

POLITICAL VIEWS AND PRACTICES IN ATLANTIC CANADA

SURVEY REPORT

PART II: POLITICAL PRACTICES



INTRODUCTION

Atlantic Canada has faced profound economic, social, and cultural changes in recent years. Increased immigration to the area, rapid urbanization, and economic restructuring have left the region, which has long been considered *averse* to change, in a position where it is experiencing a great deal of it. 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 partnership with the Rural Futures Research Centre at Dalhousie, a telephone survey on the political views and practices of Atlantic Canadians was conducted in early 2019. The purpose of this survey was to learn about how people living in Atlantic Canada participate in political life, their opinions on a number of current issues in Canadian politics, as well as their perceptions of political change in recent years. This report focuses on participants’ political practices.

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of participants reported no change to their political participation in the last few years, but 40% believed that other Canadians’ participation in political activities has increased.
- The vast majority of participants who were eligible voters claimed to have voted in the most recent federal and provincial elections—93% and 92%, respectively. Voting in municipal or local elections was less common, at 77%. These are higher than the figures available for voter turnout in the region’s recent elections. Older participants reported voting at much higher rates than younger participants.
- Only 7% of participants claimed to have protested within the last year, but many more were open to it: 44% said they were either “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to participate in a demonstration or march in the future. Protesting was more common among younger participants and those living in rural areas.
- Petition-signing and boycotting (or “buy”-cotting) are common ways that participants have

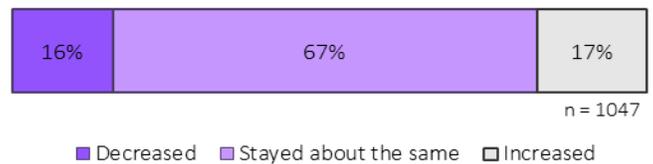
expressed their views and beliefs: 26% had signed a petition within the last year, while 38% had boycotted or chosen a product for ethical reasons.

- Nearly half of participants, 48%, said they discuss political and social issues more frequently than they did a few years ago; 62% believed that other Canadians are discussing these issues more.
- The majority of participants, 60%, said they “never” express their views on political or social issues online.

PARTICIPATION CHANGES

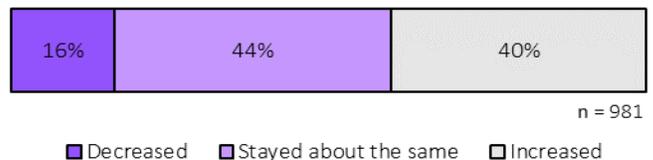
Two-thirds of Atlantic Canadians said their participation in political activities had not changed in the last few years, while 16% reported that their participation in political activities had decreased and 17% said it had increased. Younger participants, ages 18 to 35, were more likely to report increases in participation than older participants, while seniors most frequently reported decreases.

CHANGES TO ATLANTIC CANADIANS' PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE LAST FEW YEARS



When asked for their perceptions of change in the political activities of other Canadians, 40% believed that other Canadians’ participation had increased in the last five years, and 16% believed it had decreased, while 44% believed it had stayed about the same.

PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGES IN OTHER CANADIANS' PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS



VOTING

A large majority, 93%, of participants who were eligible voters reported voting in the 2015 federal election; this figure is higher than the overall turnout of 68.3%¹ across the country. Most participants also said they intended to vote in the next federal election, which will take place in October 2019: 86% said they were “very likely” to vote, and another 9% said they were “somewhat likely.”

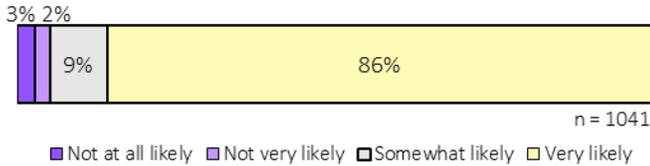
Nearly as many, 92%, also reported voting in the most recent provincial election held in their province. Participation in municipal or local elections was lower, at 77%.

