

**GITGA'AT
FIRST NATION**

**Constitution
Survey Report**

March 2024





Gitga'at First Nation



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	4
Government Responsibilities	5
Dispute Resolution	6
Elected System	7
Hereditary System	9
Gitga'at Membership/Citizenship Recognition	11
Conclusion	12



Summary

As part of negotiating Reconciliation Agreements with the Federal and Provincial Governments, the Gitga'at First Nation will be pursuing Independent Government. A fundamental aspect of reclaiming our right to govern ourselves will be a constitution that outlines the fundamental laws and rules of our government structure, process, roles and authority.

Developing this constitution will be a careful process that has Gitk'a'ata people at the heart of it. This report summarizes the first step of this process: a survey of Gitga'at members to inform the development of the Gitga'at Constitution and the Independent Government process.

113 people participated in the survey in the fall of 2023 and winter of 2024, which is an excellent turnout considering Gitga'at has approximately 675 members.

The following document gives a top-level summary of the survey responses, including both multiple choice and open-ended responses. These responses will inform further engagement with Gitga'at First Nation members on developing the constitution and independent government process, and drafting of the constitution itself.

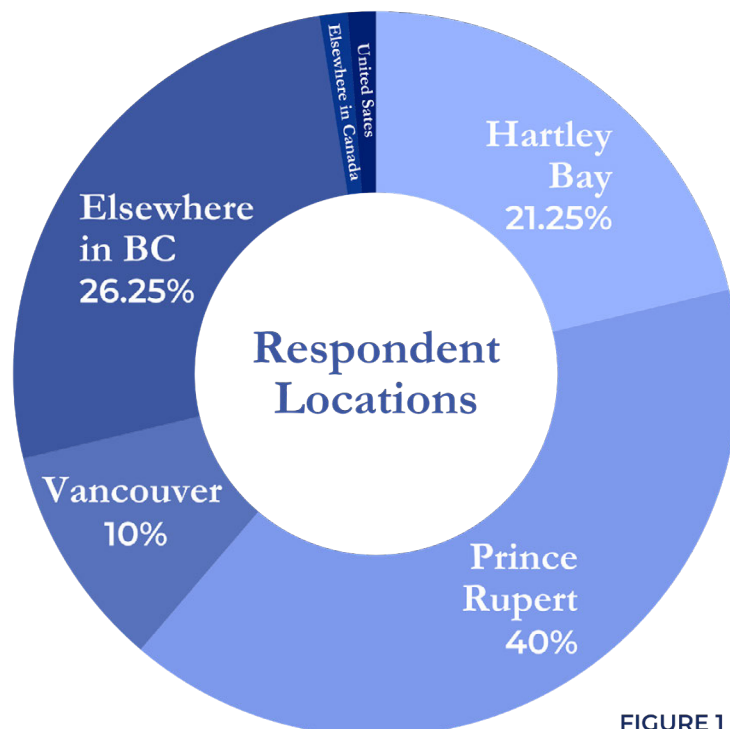


FIGURE 1

