel from high-risk countries to reduce infections here at home. Citizens also wrestled with the idea that Canada should share vaccines with the rest of the world while it was vaccinating its people. This question had the lowest support in the health theme, with pre-deliberation support at 53%, going up to 56% post deliberation. Canadians pondered on the dilemma of moral responsibility vs. safeguarding their own people. The support after deliberation went down.

post-deliberation. At the same time, the participants supported the idea (over 60%) that helping poorer countries with a COVID-19 recovery will help Canada and the rest of the world from both a health and an economic perspective.

What should the international community do to prevent future outbreaks? There was a consensus among participants regarding the need for more proactive measures to be taken next time. A majority (70%) of participants supported a proposal to authorize the World Health Organization (WHO) to inspect countries when an outbreak is suspected. However, they were unsure how this can be implemented if those countries object.

While many did not approve of how the WHO handled the COVID-19 pandemic, they supported the proposal to increase financial contributions to the body by Canada and all member-states. Suspicious of large bureaucracies, their support came with a demand for stewardship and accountability to ensure a good return on investment. (Support for the proposal was 64% post-deliberation from 67% pre-deliberation).

Should Canada improve its coordination of global public health issues? Here citizens showed more hesitation. Support for a national Global Health Strategy and a new ambassador to advocate the goals of this strategy internationally fell flat (52% support post-deliberation, down from 66% pre-deliberation). Many participants expected federal and provincial governments to coordinate effectively and did not see the need to create new machinery.

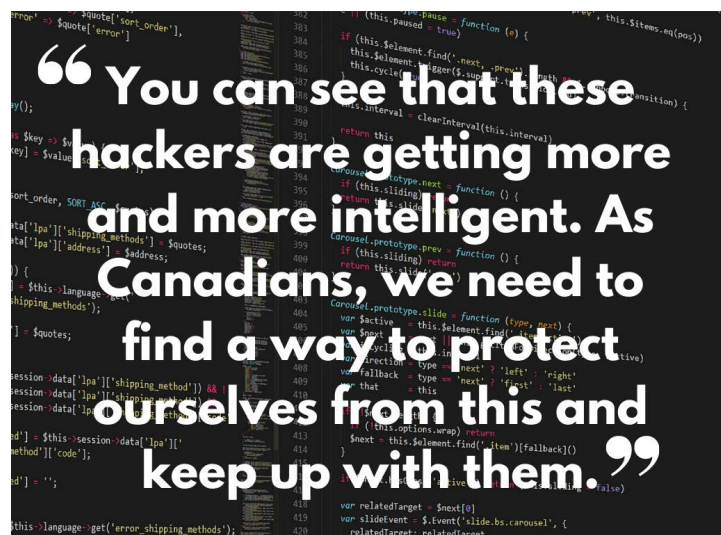
Should Canada expand on its record of leadership in global efforts in women and children's health, to global public health as well? Many were unaware of this legacy and worried that we are not doing enough to uphold women and children's health within Canada, particularly among Indigenous communities. Yet they did recognize that the health of women and girls is a priority and could bring significant benefits at a global scale. A significant majority steadfastly supported Canada maintaining its leadership role in this area.

Proposals to enhance the health of Canadians [<https://thecic.org/research/foreign-policy-by-canadians-appendices/>]. See Q1A.]

How Should Canada Engage in the World to Advance the Security of Our Citizens?

COVID-19 is but one of many threats to Canadians that have emerged from beyond our borders. The next section of *Foreign Policy By Canadians* examined various threats of most significant concern to its citizens, and where Canada might focus its efforts to protect Canadians.

Participants felt that cybersecurity was a crucial security issue that Canada needs to prioritize. They treated cyber threats as a serious matter and grave risk for economic prosperity. Many were concerned by recent



reports that hackers had accessed the private data of Canadians stored by the Canada Revenue Agency.

They also recognized that digital communications create vulnerabilities for our democratic system. Citizens supported stronger domestic laws to protect the integrity of our elections, to safeguard our ability to choose our own governments. And yet, they were suspicious of too much intervention, fearing that surveillance and state censorship are potential pitfalls of stringent cyber laws.

Participants demonstrated overwhelming support for a more prominent presence in Canada's Arctic. They know that the North has valuable resources, and that a changing climate has led to an increased presence from countries such as China and Russia. Participants were keen to know how Canada can assert its rights and find other strategies to defend its land. Some suggestions towards improving the military presence included increasing satellite surveillance. Participants also noted that Canada's military needs more funding. Most were open to Canada and the U.S. working closely to maintain control of the Arctic.



“
**I don't know if we necessarily
need the military at this point
unless we thought it was
going to come to some sort of
arms, but I think it's important
that Canada establishes a
footprint in the Arctic.**
”

Citizens support both a military presence and enhanced human security for the Indigenous population in the region. They support continued cooperation with the eight countries sharing the Arctic and the expansion of livelihood options for the people of the North.

