

Halifax Perceptions of Change Survey – Executive Summary

How residents of Atlantic Canada perceive change, and whether or not they are open to it, is a question of pressing social and policy importance. The region has been experiencing some of the most profound economic, social, cultural, physical, and environmental changes in recent Canadian history. However, a lack of data on the region has hampered the ability to systematically examine those changes and public perceptions of them.

For this reason, the Perceptions of Change project was launched at Dalhousie University, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In consultation with colleagues at Memorial University, University of New Brunswick, McMaster University, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, and Western University, a team of researchers at Dalhousie conducted a telephone survey of Halifax residents in the spring of 2017. The purpose of this survey was to assess what changes Haligonians have observed over the last five to 10 years, both in their own neighbourhoods and the city as a whole, and to better understand how they feel about those changes.

Overall, survey results show that Haligonians are quick to note changes to the built environment, recognizing widespread construction and infrastructure renewal over the last five to 10 years. They also observe improvement in the city's economy, as well as increased social and cultural diversity. At the same time, Haligonians are more divided in their perceptions of change in the natural environment, and less clear about changes occurring at the neighbourhood level. Even so, when they do see changes in these areas, they usually perceive them in a positive light.

Executive summary:

- Haligonians identified changes to the built environment as the biggest changes in the city.
- Fifty-four percent of participants believed the city's overall economic conditions had improved. Fewer reported economic improvements in their neighbourhoods, and the majority disagreed that their neighbourhoods had become more affordable.
- The majority of participants believed the city had become more diverse and has more senior citizens. These changes were also observed at the neighbourhood level.
- On average, Haligonians believed that 53% of their neighbours share similar values and beliefs, and, in general, they reported high levels of "fitting in" to their neighbourhoods.
- Ninety-nine percent of participants noted the construction of new buildings and homes in their city, and 73% within their neighbourhoods.
- The majority of participants believed that their neighbourhood facilities and amenities were sufficient, but they were divided on whether or not facilities and amenities had improved.
- The majority of participants reported no change in the condition of buildings and houses or in the prevalence of rental housing in their neighbourhoods.
- Perceptions of changes in the natural environment, both in the city and in participants' neighbourhoods, were mixed. The majority reported no change to air quality, but there was an even split in perceptions of change in water quality and in the number of green spaces.
- Perceptions of the ethnocultural make-up of Halifax neighbourhoods were similar to the figures reported in 2016 Census data for the city overall. Participants estimated higher numbers of residents with low incomes and unemployed residents in their neighbourhoods than census data reports for the city as a whole, and they estimated a lower prevalence of rental housing.