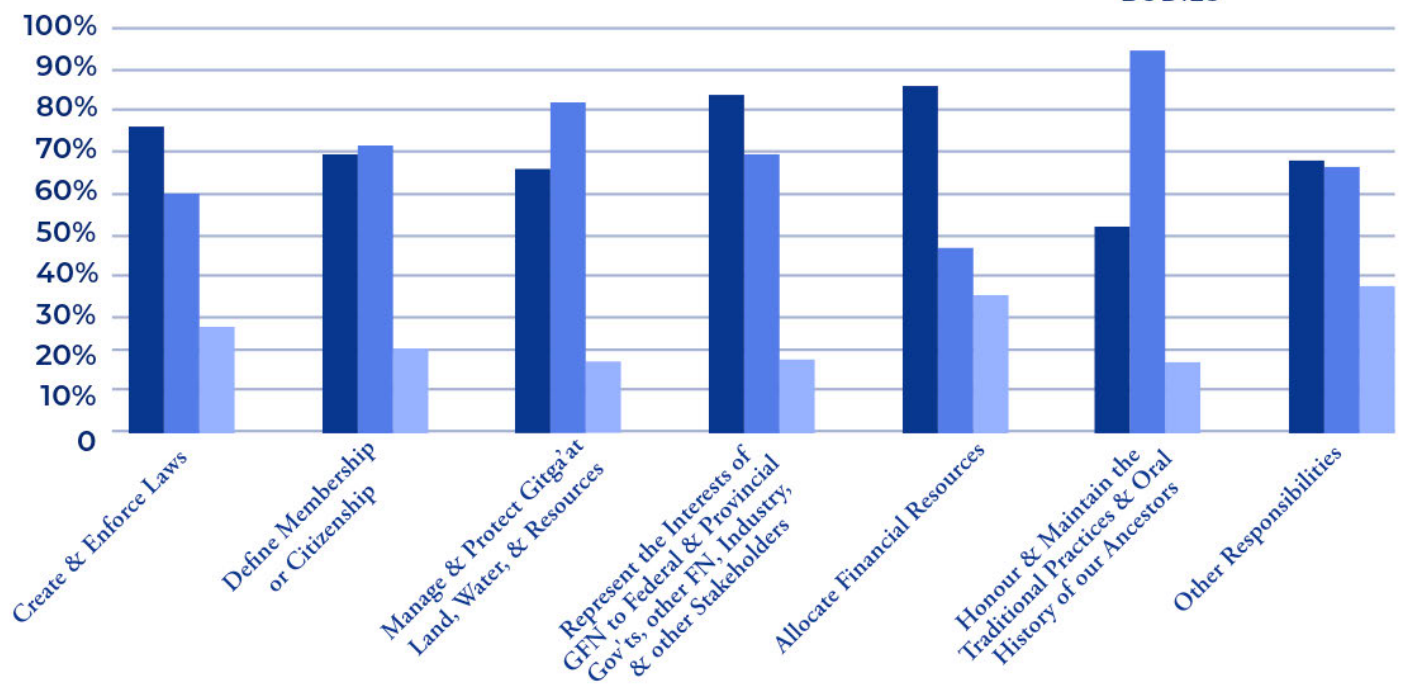


Government Responsibilities

FIGURE 2

Which governing bodies should be responsible for the following?

■ ELECTED LEADERS
■ HEREDITARY LEADERS
■ OTHER GOVERNING BODIES



Participants expressed various concerns and suggestions regarding government responsibilities and decision-making within the Gitga'at community. The major themes centred around community involvement, traditional governance, fairness, and transparency, which Gitga'at needs to consider when developing the Constitution.

Respondents discussed the importance of community involvement in policy changes and decision-making processes and the need for transparency and engagement with off-reserve members.

There was also a focus on the traditional governing bodies within each Clan and the role of leadership in upholding traditional laws and teachings of unity, honour, respect, and charity. Additionally, concerns were raised about the fairness and inclusivity of funding and programs for off-reserve members and the need for a restorative justice system.

Membership involvement in studying and informing the creation of traditional laws and enforcement processes was brought up as an important element of the constitution development process. Survey responses also touch on the differing roles of elected and hereditary leaders in managing reserves and lands, with many respondents wanting hereditary leadership to be involved in decision-making over the traditional territory and waters of Gitga'at First Nation.