As geopolitical rivalries flare up across the world, citizens were asked if an alliance of liberal democracies to defend the international rules-based order would be a solution.

Russia and China may represent a growing security threat, but the participants showed only lukewarm support for a new alliance, noting that it could signal a return of the Cold War era. "Democratic solidarity yes, but new Cold War no," is how one of our volunteers who analyzed the transcripts summed up the sentiment in the discussion rooms.

Proposals to enhance the security of Canadians [<https://thecic.org/research/foreign-policy-by-canadians-appendices/>]. See Q2A.]

How Should Canada Engage in the World to Advance the Prosperity Citizens?

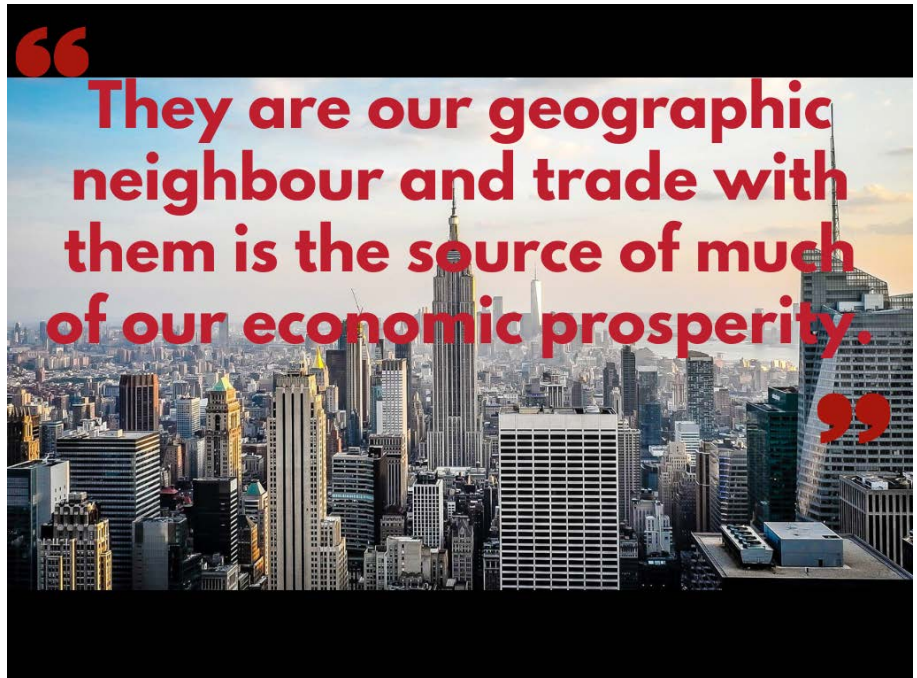
If the pandemic and security threats gave a glimpse of Canadians' concerns, the discussions on measures to advance prosperity revealed the aspirations many have for our future. We asked the participants how Canada should adapt our trade relationships to a changing geopolitical order, respond to a shifting global economy, and share the benefits of growth.

As the rivalry between the U.S. and China threatens a decoupling of the world economy, participants pondered its impact on Canada. Most of them initially supported deepening access to the U.S. market through expanded economic integration, arguing that the U.S. is a natural ally.

Yet there were also suggestions that Canada diversify trade relationships that could help the country offset the dominance of the U.S. in our economic relationship.

Deliberation surfaced greater openness to diversifying trade interests into Asia even as wariness about China remains high.

The deliberations revealed a strong preference to focus on the future industries by creating a business environment more conducive to digital innovation and by transitioning to clean energy as soon as practical.



There was an overwhelming endorsement for the proposal that Canada needs a vibrant, innovative digital sector and that rather than limiting these companies, we should embrace digital innovation as a primary source of economic growth. Participants viewed the digital sector as the future of the Canadian economy. They worry that the country is falling behind other countries. The need to build a digital economy also came with the condition that checks and balances must be in place to prevent monopoly formation in the sector.

Canada has traditionally benefited from natural resources, including oil and gas. As the world prepares for a transition to a clean energy future, Canada faces an awkward situation. How should Canada manage this change? Canadians supported partnering with the oil and gas industry so the profits from energy sales could help finance the transition. The discussions shed light on the pragmatic approach that Canadians take across issues. Participants were divided on whether they trust the industry. Still, most felt that its innovative nature and the insights for our energy future represented tangible benefits that would benefit the government.

Canadians were equally clear-eyed when it came to the social impact of economic growth. The pro-trade views outlined here did not prevent participants from expressing concern for growing inequality in Canadian society and worldwide. The principal proposal that was put forward - to ramp up training and employment support programs to spread gains from trade - was not seen as sufficient to meet the challenge but enjoyed very high support as the most promising idea on the table.

