

New survey finds shifting political views and practices among Atlantic Canadians

A new survey finds that many Atlantic Canadians say their political views have changed over the last few years. Researchers for the Perceptions of Change Project at Dalhousie University discovered that, among their 1,072 survey participants, 65% said their views had changed “somewhat” or “a lot.”

These findings stem from a landline and mobile telephone survey of Atlantic Canadian residents, which asked participants questions about their participation in political life, their opinions on current issues in Canadian politics, and their perceptions of political change in recent years.

Seventeen percent of survey participants said their participation in political activities had increased in the last few years, and nearly half, 48%, said they discuss political and social issues more frequently. Among the political practices asked about, voting was the most frequently reported form of participation, 38% of survey participants reported boycotting or choosing a product for ethical reasons in the last year, 26% reported signing a petition in the last year, and 7% of participants said they had attended a demonstration in the last year. Howard Ramos, a political sociologist at Dalhousie and principal investigator on the Perceptions of Change Project, notes, “In the charged political environment, many Atlantic Canadians appear to be more politically engaged and more open to looking to alternative forms of politics. For instance, 44% of participants in the survey said they would be open to protesting in the future.”

Most participants expressed high levels of openness to diversity and positive attitudes toward immigration; for instance, 74% agreed or strongly agreed that immigrants bring vital skills and resources that benefit the Canadian economy. These views were especially common among younger people. Older people expressed more progressive views on economic issues than younger people; for example, 75% of participants 65 and older agreed or strongly agreed that the minimum wage should be raised to ensure that people who are employed are able to make ends meet, compared to 63% of those 18 to 34.

Climate change was a concern shared by a large majority of participants; 75% viewed it as one of the most significant threats facing Canada today, and 79% agreed or strongly agreed that they would support stronger governmental regulation of corporate environmental practices. Dr. Ramos believes these numbers reflect a “supermajority” of people in the region who view the environment as a key political issue, and that these concerns “will likely play a defining role in Canadian politics during the next election cycle.”

At the same time, 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.

The Perceptions of Change Project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For more information about the project, contact Dr. Howard Ramos at howard.ramos@dal.ca or by phone at 902-402-9893. The full reports on Atlantic Canadians’ political views and practices can be found on the project’s website: <http://perceptionsofchange.ca/politicalviewsandpracticesinatcan.html>