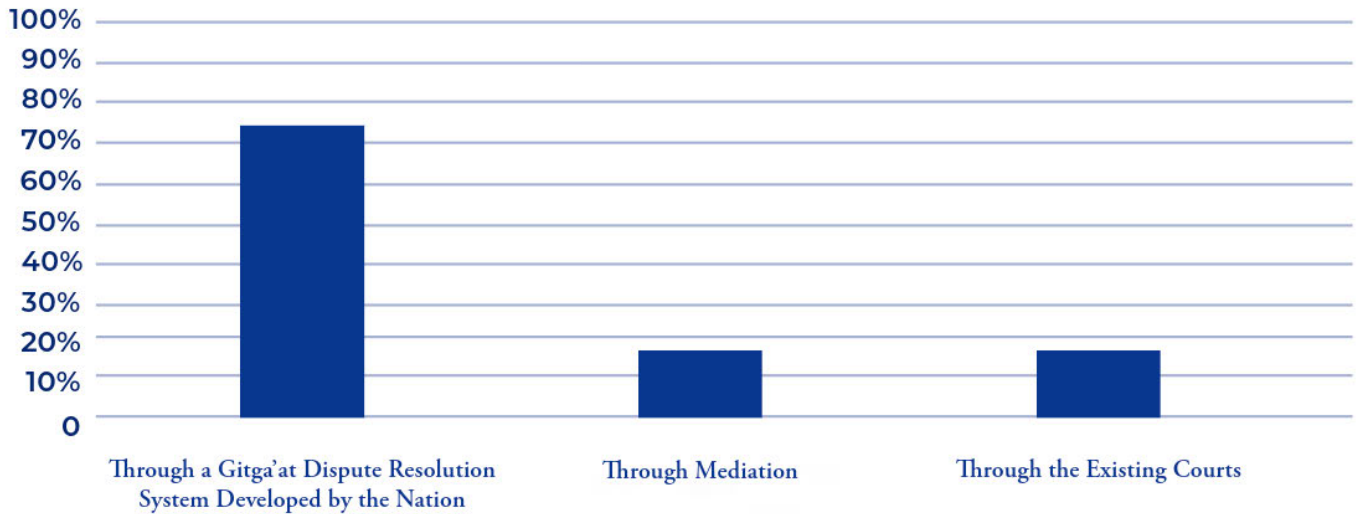
Dispute Resolution



FIGURE 3

■ RESPONSES

How should conflicts relating to Gitga'at laws be resolved?



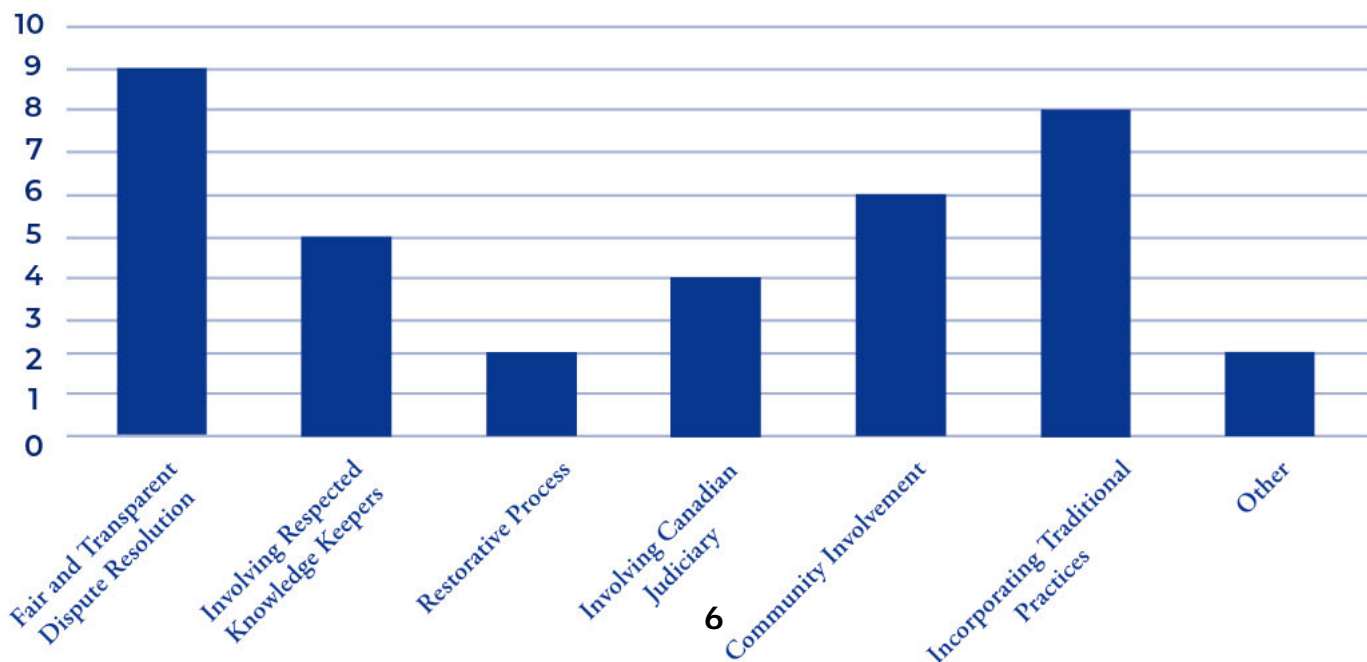
The need for a fair and transparent dispute resolution process within the community was the top theme brought up in open-ended questions about dispute resolution. Respondents often mentioned that it should involve respected knowledge keepers and elders in the decision-making process. There is also a desire for a restorative process that promotes peace and harmony and the need for accountability and community decision-making—tying the incorporation of traditional practices and customs into the dispute resolution system to embody these values, such as involvement of clan leadership.

There was also a recognized need for communication, transparency, and education within the community. To effectively uphold objectivity and fairness in handling disputes, laws need to be developed through public participation, and some respondents believed the enforcement of laws should be undertaken by the community itself.