Proposals to enhance the prosperity of Canadians [<https://thecic.org/research/foreign-policy-by-canadians-appendices/>]. See Q3A.]

How Should Canada Engage in the World to Advance the Dignity of Our Citizens?

Canadian society never stands still. As social movements emerge to address long-standing inequalities or injustices, they embrace identities that span frontiers and tackle issues present at home and abroad. Since the quest for human dignity never ends at the border, the pursuit of human rights has featured prominently in Canadian foreign policy for decades.

This deliberative democracy exercise confirmed Canadians' interest in striving for inclusive societies across the board, creating space for all marginalized groups. A majority agreed that Canada should implement a Feminist Foreign Policy to put human dignity at the centre in all of Canada's global engagement, and ensure we are 'walking our own talk' before exporting the idea to other countries.



“ It's not about accommodating women anymore. It's about accessing top talent through meeting their needs because the world needs them. ”

Participants support efforts to promote greater gender diversity in leadership roles, noting how well women leaders performed during the pandemic. There was an openness to accommodating the needs of other vulnerable groups as well. In discussions, numerous participants underlined the importance of policies that accommodate sexual and gender minority groups, those with physical and mental disabilities, Indigenous communities, and visible minorities.

A few participants expressed the opinion that the term “feminist” as a policy label doesn't reflect the goals of gender equality and inclusion. Once a Feminist Foreign Policy was further explored in deliberation, it gained in support. Most seemed to agree that it is possible to pursue equity for all marginalized groups with a focus on women.

The aspiration for Canada to advance diversity and equality in communities abroad came with conditions. Most felt strongly that Canada should only work with communities abroad when invited to do so. Several others thought it was important that Canada put its own house in order before pursuing social change abroad. Few thought it was legitimate or even feasible to pursue social justice abroad separately from efforts at home. When Canada does support communities abroad, participants insisted that we remain mindful of the differences between our cultures and our approaches.

That said, citizens did feel strongly about obliging Canadian companies operating abroad to abide by Canadian rights and environmental standards. They felt that voluntary standards were not enough, and should be made mandatory for all firms headquartered in our country, no matter where they operate. They demonstrated some flexibility in maintaining trade agreements with countries that fail to meet international standards, though they insist that human rights are considered in the initial choice of partners.

“ We need to lead by example and let others see what we really are instead of preaching to other countries. ”

Proposals to enhance the dignity of Canadians [<https://thecic.org/research/foreign-policy-by-canadians-appendices/>. See Q4A.]

The Tools of Global Engagement

Foreign Policy By Canadians sought not only to identify which policies Canadians might support in foreign policy, but how deep their support might run. The divergence in their answers offers clues to how Canadians think about international affairs.

Support for development spending was high, and remained high after deliberation. When goals were stated in terms of a tangible outcome, such as increasing official development assistance to advance global health, support was high and remained high after deliberation (70%).

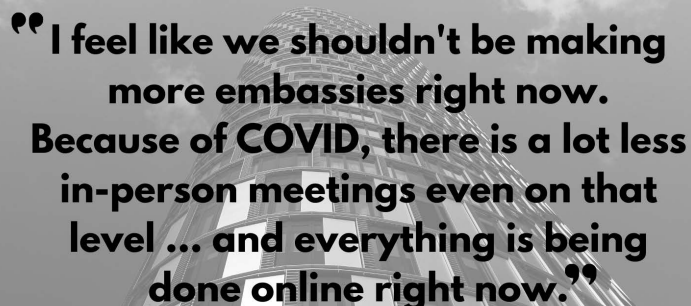
“ We've contributed to the WHO... since its inception. We have a major role to play in what the WHO does for the rest of the world. We are a part of that global infrastructure. ”

In a world turned more threatening to Canada's interests, participants showed high support for a spending on security. Most Canadians support ample funding for the nation to meet today's security challenges, to support everything from a military presence in the Arctic to greater capacity to adapt to climate crises. Several expressed concerns on our overreliance on the United States when it comes to our security.

