



## Albertans' Opinion Structure on Six Policy Issues

Alberta Public Opinion Study – Fall 2011

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## Methodology

-  **Population** The province of Alberta has a total population of 3,779,353 residents (Statistics Canada, July 1, 2011) approximately 77% of which are 18 years of age or older for an adult population of approximately 2,910,102.
-  **Sample** Data were collected by Lethbridge College and Athabasca University students enrolled in STS270 – Social Science Research Methods and PSC150 – Local Government in the fall of 2011. Students interviewed 1,237 adult Alberta residents by telephone from October 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011 under the supervision of Canadian Studies faculty members Faron Ellis PhD and Marda Schindeler MA. Telephone numbers were selected from a sample drawn from InfoCanada directories. We sincerely thank all participants who took time out of their day to respond to our inquiries. Further results from this study and results from past studies can be accessed by visiting the CSRL web pages at: [www.lethbridgecollege.ca/go/csrl](http://www.lethbridgecollege.ca/go/csrl)
-  **Representativeness** Analysis of the demographic data indicates that, within acceptable limits, the sample accurately represents the demographic distribution of the adult population within the province of Alberta. The sample has been statistically weighted where necessary to even better reflect the demographic distribution of the population (gender and age).
-  **Confidence** The weighted sample yields a margin of error of  $\pm 2.8$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when analyzing sub-samples of the data (Calgary  $\pm 4.9$  percentage points, Edmonton and immediate area  $\pm 4.8$  percentage points, North  $\pm 6.6$  percentage points, South  $\pm 6.5$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20).
-  **IB Commons Call Centre** Students conducted interviews using the facilities of the Lethbridge College IB Commons Call Centre and applications developed by the Open Source Learning Lab (OSLL). We thank James Manis PhD and OSLL for their efforts in working with us to establish and maintain the IB Commons Call Centre.
-  **Sponsorship** These data are part of a larger study of the opinions and attitudes of Alberta residents conducted by the Citizen Society Research Lab at Lethbridge College. This particular set of questions arose out of the research interests of College students and faculty.

## Traditional or Progressive?

### Alberta Opinion Structure on Six Policy Issues

-  **Introduction:** This report analyzes Albertans' opinions concerning six public policy issues, each of which can be conceptualized along a traditional vs. progressive dimension. As is to be expected in a liberal pluralist political culture, a considerable amount of diversity exists within the overall Alberta public opinion structure and divisions are often based on known causes such as religion and political partisanship, generational and gender differences, or economic and educational differences.

Contrary to some common stereotypes, Albertans are more progressive than traditional in their thinking on this cluster of issues. A majority of Albertans take a progressive position on four of the six items with residents of Alberta's two largest cities leading the way.

-  **The six items:** Opinion was measured on the issues of same-sex marriage, abortion choice, capital punishment, medical marijuana, recreational marijuana, and legalized doctor assisted suicide. Albertans support same-sex marriages having legal status with traditional marriages by almost a three to one margin. Albertans strongly support abortion choice remaining a private matter by a margin of more than five to one. They demonstrate similar support for having marijuana legal for medical purposes and are supportive of legalized doctor-assisted suicide. A slim majority of Albertans support reinstating capital punishment for first degree murder and a majority are opposed to decriminalizing marijuana for recreational purposes, although even on these issues, significant pluralities of Albertans adopt a progressive stance with nearly half opposed to capital punishment and almost two of every five supportive of decriminalization of recreational marijuana.
-  **Index of Opinion on Social Issues:** An index of opinion structure was created by summing the responses to the six questions, thereby allowing for easier regional and demographic comparisons. Technical and methodological questions about the construction of this index can be obtained by directly contacting the author of the report. A summary of the results are presented below.
-  **Detailed tabular data:** A brief summary of the results are presented along with condensed tabular data. Individuals interested in the uncondensed results can contact the author directly.