FIGURE 4

■ RESPONSES

Dispute Resolution Open Ended Themes



Elected System



Should the Nation keep the current Chief & Council structure, with 4 councillors and 1 Chief, elected through a democratic process?

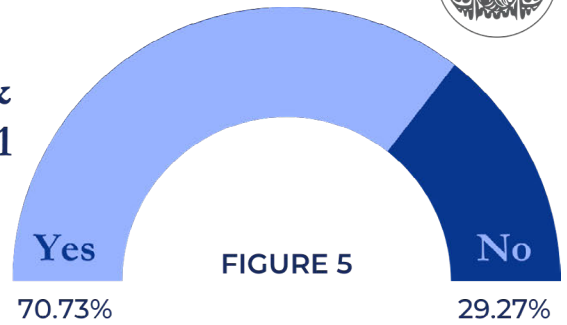
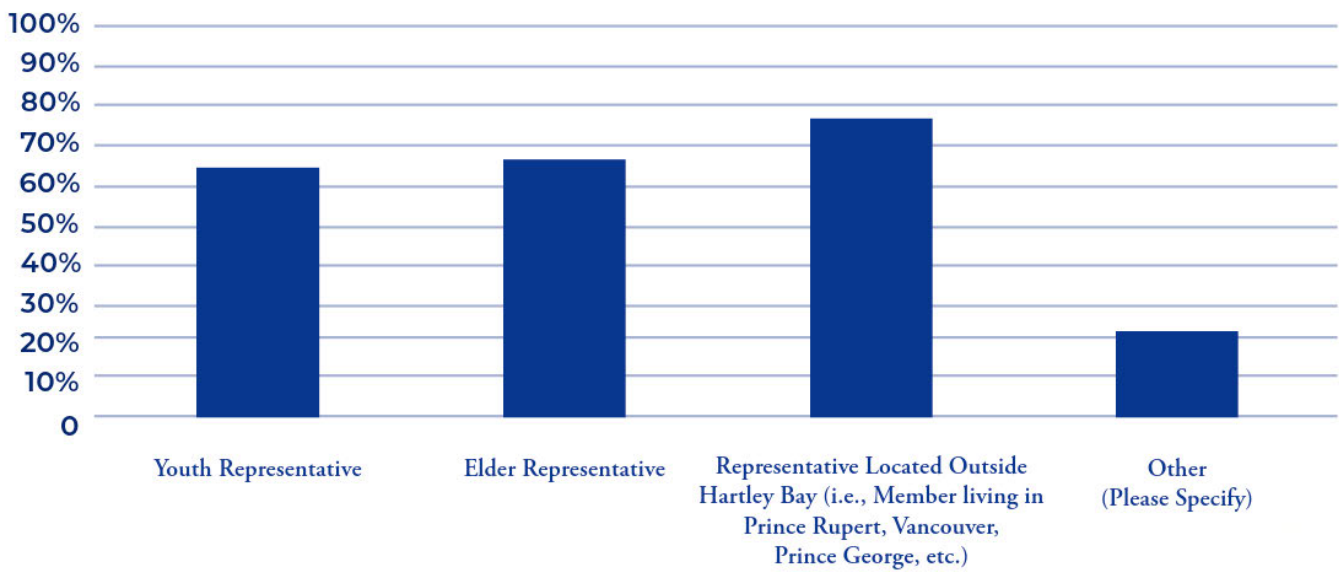


FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6

Should the Nation add any of the following roles to Gitga'at Chief and Council?



RESPONSES

FIGURE 7

What criteria should be included for individuals to be eligible to run for office in the Gitga'at government?

