Traditional or Progressive? Albertans' Opinion Structure on Six Policy Issues

Alberta Public Opinion Study – October 2016



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Methodology

- **Population** The province of Alberta has a total population of 4,233,933 residents (Statistics Canada, July 1, 2016) approximately 78% of which are 18 years of age or older for an adult population of 3,302,467.
- Sample Data were collected by Lethbridge College students in the fall of 2016. Students interviewed 1,513 adult Alberta residents by telephone from October 1 to 8, 2016 under the supervision of principal investigator Faron Ellis, Research Chair, Citizen Society Research Lab. Landline telephone numbers were selected from a sample drawn from InfoGroup directories and supplemented with a selection of mobile numbers from CSRL lists. 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
- 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, region of province and age).
- Confidence The weighted sample yields a margin of error ± 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when analyzing sub-samples of the data (Calgary ± 5.0 percentage points, Edmonton and immediate area ± 5.0 percentage points, North ± 5.2 percentage points, South ± 4.9 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. We thank members of Lethbridge College's IT team for their support in helping maintain the IB Commons Call Center.
- **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 question was derived from student and faculty interest in the topics.



Traditional or Progressive? Alberta Opinion Structure on Six Policy Issues

Introduction: This report analyzes Albertans' opinions about six public policy issues, each of which can be conceptualized along a traditional versus progressive dimension. Most, if not all of these items can be conceptualized along an individual choice versus governmental restriction axis whereby the progressive position supports greater individual autonomy and choice and the traditional positon supports greater government restrictions of individual choice. As is to be expected in an advanced liberal-pluralist political culture, a considerable amount of diversity exists within the overall Alberta public opinion structure with divisions often based on known causes such as religion and political partisanship, generational and gender differences, or economic and educational differences.

Overall, Albertans are increasingly inclined to support individual choice on these issues. A majority of Albertans now take a progressive, individual choice position on four of the six items.

The six policy issues: Opinion was measured on the issues of abortion choice, medical marijuana, capital punishment, doctor assisted suicide, same-sex marriage, and recreational marijuana. Over the past eight years, opinion has remained relatively consistent on two of the items (abortion choice and capital punishment). However, Albertans are becoming increasingly progressive on the other four items (medical marijuana, doctor assisted suicide, same-sex marriage, and recreational marijuana.)

- Albertans strongly support a woman's right to make abortion decisions (85.3%). Support has gradually increased from 77.6% in 2009.
- A majority of Albertans support reinstating capital punishment for people convicted of first degree murder (59.2%).
- Albertans strongly support marijuana remaining legal for medical purposes (87.3%). Support has risen from 73.8% in 2009.
- Albertans strongly support legalize access to doctor-assisted suicide for those suffering from terminal illness (84.9%), an increase from 64.3% in 2009.
- Albertans strongly support same-sex marriages having equal legal status with traditional marriages (82.7%). Support has increased from 65.7% in 2009.
- Slightly less than a majority of Albertans support making marijuana legal for recreational purposes (46.6%). Support has diminished somewhat from its peak in 2014 (53.0%) but remains substantially higher than the 36.5% who supported decriminalization of recreational marijuana in 2009.

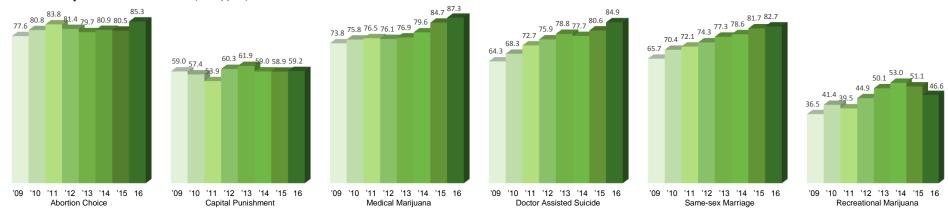


Six Policy Issues 2009-2016 – All Albertans (% support)

As the graph and tabular data below indicate, over the past eight years Albertans' opinion on abortion choice has remained relatively constant at approximately four out of every five Albertans voicing support for choice. Support for reinstating capital punishment for people convicted of first degree murder has remained relatively consistent at approximately three out of every five Albertans supporting a return to capital punishment under those conditions.

