



Traditional or Progressive?

Albertans' Opinion Structure on Six Policy Issues







Alberta Public Opinion Study – Fall 2009

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Methodology

-  **Population** The province of Alberta has a total population of 3,687,662 residents (July 1, 2009) approximately 77% of which are 18 years of age or older for an adult population of approximately 2,839,500.
-  **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 2009. Students interviewed 1,201 adult Alberta residents by telephone from October 3rd to 5th 2009 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.ab.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).
-  **Confidence** The weighted sample yields a margin of error of ± 2.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when analyzing sub-samples of the data (Calgary 4.9, Edmonton 5.0, North 6.5, South 7.2 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 Dr. James Manis 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.


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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 social traditionalism or social progressivism 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 or 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 Calgarians leading the way.


Calgarians are measurably more progressive than are Edmontonians, and southern Albertans outside of Calgary are measurably more progressive than are northerners outside of Edmonton.

 **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 two to one margin. Albertans strongly support abortion choice remaining a private matter by a margin of more than three 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 two in five opposed to capital punishment and over one third supportive of decriminalization of recreational marijuana.


 **Index of Opinion on Social Issues:** An index of opinion structure was created for regional and demographic comparative purposes by summing the responses to the six questions. Technical and methodological questions about the construction of this index can be obtained by contacting the author of the report directly. 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.


Issues (%)

-  **Same-sex marriage** A clear majority of Albertans support same-sex marriages having the same legal status as traditional marriages. Support is strongest in Calgary (73.7%) and Edmonton (65.5%) but majority support also exists outside of Alberta's two major cities.


Region*	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	All Residents
Agree	73.7	65.5	58.6	58.3	65.7
Disagree	26.3	34.5	41.4	41.7	34.3

-  **Abortion choice** A clear majority of Albertans support keeping abortion choice a private matter to be determined by a woman and her doctor. Support is highest in Edmonton (81.0%) and Calgary (79.1%), and only slightly lower in areas outside Alberta's two major cities.


Region*	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	All Residents
Agree	79.1	81.0	72.5	73.3	77.6
Disagree	20.9	19.0	27.5	26.7	22.4

-  **Capital punishment** A majority of Albertans (59.0%) support reinstating capital punishment for first degree murder. Calgarians are least supportive (50.9%) while other southern Albertans are most supportive (72.3%).


Region*	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	All Residents
Agree	50.9	58.6	62.9	72.3	59.0
Disagree	49.1	41.4	37.1	27.7	41.0

-  **Legal medical marijuana** A clear majority of Albertans (73.8%) support marijuana use for medical purposes. Little regional variance is evident, although northern Albertans are slightly less supportive (66.1%) than are other residents.

Region*	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	All Residents
Agree	77.0	75.5	66.1	73.2	73.8
Disagree	23.0	24.5	33.9	26.8	26.2

-  **Decriminalize recreational marijuana** A majority of Albertans (63.5%) are opposed to decriminalizing marijuana for recreational purposes. Northern Albertans are most opposed (71.3%) while Calgarians are least opposed (60.3%).

Region*	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	All Residents
Agree	39.7	38.3	28.7	35.2	36.5
Disagree	60.3	61.7	71.3	64.8	63.5

-  **Legalize doctor-assisted suicide** A majority of Albertans (64.3%) support legalizing doctor assisted suicide for the terminally ill. Northern residents distinguish themselves as slightly less supportive than are other Albertans.

Region	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	All Residents
Agree	66.0	65.3	57.7	67.4	64.3
Disagree	34.0	34.7	42.3	32.6	35.7

