

ST. JOHN'S 2019 PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE SURVEY



Whether Atlantic Canadians are open to change and how it is perceived are pressing questions of social and political importance. Cities in the region have, over the last decade, experienced urban growth, shifting economies, increased immigration, and the return of younger people which are all prompting a need for new data on the region in order to study how its residents are experiencing and understanding these changes. 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 during May through July of 2019. The purpose of the survey was to assess what changes residents of St. John's observed over the last five to 10 years in their city and their neighbourhoods. It is also aimed to better understand how they feel about those changes. This is the second survey conducted on St. John's as a part of the Perceptions of Change research project.

Overall, residents of St. John's observed changes to the city's economy and population. They observed a downturn in the economy, a population boom, infrastructure renewal, and widespread construction. Residents generally felt that the St. John's economy had declined over the last five to 10 years and this sentiment was echoed to a lesser extent at the neighbourhood level where concerns over affordability and employment were observed. St. John's residents were divided in their perceptions of change to the natural environment of the city compared to their neighbourhoods. When they did observe changes to the natural environment, they typically perceived them as worsening in the city but improving in their neighbourhoods.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Residents of St. John's frequently mentioned changes to the city's economy and businesses, as

well as its population, as the biggest changes in the last five to 10 years.

- Fifty-five percent of participants believed the city's overall economic conditions had worsened. Fewer observed economic decline in their neighbourhood, except in the case of employment and affordability.
- Almost half, 46%, 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, St. John's residents believed that 58% of their neighbours share similar values and beliefs, and they reported high levels of "fitting in" to their neighbourhoods.
- Ninety-seven percent of participants noted the construction of new buildings and homes in their city and 68% observed this in within their neighbourhoods.
- 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 perceived changes in water quality and in the number of green spaces in the city.

CHANGES TO THE CITY

When St. John's residents were asked to identify the biggest changes in the city over the last five to 10 years, the top five changes were economy/business; population and growth; infrastructure; housing/apartments/condos; as well as construction/development.

	2019	Ct.	Perc.
1	Economy/ Business	100	33%
2	Population & Growth	71	23%
3	Infrastructure	61	20%
4	Housing/ Apartments/ Condos	54	18%
5	Construction/ Development	48	16%

Thirty-three percent of residents in St. John’s discussed changes to the city’s **economy and businesses** as one of the top changes they were witnessing. They specifically mentioned the economic downturn in wake of a waning oil industry. Changes to the **population and growth** were mentioned by 23% of residents. Twenty percent identified changes in **city infrastructure**, which included comments on new roadways and pathways for pedestrians and cyclists. Eighteen percent of participants observed changes to **housing, apartments, and condominiums**. Sixteen percent of St. John’s residents surveyed identified **construction and development** as among the most notable changes to the city.

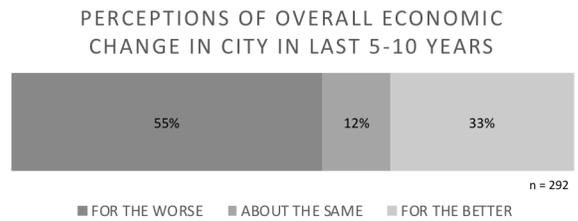
Given that the top five themes raised by survey participants relate to economic change, population growth, and the expansion of the city, it is clear that the residents of St. John’s surveyed are observing changes to the city’s economy and physical transformations.

ECONOMIC CHANGES

Participants were asked about economic changes in their city and neighbourhood. Forty-six percent noted an increase in the average income in the city while nearly a third, 32%, observed a decrease. Forty-four percent of St. John’s residents surveyed observed higher rates of employment.