Support for individual choice in each of the remaining four policy areas has grown gradually over time.

Six Policy Issues 2009-2016 (% support)



	Abortion Choice	Capital Punishment	Medical Marijuana	Doctor Assisted Suicide	Same-sex Marriage	Recreational Marijuana
2016	85.3	59.2	87.3	84.9	82.7	46.6
2015	80.5	58.9	84.7	80.6	81.7	51.1
2014	80.9	59.0	79.6	77.7	78.6	53.0
2013	79.7	61.9	76.9	78.8	77.3	50.1
2012	81.4	60.3	76.1	75.9	74.3	44.9
2011	83.8	53.9	76.5	72.7	72.1	39.5
2010	80.8	57.4	75.8	68.3	70.4	41.4
2009	77.6	59.0	73.8	64.3	65.7	36.5

Six Policy Issues 2009-2016 – by Region (% support)

Regional breakdowns demonstrate a remarkable consistently of opinion between the various regions of Alberta. Where slight variations exist, they tend to fall along a metropolitan versus the rest of the province dimension with residents of Alberta's two largest cities being slightly more progressive in their perspectives than are those in the rest of the province.

	Abortion	Capital	Medical	Doctor Assisted	Same-sex	Recreational
North	Choice*	Punishment*	Marijuana	Suicide	Marriage*	Marijuana*
2016	84.2	62.0	87.6	85.7	80.3	41.2
2015	79.8	61.8	84.5	81.6	82.2	46.5
2014	78.8	67.4	83.9	77.2	77.0	51.9
2013	75.2	68.2	68.9	76.7	74.8	42.1
2012	72.7	64.7	71.4	71.7	67.9	46.8
2011	81.6	60.3	76.6	74.6	68.6	40.1
2010	80.7	64.7	72.8	61.6	67.8	34.5
2009	72.5	62.9	66.1	57.7	58.6	28.7
Edmonton	1					
2016	87.5	54.9	87.5	86.3	85.2	45.6
2015	75.5	62.2	82.0	76.5	78.9	53.9
2014	85.5	57.8	75.4	78.6	83.3	52.8
2013	79.0	61.1	76.3	78.4	79.5	50.0
2012	80.9	60.3	75.5	72.4	73.3	42.5
2011	85.0	51.6	75.9	72.9	75.5	37.7
2010	81.2	55.0	79.4	73.4	72.3	45.8
2009	81.0	58.6	75.5	65.3	65.5	38.3
Calgary	1					
2016	89.2	57.1	86.9	83.0	83.6	46.6
2015	86.9	54.0	87.1	82.6	86.3	51.5
2014	85.2	51.5	83.6	81.1	82.4	59.0
2013	83.3	56.6	79.0	79.5	81.0	52.3
2012	87.0	52.8	77.8	77.8	78.3	43.7
2011	84.8	49.6	77.2	72.8	72.4	41.1
2010	81.1	53.5	76.7	68.2	70.9	46.0
2009	79.1	50.9	77.0	66.0	73.7	39.7
South	1					
2016	80.8	62.8	87.3	84.8	81.2	52.0
2015	79.3	58.6	84.8	81.6	78.6	52.5
2014	74.8	59.4	75.8	73.9	72.4	47.9
2013	78.5	67.6	80.9	80.2	69.1	52.8
2012	81.1	68.5	78.7	81.8	75.6	48.2
2011	82.7	58.9	76.1	70.2	69.6	39.6
2010	79.1	62.7	69.9	65.8	68.3	29.6
2009	73.3	72.3	73.2	67.4	58.3	35.2

Note; * sig < 0.05 in 2016



Policy Issues Index (2009-2016) (means)

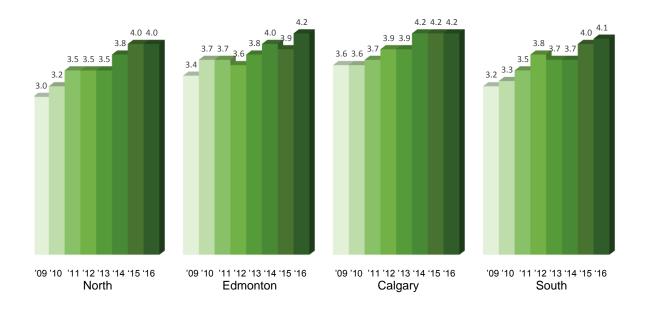
Index of Opinion on Policy Issues:

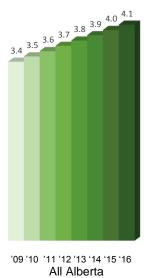
An index of opinion structure was created by summing the responses to the six questions thereby allowing for easier regional and demographic comparisons. The index scores range from a possible "0.0" for the most traditional Albertans, to "6.0" for the most progressive Albertans.

The mean score for the province as a whole is 4.1, clearly on the progressive side of neutral and steadily increasing from only 3.4 in 2009.

As was partially indicated on the previous page, on a regional basis Calgary is consistently the most progressive area of the province, moving from 3.6 in 2009 to 4.2 in 2016. Edmonton (3.4 to 4.2), northern Alberta outside of Edmonton (3.0 to 4.0), and the south outside of Calgary (3.2 to 4.1) are somewhat less progressive but still considerably more progressive than traditional.

Although all areas of the province have become more progressive over the past eight years, areas outside of the major metropolitan areas have experienced the greatest amount of opinion change during this period.





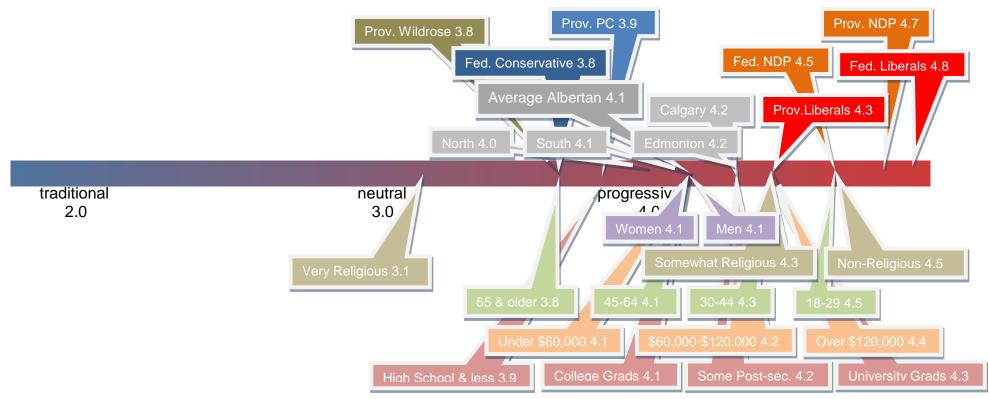


Policy Issues Index (2016) (means)

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

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

Typical patterns of opinion divergence are measured between demographic sub-groups. For example, as expected the very religious are the most traditional in their perspectives, followed by seniors, those with the least amount of formal education, and Wildrose and federal Conservative voters. Alternatively, federal Liberal voters, their NDP compatriots and Green voters are Alberta's most progressive sub-groups, followed by federal and provincial NDP supporters, provincial Liberals, the non-religious, higher educated Albertans, and upper income earners.





Policy Issues Index

The tabular data upon which the preceding graphics are based are presented below. For those interested in further explanation concerning the construction of the index or for a more extensive analysis, please contact the author of the study.

Index of Alberta Opinion Structure (mean scores)

Region	North	Edmonton	Calgary	South	All Residents
2016	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.1
2015	4.0	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.0
2014	3.8	4.0	4.2	3.7	3.9
2013	3.5	3.8	3.9	3.7	3.8
2012	3.5	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.7
2011	3.5	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.6
2010	3.2	3.7	3.6	3.3	3.5
2009	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.2	3.4
2016					
Provincial Voters	PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
	3.9	3.8	4.3	4.7	4.2
Federal Voters	CPC	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
	3.8	4.8	4.5	4.7	4.1
Gender	Male	Female			
	4.1	4.1			
Income	Under \$60,000	\$60-\$120,000	Over \$120,000		
	4.1	4.2	4.4		
Religious Participation	1-3 per month/more	Soveral per year	Rarely/never		
Religious Participation	month/more 3.1	Several per year 4.3	4.5		
Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
	4.5	4.3	4.1	3.8	
Education	High School or Less	Some Post-secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
	3.9	4.2	4.1	4.3	