Citizens were markedly more uncertain about the value of diplomacy. The most tangible expression of a country's diplomatic capabilities relates to the embassies where the principal work is done. After a discussion about the need to understand other countries' priorities and build person-to-person relations to

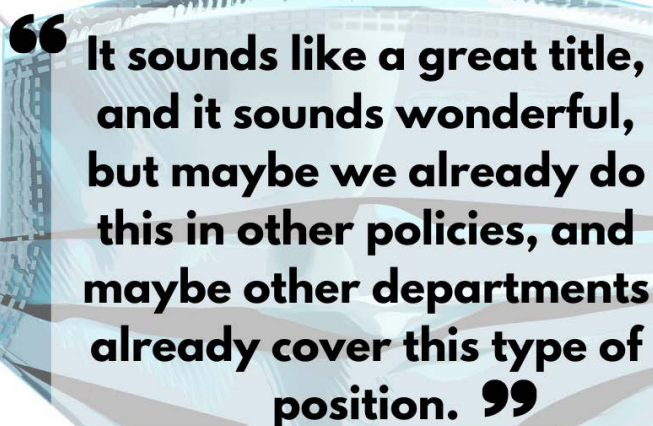
advance Canada's interests, participants were asked if they supported investment in Canada's network of embassies abroad to accomplish this. In deliberating the topic, participants wondered if Canada could pursue its objectives abroad at lower cost, to tighten the belt as the nation passes through a difficult economic time.

The challenges of a growing national debt did not escape participants. When asked to provide a relative ranking of priorities, Canadians are considerably more willing to devote resources to international objectives that involve shared benefits, in which the direct interests of Canadians are advanced alongside interests of those beyond our shores. Support for international investment correlates closely with expectations of tangible impact that Canadians believe our country can have.



“I feel like we shouldn't be making more embassies right now. Because of COVID, there is a lot less in-person meetings even on that level ... and everything is being done online right now.”

Another pattern to observe is that citizens prefer to focus on the ends and not the means of foreign policy. For example Canadians are willing to see the WHO gain greater power to investigate fresh outbreaks of infectious disease, and to increase assessed contributions to fund this. They are not interested in developing a national strategy and appointing a Canadian Ambassador for Global Health. What interests them is the outcome, not how we get there.



“It sounds like a great title, and it sounds wonderful, but maybe we already do this in other policies, and maybe other departments already cover this type of position.”

Assessment

The analysis of the discussions show that Canadians deeply care about international issues and how they impact their everyday lives. The pandemic has deepened the insecurities of the citizens about a future that increasingly seems uncertain. This is where Canadians are asking their leaders to invest in areas that

could address the immediate needs of the people (for example, by prompting economic recovery). At the same time, these discussions show that Canadians believe that the country has a certain moral responsibility in the current world order, but are loath to preach. Rather, they display a pragmatism in the pursuit of those principles. They believe that the country should make a difference and want to see tangible results, and not posturing.

Certain consistent principles emerge from the preferences Canadians voiced in this exercise. This openness to global goals is accompanied by a strong preference for equity, or equal application of protections across borders and across traditionally marginalized groups. Canadians seem determined to uphold the rights of individuals, and eager that the federal government pursue them in parallel, at home as well as abroad. Participants were no less committed to preserving economic opportunity and distributing its benefits.

And yet Canadians showed themselves to be highly practical in the exercise as well. They showed greater support for proposals that outlined the ends to be achieved to those that highlighted the institutions to achieve them. They were quite open to considering various means to achieve ends.

Foreign Policy By Canadians revealed that our fellow citizens are willing to support global goals, even more so when they see how the goals advance objectives at home and abroad. As in any other domain of public policy, Canadians want to see results. They aren't interested in investing in aspirations, but they will invest in outcomes.

Deliberative Democracy as a Regular Input to Policy-making

Rapid shifts in global affairs and the impact on Canadians make it imperative that we consult our fellow citizens more systematically. Gone are the days in which individuals had their say once every four or five years in their vote for a government that would take care of the details until the next election. Citizens have too much at stake and have too much information to casually entrust their interests to the government for extended periods.

Conversely, governments benefit from a well-informed citizenry engaged in the great policy debates of the day. When the time comes to increase spending or to take risks to expand Canada's impact through bold leadership, the government would need to count on public support.

Regular input by citizens throughout the policy-making process takes time, resources, and effort. But Canada's democracy is changing. Systems of representative democracy with roots in earlier centuries require extra efforts to inform and engage the people. Further adding complexity is an increasingly busy digital space where Canadians access their information. As *Foreign Policy By Canadians* has demonstrated in international affairs, deliberative democracy can fill that gap.

Governments and societies will benefit from regularly scheduled exercises of deliberative democracy, proposing topics for discussion, briefing participants, and acknowledging the results that emerge. As we have seen in this exercise, the resulting growth of confidence in Canadian democracy will expand public support.

That public support, in turn, will be an additional source of Canadian power at a time when we need all the influence we can get. A government confident in the public's support can do more to advance our nation's interests and contribute to an international order better reflective of our values.

CIC Chapters Involved in Preparing the Agenda of Foreign Policy By Canadians:

CIC Halifax
CIC Quebec City
CIC Ottawa (National Capital branch)
CIC Toronto
CIC Winnipeg
CIC Edmonton
CIC Prince George
CIC Vancouver
CIC Victoria

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