Voting in most recent elections

	Voted	Did not vote
Federal	93%	7%
Provincial	92%	8%
Municipal	77%	23%

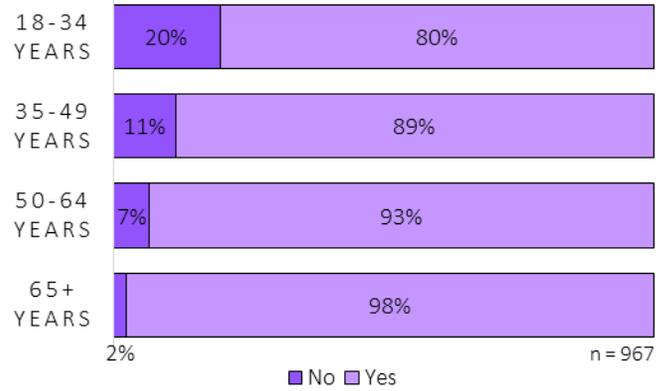
Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO VOTE IN THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTION?



Reported voting rates varied with age: 80% of participants who were eligible voters aged 18 to 34 said they had voted in the last federal election, compared to 89% of those 35 to 49, 93% of those 50 to 64, and 98% of those 65 and older. Participants with higher levels of education were more likely to have reported voting in the last federal election, as well as more women compared to men, and more people living in rural areas compared to those in urban areas.

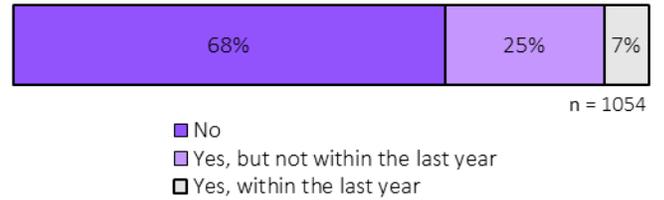
VOTING IN THE 2015 FEDERAL ELECTION, BY AGE GROUP



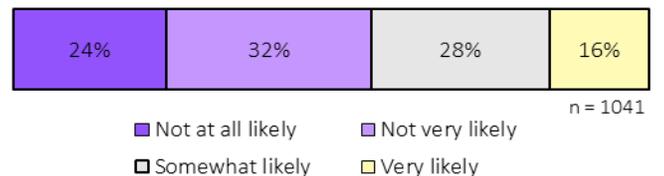
PROTESTING

While pundits have noted a resurgence in protest participation over the last decade, a small minority, 7%, of survey participants reported being involved in a demonstration or march within the last year. Another 25% reported being involved in demonstrations at some point in the past, but not within the last year. Many Atlantic Canadians said they would be open to protesting in the future: 44% of participants said they were “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to participate in a demonstration or march in the future.

HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN A DEMONSTRATION OR MARCH?



IN FUTURE, HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN A DEMONSTRATION OR MARCH?



¹ Elections Canada (2016). Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group and Gender at the 2015 General Election. Retrieved from https://www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/estim/42ge/42_e.pdf

Reported protest participation varied widely by age: among those aged 18 to 34, the rate of participation within the last year was 14%, compared to 10% among those aged 35 to 49, 7% among those aged 50 to 64, and just 4% among those aged 65 and older. Level of education was also linked to reported protest participation: 12% of participants with graduate degrees said they had been involved in a demonstration or march within the last year, compared to 9% of those with undergraduate degrees and only 4% of those with high school diplomas.

Participation in a demonstration or march, by demographics

	No	Yes	
		Not in the last year	Within the last year
Age group			
18-34 years	65%	21%	14%
35-49 years	64%	26%	10%
50-64 years	70%	22%	7%
65+ years	66%	30%	4%
Education			
<High school	78%	18%	3%
High school	79%	17%	4%
College	72%	22%	5%
Undergraduate	61%	30%	9%
Graduate	48%	40%	12%
Gender			
Male	66%	28%	6%
Female	68%	23%	8%
Region			
Rural	67%	25%	8%
Urban	68%	25%	6%