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



Policy Items by Region of Province (2016) (%)

- Large majorities in all regions of the province support abortion choice for Canadian women.
- Majorities in all regions of the province support a return to capital punishment for convicted first degree murderers.
- Large majorities in all regions of the province support medical marijuana remaining legal.
- Large majorities of all regions of the province support legal doctor assisted suicide.
- Large majorities in all regions of the province support same-sex marriage having equal legal status with traditional marriages.
- A slim majority of Albertans are opposed to the legalization of recreational marijuana.

Abortion Choice* North		Edmonton	Calgary	South	Alberta
Agree 84.2		87.5	89.2	80.8	85.3
Disagree	15.8	12.5	10.8	19.3	14.7
Capital Punishment*	North	Edmonton	Calgary	South	Alberta
Agree	62.0	54.9	57.1	62.8	59.2
Disagree	38.0	45.1	42.9	37.2	40.8
Medical Marijuana	North	Edmonton	Calgary	South	Alberta
Agree	87.6	87.5	86.9	87.3	87.3
Disagree	12.4	12.5	13.1	12.7	12.7
Doctor Assisted Suicide	North	Edmonton	Calgary	South	Alberta
Agree	85.7	86.3	83.0	84.8	84.9
Disagree	14.3	13.7	17.0	15.2	15.1
Same-sex Marriage	North	Edmonton	Calgary	South	Alberta
Agree	80.3	85.2	83.6	81.2	82.7
Disagree	19.7	14.8	16.4	18.8	17.3
Recreational Marijuana	North	Edmonton	Calgary	South	Alberta
Agree	41.2	45.6	46.6	52.0	46.6
Disagree	58.8	54.4	53.4	48.0	53.4



Abortion choice by demographic group (2016) (%)

Majorities in all demographic groups within Alberta agree that abortion is a matter of private choice. Although still the least supportive, a clear majority of even the very religious are more supportive (59.9%) than opposed (40.1%). Religion remains the only demographic characteristic to significantly impact opinion on this item. Support climbs to 89.9% among those with moderate amounts of religious participation, and peaks at 93.2% among the non-religious.

Men (84.79%) are just as supportive as are women (85.9%), while federal and provincial Liberal voters (approximately 93% each) and NDP voters (92.0% provincial, 93.1% federal)) are more supportive than are Wildrose (80.2%), provincial PC (82.4%), and federal Conservative (79.9%) voters, but these differences are relatively small and substantial majorities of partisans of all parties support abortion choice.

Gender	Male	Female	All Albertans		
Agree	84.7	85.9	85.3		
Disagree	15.3	14.1	14.7		
Household Income	Under \$60,000	\$60,000 to \$120,000	Over \$120,000		
Agree	84.0	85.3	87.0		
Disagree	16.0	14.7	13.0		
Religious Participation*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never		
Agree	59.9	89.9	93.2		
Disagree	40.1	10.1	6.8		
Education	High School or less	Some Post-secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
Agree	84.8	86.7	85.5	84.9	
Disagree	15.2	13.3	14.5	15.1	
Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
Agree	85.5	89.2	84.2	82.8	
Disagree	14.5	10.8	15.8	17.2	
Provincial Vote	NDP	Wildrose	PC	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	92.0	80.2	82.4	92.7	86.6
Disagree	8.0	19.8	17.6	7.3	13.4
Federal Vote	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	79.9	93.7	93.1	87.7	89.1
Disagree	20.1	6.3	6.9	12.3	10.9



Capital punishment by demographic group (2016) (%)

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

Less well-educated Albertans are more supportive (71.6%) than are more educated residents, with university grads one of the few groups to be more opposed (54.3%) than supportive (45.7%). Highly religious Albertans are less supportive than are less religious residents. Middle aged Albertans are slightly more supportive than are younger and older Albertans. Also, provincial PC (61.6%) and Wildrose (74.2%) voters, as well as federal Conservatives (65.5%), are considerably more supportive than are Liberal or NDP partisans. Majorities of provincial NDP voters (58.4%) and provincial Liberal voters (58.0%) more opposed to reinstating capital punishment for first degree murderers.