## Six Policy Issues 2009-2011 (% agree)

All Alberta	Same-sex Marriage	Abortion Choice	Capital Punishment	Medical Marijuana	Recreational Marijuana	Doctor Assisted Suicide
2011	72.1	83.8	53.9	76.5	39.5	72.7
2010	70.4	80.8	57.4	75.8	41.4	68.3
2009	65.7	77.6	59.0	73.8	36.5	64.3
Calgary	Same-sex Marriage	Abortion Choice	Capital Punishment	Medical Marijuana	Recreational Marijuana	Doctor Assisted Suicide
2011	72.4	84.8	49.6	77.2	41.1	72.8
2010	70.9	81.1	53.5	76.7	46.0	68.2
2009	73.7	79.1	50.9	77.0	39.7	66.0
Edmonton	Same-sex Marriage	Abortion Choice	Capital Punishment	Medical Marijuana	Recreational Marijuana	Doctor Assisted Suicide
2011	75.5	85.0	51.6	75.9	37.7	72.9
2010	72.3	81.2	55.0	79.4	45.8	73.4
2009	65.5	81.0	58.6	75.5	38.3	65.3
North	Same-sex Marriage	Abortion Choice	Capital Punishment	Medical Marijuana	Recreational Marijuana	Doctor Assisted Suicide
2011	68.6	81.6	60.3	76.6	40.1	74.6
2010	67.8	80.7	64.7	72.8	34.5	61.6
2009	58.6	72.5	62.9	66.1	28.7	57.7
South	Same-sex Marriage	Abortion Choice	Capital Punishment	Medical Marijuana	Recreational Marijuana	Doctor Assisted Suicide
2011	69.6	82.7	58.9	76.1	39.6	70.2
2010	68.3	79.1	62.7	69.9	29.6	65.8
2009	58.3	73.3	72.3	73.2	35.2	67.4

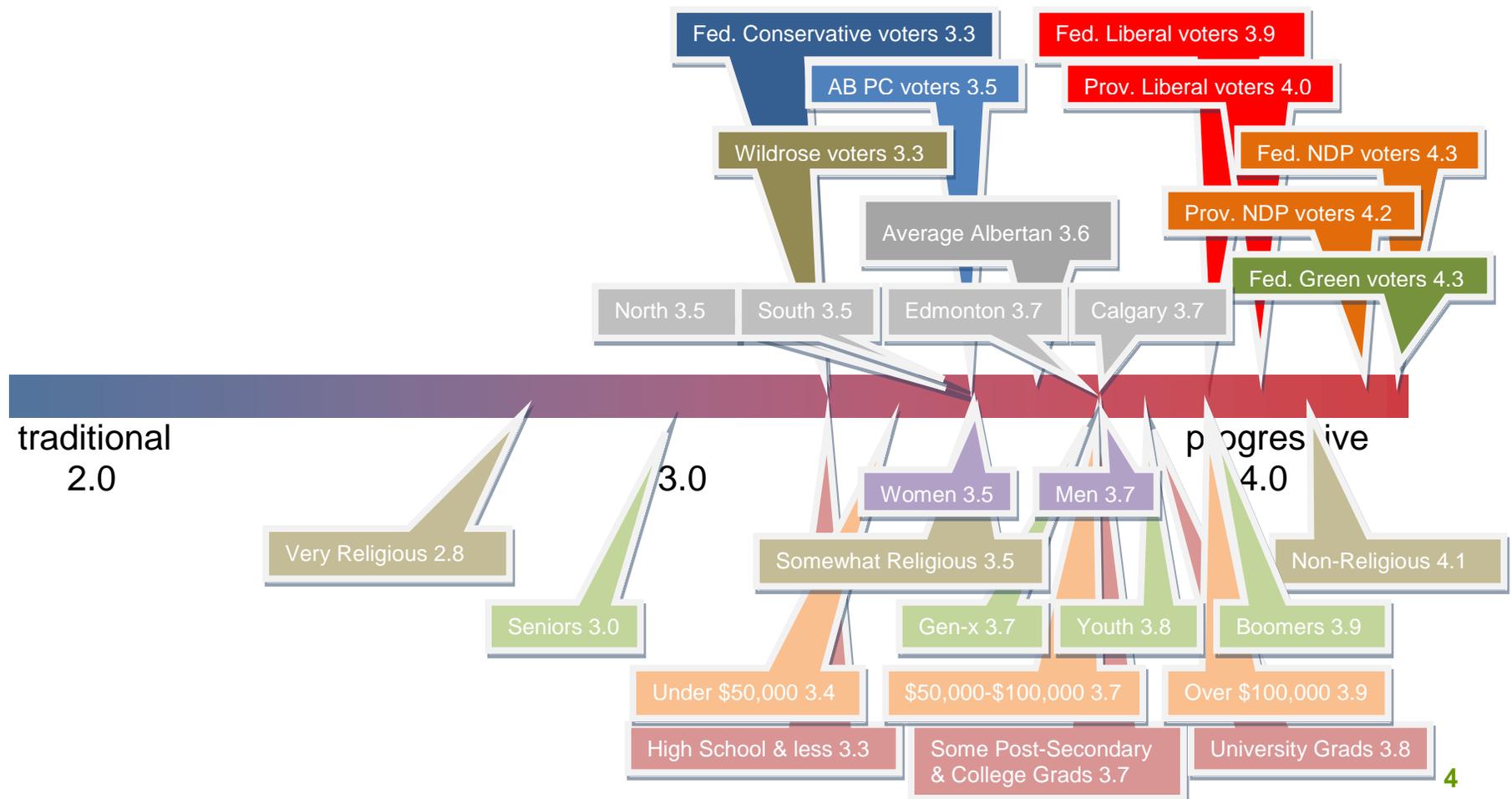
## Issues Index (2011) (means)



This graphical presentation is based on the tabular data on the next page and demonstrates where various groups of Albertans place themselves on the traditional-progressive index.