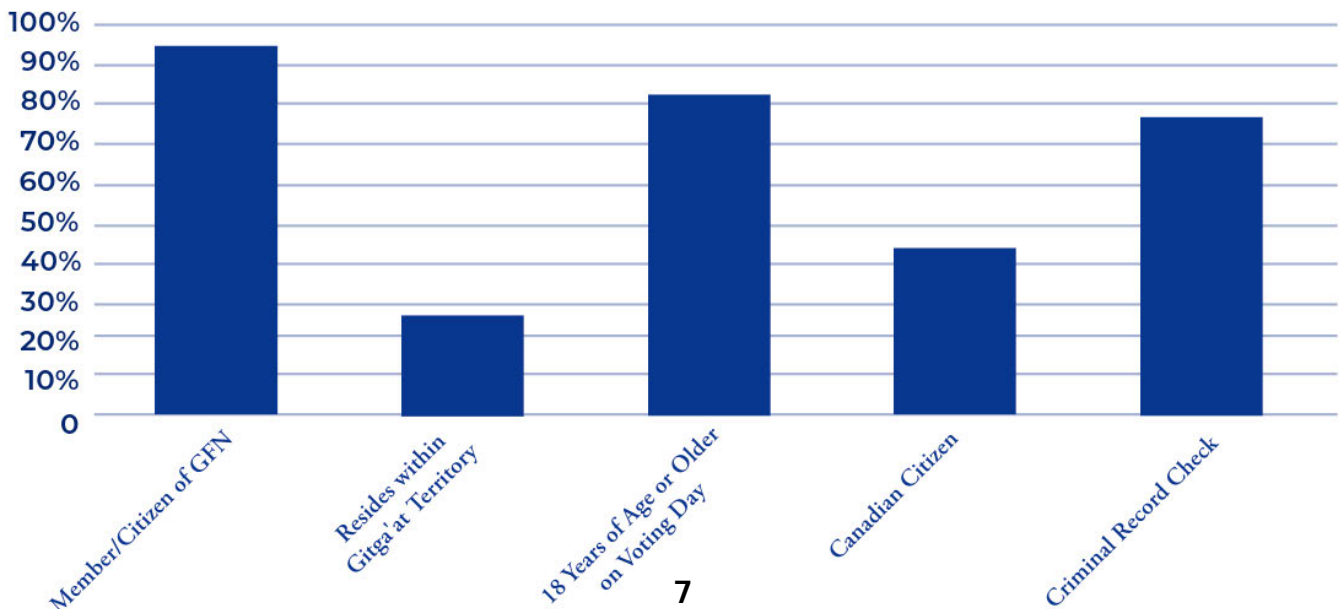
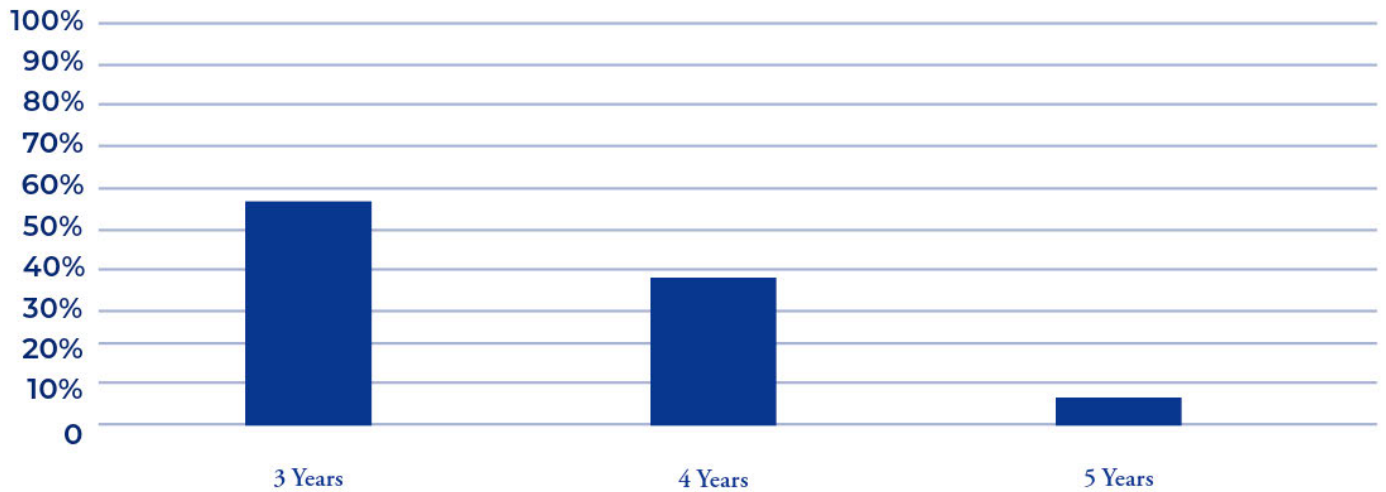




FIGURE 8

How long should an elected representative hold a term of office?