Gender	Male	Female	All Albertans		
Agree Disagree	60.3 39.7	58.2 41.8	59.2 40.8		
Household Income	Under \$60,000	\$60,000 to \$120,000	Over \$120,000		
Agree Disagree	61.5 38.5	55.6 44.4	56.9 43.1		
Religious Participation*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never		
Agree Disagree	54.5 45.5	60.4 39.6	61.5 38.5		
Education*	High School or less	Some Post-secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
Agree Disagree	71.6 28.4	56.8 43.2	67.8 32.2	45.7 54.3	
Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
Agree Disagree	58.7 41.3	62.7 37.3	61.6 38.4	52.5 47.5	
Provincial Vote*	NDP	Wildrose	PC	Liberal	Undecided
Agree Disagree	41.6 58.4	74.2 25.8	61.7 38.3	56.1 43.9	54.8 45.2
Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree Disagree	65.5 34.5	42.0 58.0	58.8 41.2	54.8 45.2	56.2 43.8



Medical marijuana by demographic group (2016) (%)

Gender

Male

Majorities in all demographic groups within Alberta agree that marijuana should be legal for medical purposes. Only religion significantly divides opinion on this issue.

Women (88.4%) as equally as supportive as men (86.3%). Non-religious Albertans (90.9%) are more supportive than are the very religious (76.0%), while younger Albertans (91.7%) are more supportive than are seniors (79.1%). Liberal, New Democrat and Green voters are only slightly more supportive than are Wildrose, provincial PC, and federal Conservative voters, although overwhelming majorities of all partisans are supportive.

Female

All Albertans

Agree Disagree	86.3 13.7	88.4 11.6	87.3 12.7		
Household Income	Under \$60,000	\$60,000 to \$120,000	Over \$120,000		
Agree Disagree	86.2 13.8	87.2 12.8	90.5 9.5		
Religious Participation*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never		
Agree Disagree	76.0 24.0	91.2 8.8	90.9 9.1		
Education	High School or less	Some Post-secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
Agree Disagree	83.5 16.5	87.4 12.6	89.5 10.5	87.6 12.4	
Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
Agree Disagree	91.7 8.3	90.5 9.5	87.6 12.4	79.1 20.9	
Provincial Vote	NDP	Wildrose	PC	Liberal	Undecided
Agree Disagree	91.7 8.3	87.4 12.6	85.7 14.3	85.0 15.0	90.9 9.1
Federal Vote	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree Disagree	84.8 15.2	93.7 6.3	86.1 13.9	97.0 3.0	89.2 10.8



Legal doctor-assisted suicide by demographic group (2016) (%)

Majorities in all demographic groups within Alberta believe that people with terminal illnesses should have legal access to doctor-assisted suicide. Household income and religion are the only significant determinants of opinion differences on this issue.

Most significantly, although almost evenly split on the issue, a slim majority of very religious Albertans (53.3%) support individual choice on this issue. Moderately religious (92.4%) and non-religious (94.6%) Albertans are much more supportive. Upper income Albertans are more supportive than are lower income earners, and although NDP and Liberal voters are more supportive than are other Albertans, partisan differences are not statistically significant on this issue.

Gender	Male	Female	All Albertans		
Agree Disagree	85.1 14.9	84.8 15.2	84.9 15.1		
Household Income*	Under \$60,000	\$60,000 to \$120,000	Over \$120,000		
Agree Disagree	83.1 16.9	83.8 16.3	89.7 10.3		
Religious Participation*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never		
Agree Disagree	53.3 46.7	92.4 7.6	94.6 5.4		
Education	High School or less	Some Post-secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
Agree Disagree	86.6 13.4	83.5 16.5	86.1 13.9	83.7 16.3	
Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
Agree Disagree	86.8 13.2	88.6 11.4	83.6 16.4	81.3 18.7	
Provincial Vote	NDP	Wildrose	PC	Liberal	Undecided
Agree Disagree	91.2 8.8	83.7 16.3	81.0 19.0	85.7 14.3	87.2 12.8
Federal Vote	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree Disagree	81.1 18.9	88.3 11.7	92.9 7.1	89.1 10.9	86.0 14.0



Same-sex Marriage Equality by demographic group (2016) (%)

Majorities in all demographic groups within Alberta agree that same-sex marriages should have equal legal standing with traditional marriages.