The graph is organized with supporters of the federal and provincial political parties, regions of the province, and the Alberta average score placed above the bar. A selection of various demographic groups are found below the bar.

Clear divisions exist between somewhat less progressive Conservative Party of Canada, Alberta PC, and Wildrose supporters and more progressive Liberal, NDP and Green voters. Seniors, the highly religious, lower income earners, and those without post-secondary education also distinguish themselves as more traditional than other groups and the average Albertan.



## Issues Index (2011) (means)

### Index of Alberta Opinion Structure (mean scores)

Region	<u>Calgary</u> 3.7	<u>Edmonton</u> 3.7	<u>North</u> 3.5	<u>South</u> 3.5	<u>All Residents</u> 3.6
Provincial Voters	<u>AB PC</u> 3.5	<u>NDP</u> 4.2	<u>Wildrose</u> 3.3	<u>Liberal</u> 4.0	<u>Undecided</u> 3.3
Federal Voters	<u>CPC</u> 3.3	<u>Liberal</u> 3.9	<u>NDP</u> 4.3	<u>Green</u> 4.3	<u>Undecided</u> 3.4
Gender	<u>Male</u> 3.7	<u>Female</u> 3.5			
Income	<u>Under \$50,000</u> 3.4	<u>\$50-\$100,000</u> 3.7	<u>Over \$100,000</u> 3.9		
Religious Participation	<u>1-3 per month/more</u> 2.8	<u>Several per year</u> 3.5	<u>Rarely/never</u> 4.1		
Age	<u>18-29</u> 3.8	<u>30-44</u> 3.7	<u>45-64</u> 3.9	<u>65 and older</u> 3.0	
Education	<u>High School or less</u> 3.3	<u>Some Post Secondary</u> 3.7	<u>College-Tech-Trade</u> 3.7	<u>University Grad</u> 3.8	

Range = 0 (most traditional) to 6 (most progressive)

Note: Alberta Party = 4.2

## Index Items by Area of Province (2011) (%)

- Substantial majorities in all regions of the province support same-sex marriage having equal legal status with traditional marriages.
- Large majorities in all regions of the province support abortion choice for Canadian women.
- Majorities of Albertans outside of the two largest cities support a return to capital punishment for convicted first degree murderers. Opinion in Calgary and Edmonton is much more evenly divided.
- Substantial majorities in all regions of the province support medical marijuana being legal.
- Majorities in all regions of the province oppose the decriminalization of recreational marijuana.
- Substantial majorities of all regions of the province support legal doctor assisted suicide.

Same-sex Marriage	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	Alberta
Agree	72.4	75.5	68.6	69.6	72.1
Disagree	27.6	24.5	31.4	30.4	27.9
Abortion Choice	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	Alberta
Agree	84.8	85.0	81.6	82.7	83.8
Disagree	15.2	15.0	18.4	17.3	16.2
Capital Punishment*	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	Alberta
Agree	49.6	51.6	60.3	58.9	53.9
Disagree	50.4	48.4	39.7	41.1	46.1
Medical Marijuana	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	Alberta
Agree	77.2	75.9	76.6	76.1	76.5
Disagree	22.8	24.1	23.4	23.9	23.5
Recreational Marijuana	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	Alberta
Agree	41.1	37.7	40.1	39.6	39.5
Disagree	58.9	62.3	59.9	60.4	60.5
Doctor Assisted Suicide	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	Alberta
Agree	72.8	72.9	74.6	70.2	72.7
Disagree	27.2	27.1	25.4	29.8	27.3

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%; \* sig < 0.05

## Same-sex marriage by demographic group (2011) (%)

Majorities of all demographic groups within Alberta now support same-sex marriages having equal legal status with traditional marriages. However, significant opinion differences are measured within each demographic group.

