

POLITICAL VIEWS AND PRACTICES IN ATLANTIC CANADA

SURVEY REPORT

PART I: POLITICAL VIEWS



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' views and beliefs on a number of different political issues.

KEY FINDINGS

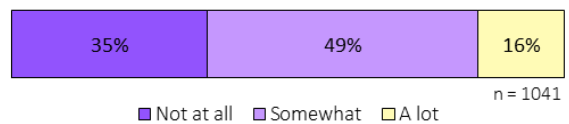
- The majority of participants, 65%, reported that their political views and beliefs have changed either “somewhat” or “a lot” in the last few years, while 87% believed that, overall, other Canadians’ views and beliefs have changed either “somewhat” or “a lot.”
- Most participants expressed high levels of openness to diversity and positive attitudes toward immigration; however, many participants also expressed concerns about immigrants’ integration into Canadian society.
- The majority of participants, 63%, believed that balanced budgets should be a top priority for the government. At the same time, 85% agreed or strongly agreed that it is the government’s responsibility to ensure that all Canadians have access to affordable food, shelter, heat, and health care.
- The majority of participants, 70%, agreed that minimum wage should be raised to ensure that people who are employed are able to make ends meet.

- Three-quarters of participants viewed climate change as one of the most significant threats facing Canada today; 79% agreed or strongly agreed that they would support stronger governmental regulation of corporate environmental practices.
- Younger participants, between 18 and 35, had more progressive views on social issues and showed more openness to cultural diversity than older participants. Participants aged 65 and older, on the other hand, had the most progressive views on economic issues and government spending.
- Two-thirds of participants were optimistic about the direction Canadian society is heading. Young people, those with university degrees, and those living in urban areas were the most likely to express optimism.

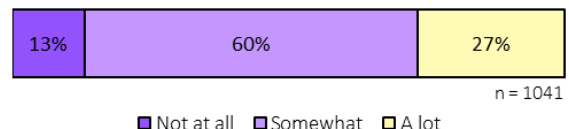
POLITICAL CHANGE

Atlantic Canadians’ political views have been changing in recent years. Nearly half of participants said their views have changed “somewhat” in the last few years, while another 16% said their views have changed “a lot.” Participants had also observed changes in other Canadians’ views, with more than 60% expressing that the political views of Canadians in general had changed “somewhat” and 27% saying they had changed “a lot.”

CHANGES TO ATLANTIC CANADIANS' POLITICAL VIEWS AND BELIEFS OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS



PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE IN OTHER CANADIANS' POLITICAL VIEWS AND BELIEFS OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS



SOCIAL ISSUES, DIVERSITY, AND IMMIGRATION

In general, participants expressed a high level of openness to diversity. About 80% agreed or strongly agreed that multiculturalism is an important part of Canadian society, and the same number were also in agreement that it is important for Canadian society to be open to diverse lifestyles and forms of self-expression. More than half of participants, 55%, agreed or strongly agreed that the country would benefit if more members of minority groups held positions of power.

| Statements on social issues: diversity | Level of agreement | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Multiculturalism is an important part of Canadian society. | 3% | 4% | 14% | 35% | 45% |
| It is important for Canadian society to be open to diverse lifestyles and forms of self-expression. | 2% | 4% | 13% | 44% | 37% |
| The country would benefit from having more members of minority groups in positions of power. | 8% | 10% | 27% | 31% | 24% |

Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

In response to the statement that Canada should accept all asylum seekers fleeing violence or persecution, the majority of participants, 58%, agreed or strongly agreed. Nearly three-quarters of participants, 73%, agreed that immigrants bring vital skills and resources to Canada; however, 57% also agreed or strongly agreed that immigrants need to do more to integrate into Canadian society. When asked if the government should prioritize the needs of Canadian citizens who were born in Canada over those of others, responses were mixed, with 46% in agreement and 36% in disagreement.

| Statements on social issues: immigration | Level of agreement | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly agree |
| It is important that Canada allows entry for all asylum seekers fleeing violence or persecution. | 9% | 15% | 18% | 34% | 24% |
| Immigrants bring vital skills and resources that benefit the Canadian economy. | 4% | 7% | 16% | 39% | 34% |
| Immigrants need to do more to integrate into Canadian society. | 3% | 12% | 27% | 34% | 23% |
| It is important that the federal government put the needs of Canadian citizens who were born in Canada first in policy decisions. | 16% | 20% | 19% | 22% | 24% |

Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

Participants aged 18 to 34, women, those with higher levels of education, and those in urban areas were, overall, the most open to diversity and multiculturalism. Prince Edward Island residents were also more positive about diversity and immigration than those in other provinces, especially New Brunswick and Newfoundland.