Significant differences in opinion are measured in all demographic clusters. Most significantly, although a clear majority of very religious Albertans (59.6%) now support individual choice on this issue, this is less support than amongst moderately (90.9%) and non-religious (89.3%) Albertans. NDP, Liberal and Green voters are also more supportive than are PC, Wildrose and federal Conservative voters, although substantial majorities of all partisans agree with same-sex marriage equality.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Albertans		
Agree	78.1	87.2	82.7		
Disagree	21.9	12.8	17.3		
Household Income*	Under \$60,000	\$60,000 to \$120,000	Over \$120,000		
Agree	78.8	83.5	89.8		
Disagree	21.2	16.5	10.2		
Religious Participation*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never		
Agree	59.6	90.9	89.3		
Disagree	40.4	9.1	10.7		
Education*	High School or less	Some Post-secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
Agree	77.2	84.6	82.7	85.2	
Disagree	22.8	15.4	17.3	14.8	
Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
Agree	88.1	89.1	81.5	72.3	
Disagree	11.9	10.9	18.5	27.7	
Provincial Vote*	NDP	Wildrose	PC	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	90.8	78.3	79.5	84.9	87.8
Disagree	9.2	21.7	20.5	15.1	12.2
Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	76.8	92.5	90.0	92.2	87.6
Disagree	23.2	7.5	10.0	7.8	12.4



Recreational marijuana by demographic group (2016) (%)

A slim majority of Albertans are opposed to legal recreational marijuana (53.4%). However, substantial majority support exists among Alberta's youth (65.4%), the least religious (57.1%) and federal Liberal (63.3%) and Green (68.2%) voters. Men (53.7%) are more supportive than are women (39.4%). Most opposed are seniors (68.7%), the highly religious (73.1%), federal Conservative voters (60.8%), provincial PC (58.6%) and Wildrose (59.1%) voters.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Albertans		
Agree	53.7	39.4	46.6		
Disagree	46.3	60.6	53.4		
Household Income	Under \$60,000	\$60,000 to \$120,000	Over \$120,000		
Agree	50.2	44.2	51.8		
Disagree	49.8	55.8	48.2		
Religious Participation*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never		
Agree	26.9	41.6	57.1		
Disagree	73.1	58.4	42.9		
Education	High School or less	Some Post-secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
Agree	46.2	44.7	49.0	45.9	
Disagree	53.8	55.3	51.0	54.1	
Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
Agree	65.4	50.2	41.7	31.3	
Disagree	34.6	49.8	58.3	68.7	
Provincial Vote*	NDP	Wildrose	PC	Liberal	Undecided
Agree	58.9	40.9	41.4	51.2	50.4
Disagree	41.1	59.1	58.6	48.8	49.6
Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	39.2	63.3	51.0	68.2	42.2
Disagree	60.8	36.7	49.0	31.8	57.8



Demographics (%)

Area of Province		Gender		Income		Education		Age	
Calgary	25.2	Male	49.9	Under \$60,000	35.1	H-School/less	18.2	18-29	22.1
Edmonton	25.1	Female	50.1	\$60-\$120,000	39.3	Some P-Sec.	20.0	30-44	22.5
North	23.2			Over \$120,000	25.6	Col-Tech-Grad	30.2	45-64	33.1
South	26.5					University Grad	31.6	65 or older	22.3

Mean age = 48 years old

Religious	Dortici	nation
Reliaious	rando	บลแบบ

2-3/month-more	25.2
Several/year	20.6
Rarely-never	54.2

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

Questions

Pease tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- 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 legal for recreational purposes.
- People with terminal illnesses should be allowed to legally access doctor assisted suicides.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Somewhat Agree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
 - Don't know (unprompted)
 - Refused (unprompted)