Women (77.8%) are more supportive than are men (66.8%), upper income residents (76.9%) and younger residents (81.3%) are more supportive than are other income and age groups. Liberal, NDP and Green voters are significantly more supportive than are federal and provincial Conservatives or Wildrose supporters. Seniors (51.8%) and the highly religious (51.1%) are the least supportive, but for the first time, majorities of each of these demographic groups now support equality for same-sex marriages.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	66.8	77.8	72.1
Disagree	33.2	22.2	27.9

Household Income*	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	66.9	73.3	76.9
Disagree	33.1	26.7	23.1

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	51.1	69.4	84.2
Disagree	48.9	30.6	15.8

Education*	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	61.5	76.9	73.6	75.1
Disagree	38.5	23.1	26.4	24.9

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	81.3	78.5	73.2	51.8
Disagree	18.7	21.5	26.8	48.2

Provincial Vote*	PC	NDP	Wildrose	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	67.2	87.1	63.6	79.7	68.7
Disagree	32.8	12.9	36.4	20.3	31.3

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	64.0	77.6	85.9	94.7	73.8
Disagree	36.0	22.4	14.1	5.3	26.2

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%; \* sig < 0.05

## Abortion choice by demographic group (2011) (%)

Majorities in all demographic groups within Alberta agree that abortion is a matter of private choice, with only religion, age and partisanship significantly impacting opinion on this item.

Men (84.3%) are equally supportive as are women (83.3%), while NDP and Liberal voters are slightly more supportive than are Conservative and Wildrose supporters, but these differences are small and substantial majorities of all partisans from all parties support abortion choice. Religion has the strongest impact on opinion with only 61.4% of the most religious supporting choice. Support climbs to 86.0% among those with moderate amounts of religious participation, and peaks at 93.2% among the non-religious.

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	84.3	83.3	83.8
Disagree	15.7	16.7	16.2

Household Income	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	83.5	83.0	85.3
Disagree	16.5	17.0	14.7

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	61.4	86.0	93.2
Disagree	38.6	14.0	6.8

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	83.3	83.3	84.1	84.6
Disagree	16.7	16.7	15.9	15.4

Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	86.8	84.7	82.5	82.5
Disagree	13.2	15.3	17.5	17.5

Provincial Vote*	PC	NDP	Wildrose	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	82.9	89.5	78.1	91.3	77.5
Disagree	17.1	10.5	21.9	8.7	22.5

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	80.4	90.6	87.9	94.4	82.4
Disagree	19.6	9.4	12.1	5.6	17.6

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%; \* sig < 0.05

## Capital punishment by demographic group (2011) (%)

Majorities in most demographic groups within Alberta agree that capital punishment should be reinstated for people convicted of first degree murder. Significant income, education, age and partisan differences divide opinion on this issue.

Lower income and less well educated Albertans are more supportive than are upper income and more educated residents, with university grads one of the few groups to be more opposed (60.7%) than supportive (39.3%). Seniors (62.8%) are more supportive than are other age groups. Also, federal and provincial Conservative party voters and Wildrose supporters are considerably more supportive than are Liberal, NDP or Green partisans with majorities within each of these latter groups of voters opposed to reinstating capital punishment.

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	54.9	53.0	53.9
Disagree	45.1	47.0	46.1

Household Income*	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	59.0	55.8	48.3
Disagree	41.0	44.2	51.7

Religious Attendance	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	50.0	61.5	51.3
Disagree	50.0	38.5	48.7

Education*	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	73.6	52.1	58.4	39.3
Disagree	26.4	47.9	41.6	60.7

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	42.4	56.6	54.2	62.8
Disagree	57.6	43.4	45.8	37.2

Provincial Vote*	PC	NDP	Wildrose	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	55.3	43.0	65.8	39.0	56.5
Disagree	44.7	57.0	34.2	61.0	43.5

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	60.3	47.1	37.7	37.5	61.7
Disagree	39.7	52.9	62.3	62.5	38.3

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%; \* sig < 0.05

## Medical marijuana by demographic group (2011) (%)

Majorities in all demographic groups within Alberta agree that marijuana should be legal for medical purposes. Significant religious, age and partisan differences divide opinion on this issue.

Seniors (61.1%) are less supportive than are other age groups, particularly the youth (83.7%) and boomers (80.1%). The highly religious (64.5%) are less supportive than are less religious Albertans, while Wildrose (67.3%) and Alberta Conservative (70.9%) are slightly less supportive than are their Liberal (79.0%) and NDP (86.5%) counterparts. Similar patterns of partisan support are measured among federal party partisans.