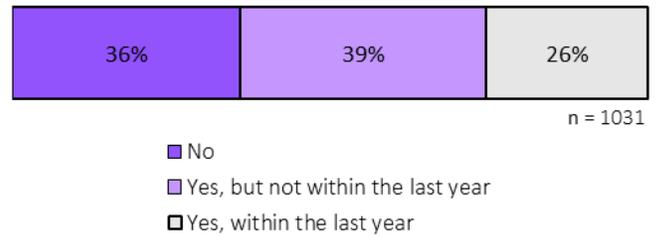
Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

Men who participated in the survey were slightly more likely than women to report being involved in a protest at some point in their lives; however, a greater percentage of women than men said they had been involved within the last year. When we looked at differences in protest participation by region, people in rural areas of Atlantic Canada reported slightly higher rates within the last year than those in urban areas.

SIGNING PETITIONS, BOYCOTTING AND ETHICAL CONSUMERISM

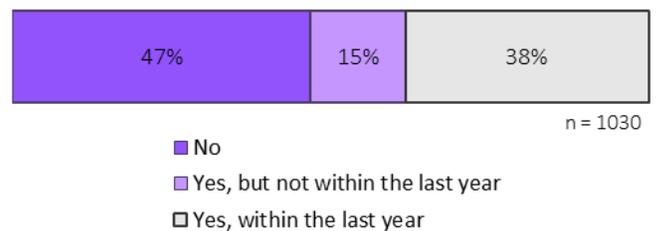
The majority of participants, 65%, had signed a petition, either on paper or online, at some point in their lives, and 26% reported doing so in the last year. This form of action was more common among people under the age of 50 and among those with higher levels of education.

HAVE YOU SIGNED A PETITION?



More than half of participants, 53%, reported having participated in a boycott or chosen products for ethical reasons at some point in their lives; 38% said they have done so in the last year. As with petition-signing, this behaviour was more common among younger and more educated participants. It was also more prevalent among those living in urban areas.

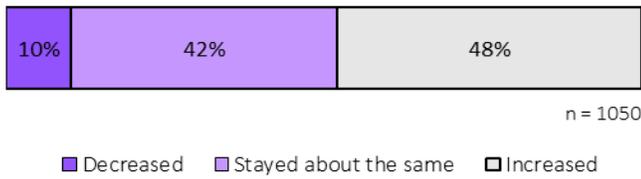
HAVE YOU BOYCOTTED OR CHOSEN A PRODUCT FOR ETHICAL REASONS?



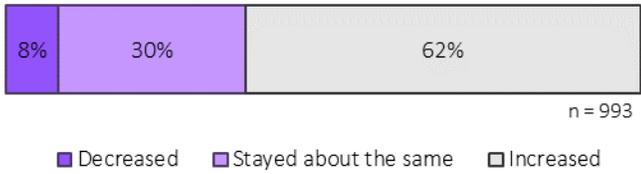
DISCUSSING POLITICS

While 17% of participants reported an increase in their political participation over the last few years, nearly half, 48%, reported an increase in their discussions of political and social issues. Many survey participants also perceived an increase in other Canadians' political discussions in the last five years: 62% believed others were talking about political issues more than before.

CHANGES TO ATLANTIC CANADIANS' DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL OR SOCIAL ISSUES OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS



PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGES IN OTHER CANADIANS' DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL OR SOCIAL ISSUES OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS



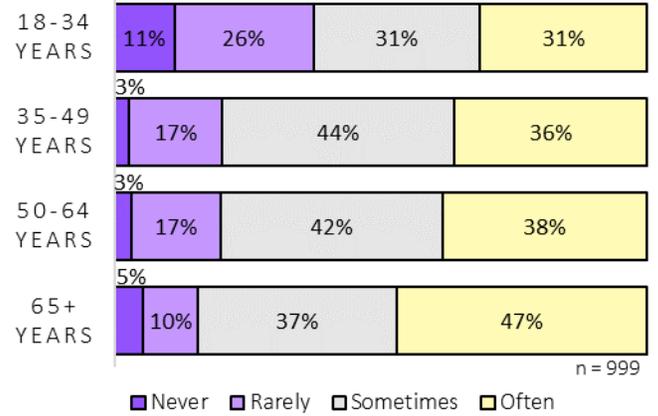
The majority of survey participants reported regularly expressing their opinions on political issues to people they know in person: 40% said they do this “often,” and another 40% said “sometimes.” Expressing views *online*, however, was far less common, and many expressed a strong aversion to doing so. Only 9% said they expressed their views online “often,” and 11% said “sometimes,” while the majority, 60%, said they “never” express their views on political or social issues online.

