

St. John's 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 toward 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 St. John's residents in the spring of 2017. The purpose of this survey was to assess what changes residents 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 residents of St. John's were quick to note changes in the state of the economy, as well as growth in housing, population growth, social problems like increased drug use and crime, and changes to infrastructure. St. John's residents were divided on whether, overall, the economy had changed for the better or for the worse over the last five to 10 years. Perceptions of change in the built and natural environment were also mixed, but there was a broad consensus among participants that ethnocultural diversity in the city had increased.

Executive summary:

- St. John's residents noted significant change in the economy, as well as growth in population and housing. Alongside these changes, an increase in drug use and crime and the deterioration of infrastructure were also top changes observed.
- Opinions on the economy were mixed. While most reported increased income and employment, participants were divided in their perceptions of change in the city's economy overall.
- Participants overwhelmingly reported increased ethnocultural diversity and senior citizens in the city. The majority felt neighbourhood social and cultural changes were for the better.
- On average, residents believed that 61% of their neighbours shared similar values and beliefs, and, in general, they reported high levels of "fitting in" to their neighbourhoods.
- Ninety-eight percent of participants noted the construction of new buildings and homes in their city, and 67% within their neighbourhoods.
- The majority of participants believed that their neighbourhood facilities and amenities were sufficient, but were less likely to believe that public transit was accessible or had improved.
- The majority reported no change in the condition of buildings and houses or change in rental housing in their neighbourhood.
- Most participants observed no changes in the water and air quality in the city, but opinions were divided on changes in the number of green spaces and in overall environmental quality.
- Perceptions of the ethnocultural make-up and unemployment rate of St. John's neighbourhoods were similar to the figures reported in 2016 Census data for the city overall. Participants estimated higher numbers of seniors, residents with university degrees, with low incomes, and unemployed residents in their neighbourhoods than census data reports for the city as a whole.