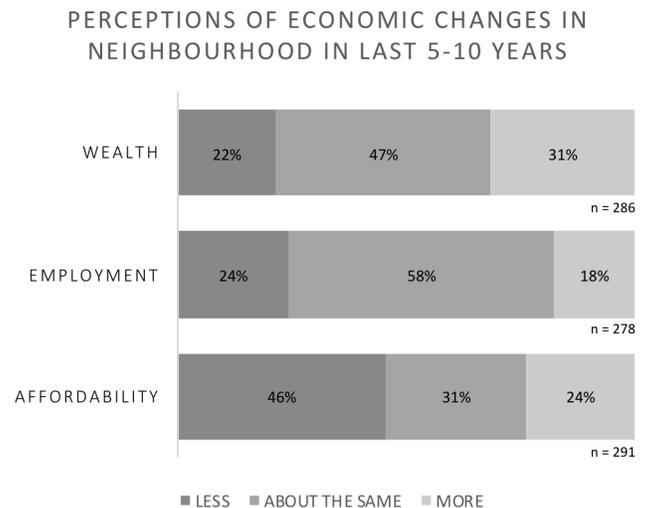


When asked about their overall perception of economic changes in the city, 55% of St. John’s residents reported seeing change for the worse.



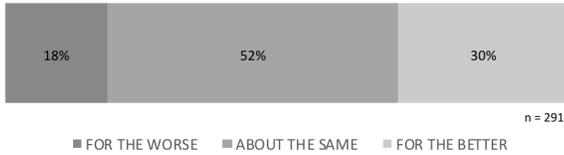
Participants were also asked about their perceptions of economic factors in their neighbourhood. On average, they estimated their neighbourhood’s unemployment rate at 13% and the percentage of residents with low incomes in their neighbourhood at 20%.

Thirty-one percent of St. John’s residents surveyed reported that there was more wealth in their neighbourhood compared to five to 10 years ago and 47% reported no change. Eighteen percent of participants felt that more people in their neighbourhood were employed now compared to five to 10 years ago and 58% felt there was no change. Twenty-four percent of participants felt the neighbourhood was more affordable now compared to five to 10 years ago, while 46% felt it was less affordable. This points to potential tensions between support for growth but concerns over affordability.



When participants were asked about their overall perceptions of economic change in their neighbourhoods, 52% felt things were about the same and 30% observed changes for the better.

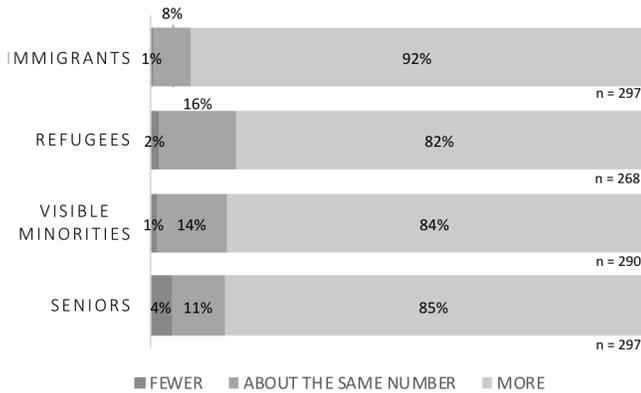
PERCEPTIONS OF ECONOMIC CHANGE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD IN LAST 5-10 YEARS



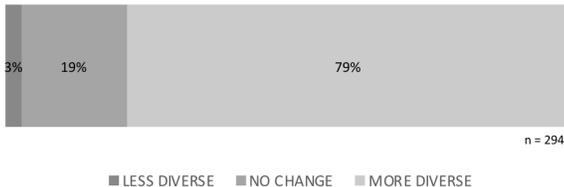
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES

When participants were asked about social and cultural changes in St. John’s over the last five to 10 years, 92% reported an increase in the number of immigrants; 82% observed an increase in the number of refugees; 84% reported an increase in the number of visible minority residents; and 85% noted an increase in the number of senior citizens. When asked about overall social and cultural changes, 79% of survey participants felt that the city had become more diverse in the last five to 10 years.

PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN CITY IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



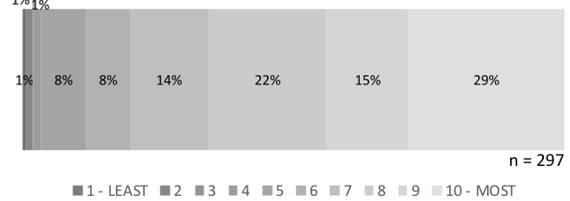
PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE IN THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MAKE-UP OF CITY IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



When asked what percentage of people in their neighbourhood shared similar values and beliefs, participants estimated, on average, that 58% of people did. The most common estimate was 60%, but a wide range of estimates were offered, with the majority of participants estimating between 34% and 82%. When asked how well they believed they “fit in”

to their neighbourhood on a scale from one to 10, where 10 is the strongest sense of fitting in, residents in St. John’s on average reported “8,” largely expressing a strong sense of fitting in and belonging.

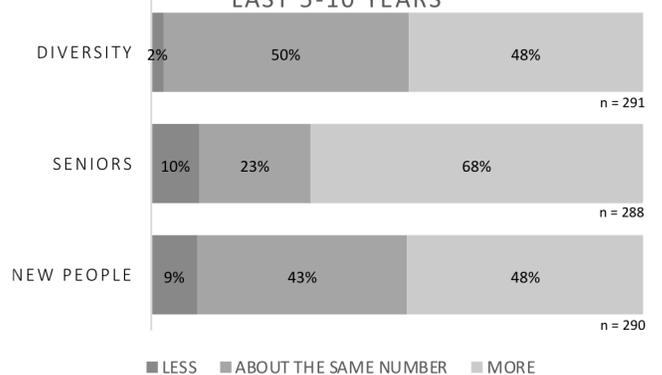
PERCEPTIONS OF "FITTING IN" TO NEIGHBOURHOOD, SCALE OF 1 TO 10



Participants were also asked about social and cultural diversity within their neighbourhoods. On average, residents surveyed estimated that 8% of their neighbours were immigrants, 3% were refugees, 9% were visible minorities, 40% had a university degree, and 35% were senior citizens.

Forty-eight percent of residents felt their neighbourhood had become more diverse, compared to five to 10 years ago, while 50% expressed that it had not changed. The majority of participants, 68% indicated that there are more senior citizens, and 48% reported more new residents in the neighbourhood.

PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



Overall, when participants were asked to assess the social and cultural changes in their neighbourhood, 45% of residents felt that changes were for the better and 51% felt things were about the same.

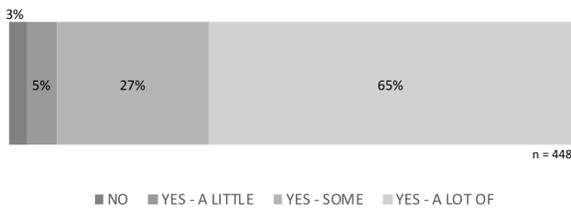
PERCEPTIONS OF OVERALL SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES IN NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



CHANGES TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Participants were also asked about changes to their built and natural environments. Sixty-five percent of St. John’s residents surveyed observed “a lot” of new construction in the city compared to five to 10 years ago. Overall, 97% of participants mentioned some change in the amount of new construction in the city.

PERCEPTIONS OF NEW CONSTRUCTION IN THE CITY IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



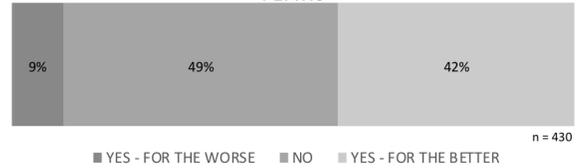
When asked about the condition of buildings and homes, participants estimated on average that 13% of buildings and houses in their neighbourhood were in need of repair. When asked to estimate the percentage of rental housing in their neighbourhood, participants put this figure at 23%.