RESPONSES



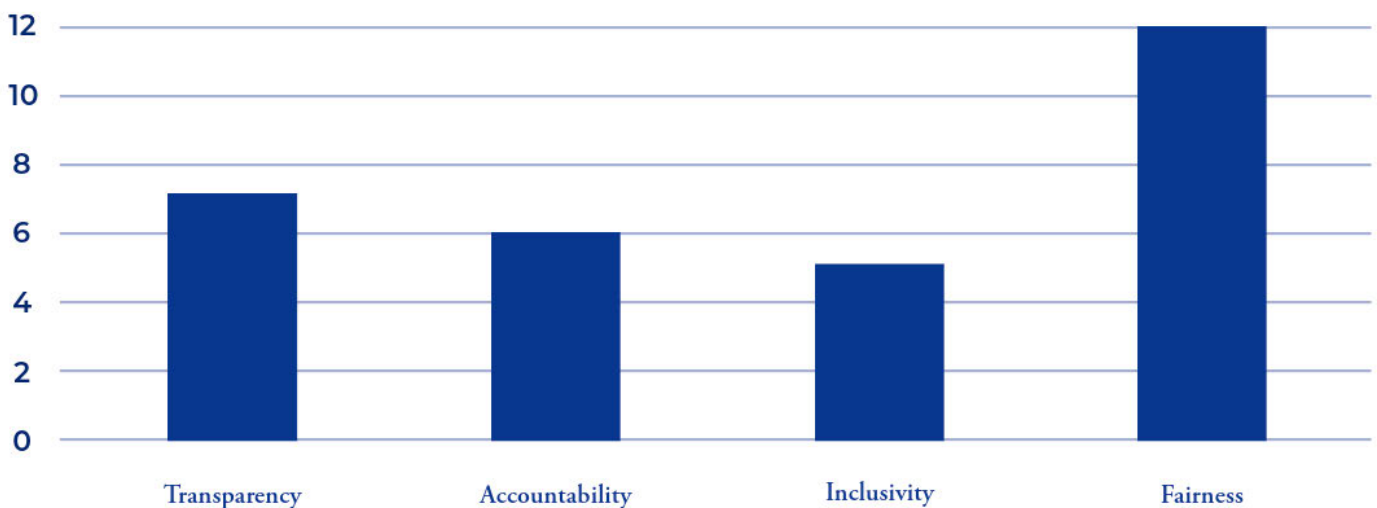
Respondents' most common themes revolve around the need for greater transparency, accountability, and inclusivity within the Gitga'at community and its leadership. There was a strong emphasis on the desire for more open communication and involvement of all community members, including those residing off reserve. The need for staggered council terms, regular public meetings, and an annual general meeting were highlighted as a way to ensure stability, accountability, and representation for all members.

Additionally, there are calls for a new chief, electoral office, and voting system to restore trust and fairness in the leadership structure. The importance of addressing issues such as employment conflicts of interest, and the traditional hereditary system is also emphasized. The themes of transparency, inclusivity, accountability, and fairness are central to the concerns and suggestions expressed in the constitution survey responses.

FIGURE 9

Elected System Open-Ended Themes

RESPONSES



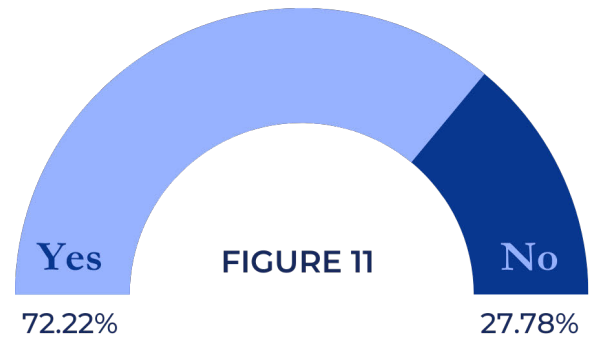


Should a Gitga'at Constitution:

...have established rules in the
hereditary system?



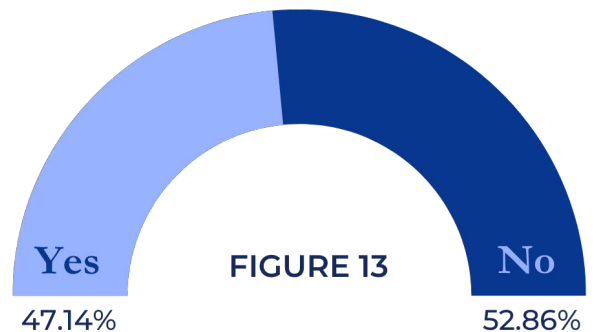
...specify the amount or
frequency of clan meetings?



...have a mechanism to remove
chiefs from their positions?



...define the amount of
feasts required to attain
a hereditary title?