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	78.4	74.5	76.5
Disagree	21.6	25.5	23.5

Household Income	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	74.4	80.4	76.8
Disagree	25.6	19.6	23.2

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	64.5	77.4	81.6
Disagree	35.5	22.6	18.4

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	73.0	77.1	79.7	75.9
Disagree	27.0	22.9	20.3	24.1

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	83.7	76.4	80.1	61.1
Disagree	16.3	23.6	19.9	38.9

Provincial Vote*	PC	NDP	Wildrose	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	70.9	86.5	67.3	79.0	81.3
Disagree	29.1	13.5	32.7	21.0	18.7

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	72.1	75.0	86.6	80.7	79.1
Disagree	27.9	25.0	13.4	19.3	20.9

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%; \* sig < 0.05

## Recreational marijuana by demographic group (2011) (%)

Majorities in almost all demographic groups within Alberta are opposed to marijuana being decriminalized for recreational purposes. However, significant pluralities of support exist among men (46.4%), the least religious (47.4%), boomers (44.2%) and NDP supporters.

The highly religious (27.6%) are much less supportive than are the non-religious, while the youth (42.8%) are only somewhat more supportive than are seniors (38.6%). A majority of Green party voters (63.6%) are supportive while federal (49.0%) and provincial (47.3%) NDP partisans are much more supportive than are their federal (32.8%) and provincial (31.6%) Conservative counterparts.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	46.4	32.5	39.5
Disagree	53.6	67.5	60.5

Household Income	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	37.1	41.6	43.5
Disagree	62.9	58.4	56.5

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	27.6	33.9	47.4
Disagree	72.4	66.1	52.6

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	42.1	36.8	41.0	38.6
Disagree	57.9	63.2	59.0	61.4

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	42.8	40.2	44.2	25.9
Disagree	57.2	59.8	55.8	74.1

Provincial Vote*	PC	NDP	Wildrose	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	31.6	47.3	38.4	42.9	32.8
Disagree	68.4	52.7	61.6	57.1	67.2

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	32.8	37.3	49.0	63.6	31.8
Disagree	67.2	62.7	51.0	36.4	68.2

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%; \* sig < 0.05

## Legalize doctor-assisted suicide by demographic group (2011) (%)

Majorities in almost all demographic groups within Alberta believe that doctor-assisted suicide should be legal for people with terminal illnesses. Although some gender, income and partisan differences emerge, religion is the most important predictor of opinion.

Men (75.6%) are slightly more supportive than are women (69.6%) while Conservative and Wildrose partisans are slightly less supportive than are their Liberal, Green and NDP counterparts. Most importantly, highly religious residents (49.0%) are much less supportive than are the moderately religious (76.5%) and the non-religious (83.3%).

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	75.6	69.6	72.7
Disagree	24.4	30.4	27.3

Household Income*	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	67.2	73.0	78.9
Disagree	32.8	27.0	21.1

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	49.0	76.5	83.3
Disagree	51.0	23.5	16.7

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	70.4	71.7	74.5	73.2
Disagree	29.6	28.3	25.5	26.8

Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	66.0	75.3	77.1	67.4
Disagree	34.0	24.7	22.9	32.6

Provincial Vote*	PC	NDP	Wildrose	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	71.6	80.9	70.3	74.2	71.4
Disagree	28.4	19.1	29.7	25.8	28.6

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	69.7	76.7	84.6	75.0	68.4
Disagree	30.3	23.3	15.4	25.0	31.6

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%; \* sig < 0.05

## Demographics

Area of Province (%)		Gender (%)		Income (%)		Education (%)		Age (%)	
Calgary	30.3	Male	50.5	Under \$50,000	27.1	H-School/less	19.8	18-29	20.2
Edmonton	32.0	Female	49.5	\$50-\$100,000	37.5	Some P-Sec.	17.9	30-44	24.8
North	18.0			Over \$100,000	35.3	Col-Tech-Grad	27.6	45-64	35.6
South	19.7					University Grad	34.7	65 or older	19.4

Mean age = 47 years old

Religious Participation (%)		Provincial Vote (%)		Federal Vote (%)	
2-3/month-more	27.0	PC	42.0	Conservative	54.2
Several/year	22.7	NDP	14.4	Liberal	11.9
Rarely-never	50.3	Wildrose	14.2	NDP	19.7
		Liberal	11.8	Green	5.6
		Alberta Party	2.7	Undecided	8.5
		Other Party	3.0		
		Undecided	11.9		

Note: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100%

## Questions

The federal government should continue to recognize same sex marriages giving them equal legal standing with traditional marriages.

Abortion is a matter of choice that should be decided between a woman and her doctor.

Canada should re-introduce capital punishment for people convicted of first-degree murder.

Marijuana should be legal for medical purposes.

Marijuana should be decriminalized for recreational purposes.

People with terminal illnesses should be allowed to legally access doctor assisted suicides.

- Strongly Agree – Somewhat Agree – Somewhat Disagree – Strongly Disagree