Residents of St. John’s were also asked about the changes to the built environment in their neighbourhoods. Sixty-eight percent reported new buildings and homes being constructed in the neighbourhood in the last five to 10 years. As for the conditions of existing buildings and homes in their neighbourhood, 42% of participants reported change for the better and only 9% reported change for the worse in the last five to 10 years.

PERCEPTIONS OF NEW CONSTRUCTION OF BUILDINGS AND HOMES IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS

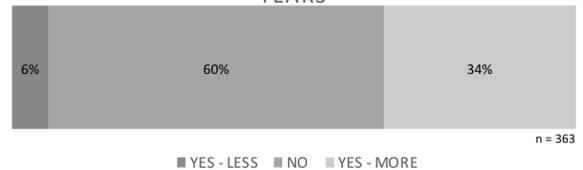


PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONDITION OF BUILDINGS AND HOMES IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



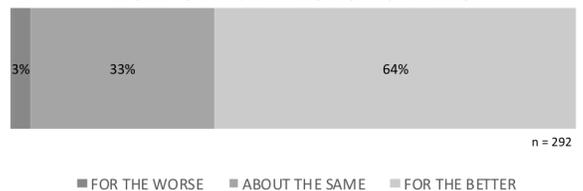
Participants were also asked about housing tenure, and 34% of those surveyed observed an increase in rental housing in their neighbourhood compared to five to 10 years earlier. The majority of participants, 60%, did not perceive any change.

PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE IN NUMBER OF RENTED HOMES IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



Overall, 64% of survey participants felt that changes in their neighbourhood’s buildings and homes were for the better, and 33% felt that buildings and homes had generally stayed about the same in the last five to 10 years.

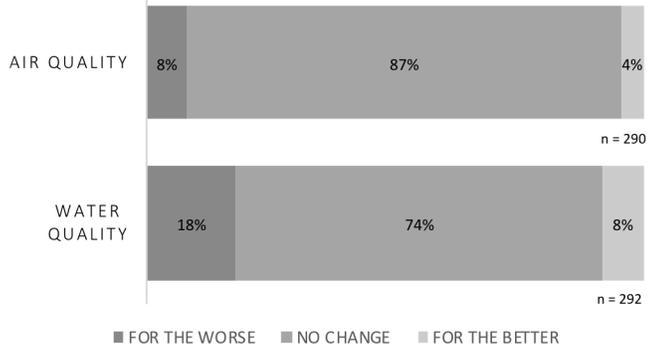
PERCEPTIONS OF OVERALL CHANGES TO NEIGHBOURHOOD BUILDINGS AND HOMES IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



CHANGES TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

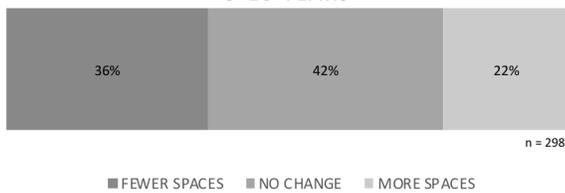
Perceptions on the natural environment were also examined. The majority of participants, 87%, reported no change in the city’s air quality over the last five to 10 years, while only 8% felt that it had changed for the worse. Seventy-four percent of St. John’s residents saw no change in the quality of the city’s natural bodies of water while 18% observed a change for the worse compared to five to 10 years ago.

PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGES IN AIR AND WATER QUALITY IN THE CITY IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



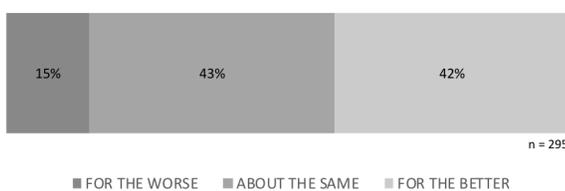
When asked about changes in the number of green spaces in the city, 36% of participants felt there were fewer, 42% felt there was no change, and 22% felt there were more green spaces in the city now compared to five to 10 years ago.

PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE IN NUMBER OF GREEN SPACES IN THE CITY IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



In their neighbourhood, perceptions were more positive. Forty-three percent of St. John’s residents participating in the survey reported no overall change to the natural environment in their neighbourhood in the last five to 10 years, 42% reported change for the better, and 15% noted that change had been for the worse.

PERCEPTIONS OF OVERALL ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES IN NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE LAST 5-10 YEARS



HOW HAVE PERCEPTIONS CHANGED SINCE 2017?

Surveys on St. John’s were conducted in both 2017 and in 2019, and in both rounds residents identified changes to the economy and businesses as the

biggest changes occurring in the city. Compared to 2017, when it ranked 3rd among the top changes mentioned in St. John’s, population changes were the second most observed change in the city in 2019. The number of participants who commented on changes in drug use and crime in the city decreased between 2017 and 2019, with the issue no longer ranking in the top five changes mentioned in 2019.

There was a decrease in positive perceptions of economic changes in the city between 2017 and 2019. In 2019, there was a 13 percentage point decrease in the proportion of St. John’s residents who observed overall change for the better compared to 2017. There were similar decreases in positive perceptions of income and employment levels in the city, with a 19 percentage point decrease in those who observed higher incomes and a 9 percentage point decrease in those who perceived higher employment. At the neighbourhood level, the proportion of St. John’s residents who observed overall economic change for the better decreased by 9 percentage points between 2017 and 2019. In 2019, 46% of St. John’s residents said their neighbourhoods were less affordable while in 2017, although this question was asked slightly differently, 77% of participants disagreed with the statement that their neighbourhood was more affordable compared to 5 to 10 years ago.

In terms of social and cultural changes to the city and neighbourhood, there was little change in perceptions. Participants in the 2019 survey continued to perceive the city and their neighbourhoods as being more diverse compared to five to 10 years ago. There was a 2 percentage point decrease in the number of participants who perceived their city as being more diverse, and an average decrease of 5 percentage points in the number of participants observing more immigrants and refugees, while the number observing more visible minorities in their city remained unchanged between 2017 and 2019. There was also an increase of 2 percentage points in the proportion of people claiming a score of 8 or higher when asked about how much they fit in to the neighbourhood on a 10-point scale.

While perceptions of changes to the built and natural environments did not change a lot between 2017 and 2019, the proportion of residents observing increases in construction in their city in 2019 decreased by 16 percentage points from 2017. There is also a decrease of 9 percentage points in the proportion of St. John's residents reporting less green space in the city in 2019 compared to 2017.

Overall, perceptions of change in 2019 largely resemble those reported in 2017. Perceptions of economic change became more negative in both the city and neighbourhoods in 2019 compared to 2017. Fewer residents perceived an increase in diversity in their city and neighbourhoods. St. John's residents continued to observe changes to the built environment in their city and neighbourhoods but are observing less growth in the rate of construction. Changes to the natural environment, when observed, were generally seen as being for the worse in the city, but for the better in residents' neighbourhoods.

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY?

More women than men participated in the survey: 51% women compared to 49% men. The majority of participants, 80%, owned their homes, and 77% reported living in single detached houses. Almost all of the participants, 96%, spoke English as their first language. The average age of participants was 56. Two percent identified as visible minorities, 6% as immigrants or refugees, 4% identified as Indigenous (Indian, Métis, or Inuit), and 58% were legally married.

The majority of participants, 80%, had some post-secondary education; 27% named a Bachelor's degree as their highest level of education obtained. The median individual employment income reported by participants was \$60,001 to \$80,000, and 55% reported spending a third or more of their incomes on housing and related expenses

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Participants were recruited through a random selection of telephone numbers assigned to the St. John's Census Metropolitan Area, from a list that

included landline and mobile telephone numbers. Twenty-four percent of participants were recruited through mobile numbers. Only participants over the age of 18 and who were residents of St. John's 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 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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