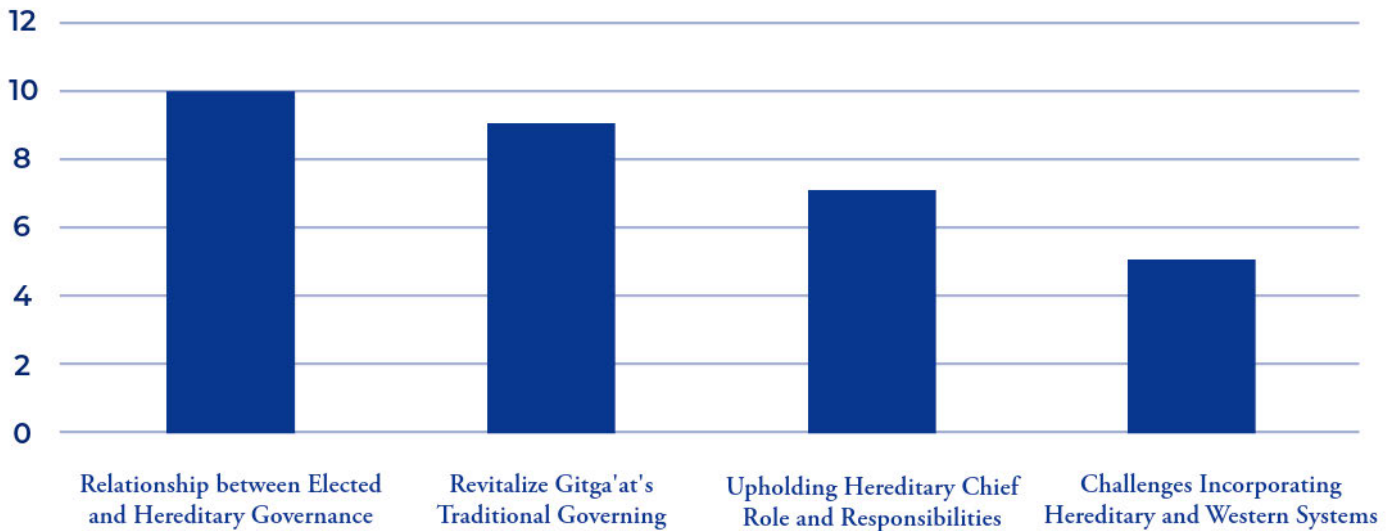


There was a strong emphasis on the need to reclaim and rebuild the traditional system and the importance of respecting and upholding the hereditary chiefs' roles and responsibilities among responses. Participants also highlighted the potential conflicts and challenges that arise when attempting to integrate the traditional hereditary system with Western requirements and expectations. Furthermore, responses indicated the need for clear protocols, communication, and collaboration between the elected and hereditary leaders, along with the importance of preserving and passing down traditional knowledge and practices to future generations. The survey participants also addressed the issue of accountability and the role of the hereditary chiefs in advising and informing the elected council. Overall, the themes center around the complexities and dynamics of tribal governance and the ongoing efforts to reconcile and revitalize the traditional governing system.

FIGURE 14

Hereditary System Open-Ended Themes

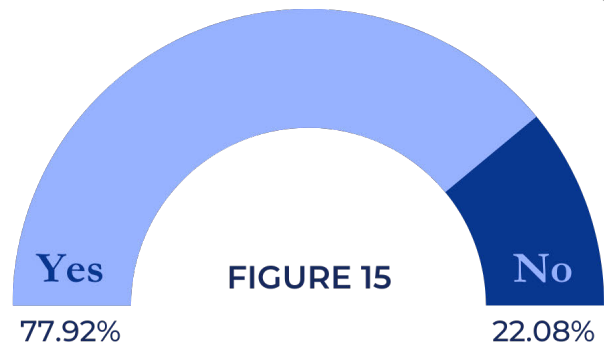
■ RESPONSES



Gitga'at Membership/Citizenship Recognition



Should the Constitution include rules that define who is a Gitga'at member?