ECONOMIC ISSUES AND GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The majority of participants, 63%, agreed or strongly agreed that a balanced budget should be a top priority for the federal government. Participants were more divided on whether they would support raising taxes to expand or improve services such as healthcare and education. Nearly half, 47%, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Participants were also divided on the question of whether private businesses are better service-providers than the government: 36% agreed or strongly agreed, compared to 40% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Regardless of differences, participants were largely supportive of government policies and actions that could assist those living with low incomes: 71% agreed or strongly agreed that the minimum wage should be raised substantially to ensure that people who are employed are able to make ends meet. An even larger majority, 85%, agreed or strongly agreed that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that all Canadians have access to essentials, including food, shelter, heat, and health care.

| Statements on economic issues and government spending | Level of agreement | | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly agree |
| A balanced budget should be a top priority for the Canadian federal government. | 3% | 8% | 26% | 29% | 34% |
| I would support raising taxes to expand or improve government services such as health care and education. | 14% | 17% | 22% | 28% | 19% |
| When services are provided by private businesses instead of by the government, they are usually more efficient and less expensive. | 16% | 24% | 24% | 21% | 15% |
| The minimum wage should be raised substantially to ensure that people who are employed are able to make ends meet. | 4% | 8% | 18% | 29% | 42% |
| It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that everyone in Canada has access to essentials, including things like food, shelter, heat, and health care. | 2% | 4% | 9% | 27% | 58% |

Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

On economic issues, older participants generally took more progressive stances. Younger participants were more likely to agree or strongly agree with prioritizing a balanced budget, and they disagreed or strongly disagreed more often with raising taxes to improve services and with increasing the minimum wage.

OTHER ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Public discourse, democracy, and the media

Nearly two-thirds of participants, 64%, agreed or strongly agreed that there is too much pressure in Canada to be “politically correct.” A similar proportion, 65%, were also in agreement that everyday people do not currently have enough say in government decision-making. Almost one-third, 31%, of participants felt that mainstream media sources in Canada cannot be trusted to provide truthful and accurate information, while 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Statements on public discourse, democracy, and the media

| | Level of agreement | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly agree |
| There is too much pressure to be "politically correct" in Canada. | 4% | 12% | 19% | 26% | 38% |
| Everyday people do not currently have enough say in government decision-making. | 4% | 11% | 20% | 33% | 32% |
| Mainstream Canadian media sources cannot be relied on to provide truthful and accurate information. | 16% | 30% | 23% | 20% | 11% |

Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

Terrorism

Only one-third of participants, 33%, perceived terrorism as one of the most significant threats facing Canada today.

Statement on the threat of terrorism

| | Level of agreement | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Terrorism is one of the most significant threats facing Canada today. | 14% | 28% | 25% | 22% | 11% |

Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

Climate, environment, and land issues

Compared to terrorism, many more participants viewed climate change as one of the most significant threats facing Canada today: 75% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. A large majority of participants approved of further government action to reduce this threat, as well, with 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would support stronger governmental regulation of corporate environmental practices. The majority, 61%, also agreed or strongly agreed that Indigenous peoples should have the right to veto development on their traditional lands.

Statements on climate, environment, and land issues

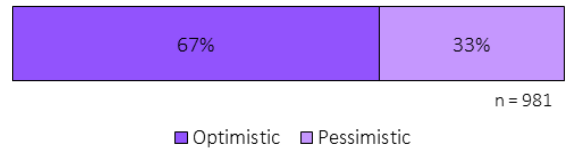
| | Level of agreement | | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Climate change is one of the most significant threats facing Canada | 2% | 7% | 15% | 36% | 39% |
| I would support stronger government regulation of corporate environmental practices. | 3% | 6% | 13% | 30% | 49% |
| Indigenous peoples should have the right to veto development on their traditional lands. | 7% | 10% | 21% | 27% | 34% |

Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC?

When participants were asked if they were optimistic or pessimistic about the direction Canadian society is heading, two-thirds claimed to be optimistic.

OVERALL, ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE DIRECTION CANADIAN SOCIETY IS HEADING?



Young people, those with university degrees, and those living in urban areas were the most likely to report optimism. Women were also slightly more optimistic than men, and participants from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland were more optimistic about the future of Canadian society than those from New Brunswick and P.E.I.

Optimism and pessimism about the direction Canada is heading, by demographics

| | Optimistic | Pessimistic |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Age group | | |
| 18-34 years | 75% | 25% |
| 35-49 years | 60% | 40% |
| 50-64 years | 66% | 34% |
| 65+ years | 69% | 31% |
| Education | | |
| <High school | 53% | 47% |
| High school | 61% | 39% |
| College | 65% | 35% |
| Undergraduate | 72% | 28% |
| Graduate | 74% | 26% |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 65% | 35% |
| Female | 67% | 33% |
| Region | | |
| Rural | 65% | 35% |
| Urban | 72% | 28% |
| Province | | |
| Nova Scotia | 69% | 31% |
| New Brunswick | 62% | 38% |
| Newfoundland | 68% | 32% |
| Prince Edward Island | 63% | 37% |

Source: Perceptions of Change Project, 2019

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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