Expressing views on political or social issues

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
In Person	5%	15%	40%	40%
Online	60%	20%	11%	9%

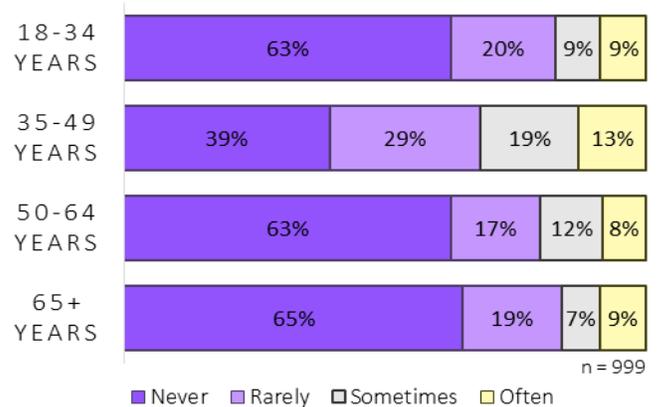
Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

EXPRESSING POLITICAL VIEWS IN PERSON, BY AGE GROUP



Compared to older people, a larger proportion of young people, aged 18 to 34, claimed they “never” expressed their political views in person. Looking at online expression, the youngest and the oldest participants were almost equally reluctant to share their views, while those aged 35 to 49 were the most likely to do so, with more than 60% saying they express their views online at least occasionally. Higher levels of education were also linked to more frequent expressions of political views, both in person and online. Differences between genders and regions in Atlantic Canada were minimal.

EXPRESSING POLITICAL VIEWS ONLINE, BY AGE GROUP



WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY?

The sample included 1,072 participants from Atlantic Canada. This survey has a 95% confidence level and a sampling error of 0.025. More women participated than men: 55%, compared to 45% men. Most surveys were completed in English; 4% were completed in French. The average age of participants was 58 years. The sample includes 10% who self-identify as visible minorities, 7% who immigrated to Canada, and 4% who self-identify as Indigenous.

The majority of participants, 70%, had completed some post-secondary education, and 44% had obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income of participants fell in the category between \$50,000 and \$79,999, and 47% of participants were employed.

Data collection for this report took place between January 14, 2019, and March 5, 2019. In the middle of this period, on February 7, 2019, news broke that former attorney general, Jody Wilson-Raybould, alleged political interference from the Prime Minister's Office to defer prosecution of construction giant, SNC-Lavalin. This affair has affected some Canadians' party support and voting intentions. Compared to participants surveyed before February 7, 3% fewer said they intended to vote for the Liberals in the 2019 federal election after news of this affair broke. There was no corresponding increase in support for other major parties in this period, but the percentage of participants who said they were undecided increased by 5%.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Participants were recruited through a random selection of telephone numbers assigned from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island, from a list that included landline and mobile telephone numbers. Twenty-three percent of participants were recruited through mobile numbers. Only participants over the age of 18 and who were residents of Atlantic Canada were invited to participate. To ensure confidentiality, the names and telephone numbers of the participants were not linked to their responses.

The survey was designed and led by Rachel McLay, a research associate with the Perceptions of Change project and a graduate student at Dalhousie University, under the

supervision of Dr. Howard Ramos, Principal Investigator for the Perceptions of Change project. The survey was conducted by student researchers through the Rural Futures Research Centre at Dalhousie University.

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