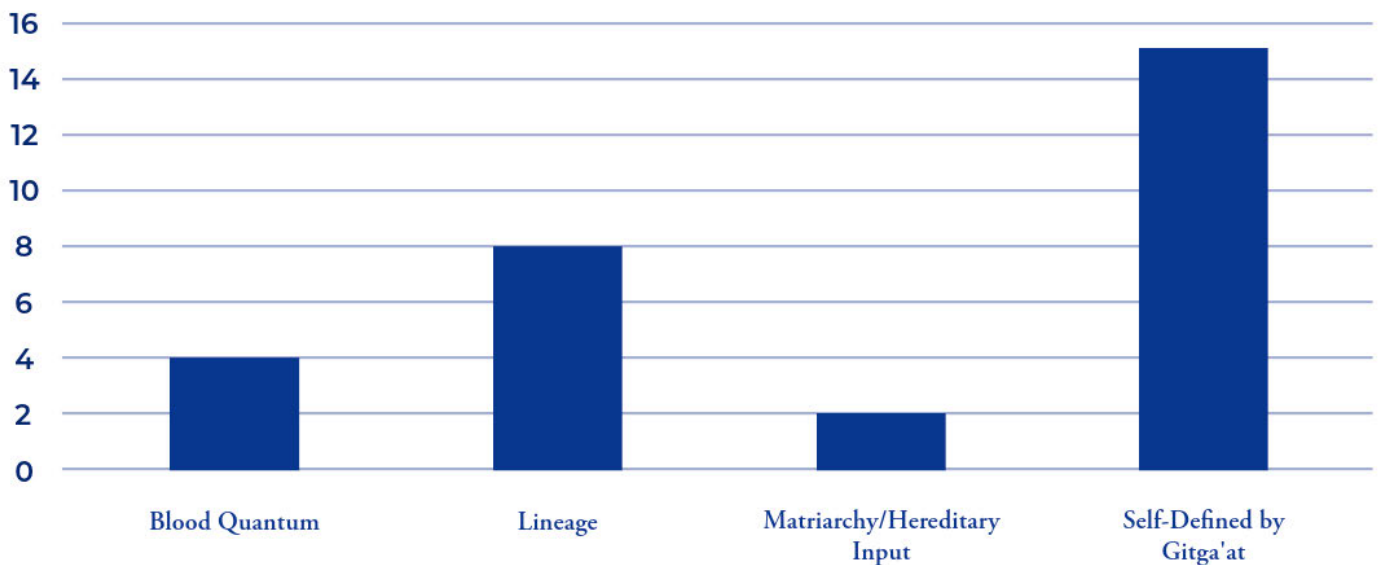
Open-ended responses expressed a wide spectrum of opinions regarding membership/citizenship recognition for Gitga'at. These included the importance of blood quantum and lineage in determining membership within the Gitga'at nation. Other factors included the significance of matriarchy in the community, community recognition and participation in cultural activities.

There was also a desire for self-determination in defining membership rather than replicating the exclusionary format of the Indian Act. There was a focus on reclaiming artifacts and land recognition, as well as concerns about treaty nations and citizenship rules. Gitga'at members also addressed the issue of “pretendians” and the need for clear guidelines on who can be recognized as Gitga'at. Overall, the survey responses emphasize the importance of community involvement, self-identification, and the preservation of Gitga'at culture and heritage.

FIGURE 16

Gitga'at Membership Open-Ended Themes

■ RESPONSES





Conclusion

The feedback from the Gitga'at Constitution Survey provides valuable insights into the considerations and concerns of the Gitga'at membership regarding the development of the Gitga'at's independent government and constitution. Seven overarching themes emerged from survey responses, reflecting community desires, concerns, and suggestions. From the narrative summaries of these seven themes, three key insights emerged from the survey respondents.

Firstly, cultural revitalization is an active part of life that shapes processes. Cultural integrity and preservation were consistently identified, emphasizing the teaching of members and adhering to matriarchal protocols. Education on the foundation of Gitga'at ways of knowing, such as the Ayaaxw and Adaawx, was recognized as significant in supporting members in fulfilling their roles effectively in developing governance. These types of roles may include participation in committees by the membership to shape governance processes and extend to leadership roles leading the community from a cultural base.

Secondly, membership emphasized the necessity for thorough inclusion in the law-making process and promoting communication and engagement with off-reserve members. Transparency and community involvement in decision-making processes were cited as essential aspects of governance. Similarly, concerning leadership, respondents suggested various election adjustments to reform and improve processes. A significant theme that reoccurred throughout the survey emphasized the importance of upholding Gitga'at principles and values, especially for leadership to uphold in the process. Various strategies are tied to this theme, including transparency, accountability, the role of feasts, cultural preservation, and integrity.

Thirdly, members lacked consensus and held various views on the roles and authority between hereditary and elected chiefs and council. Similarly, membership criteria were subject to a range of perspectives on the requirements of recognition and acceptance. However, the views all demonstrate a consideration for preserving culture and identity.

This overall feedback from the Gitga'at members will be integrated into the ongoing engagement around independent government, and the drafting of the constitution.