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

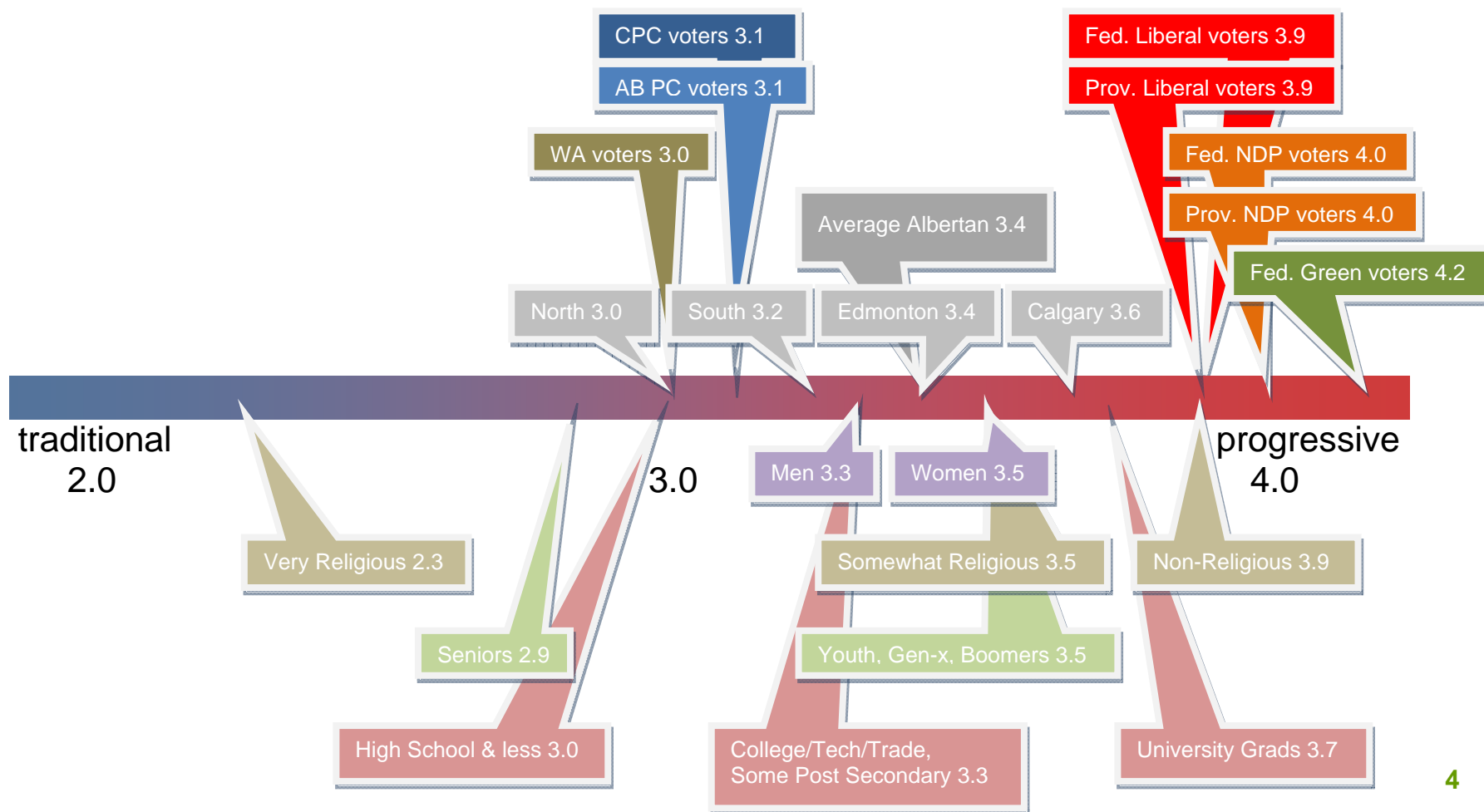
Issues Index (means)



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 particular political parties and the regional differences above the bar and a selection of various demographic groups below the bar.

Clear divisions exist between CPC, Alberta PC, and Wildrose Alliance votes on the more traditional side and Liberal, NDP and Green voters on the more progressive side. Seniors, the highly religious and those without post-secondary education also distinguish themselves as more traditional than other groups and the provincial mean.




Issues Index (means)

Index of Alberta Opinion Structure (mean scores)

Region	<u>Calgary</u>	<u>Edmonton</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>All Residents</u>
	3.6	3.4	3.0	3.2	3.4
Provincial Voters	<u>AB PC</u>	<u>WA</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>NDP</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
	3.1	3.0	3.9	4.0	3.2
Federal Voters	<u>CPC</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>NDP</u>	<u>Green</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
	3.1	3.9	4.0	4.2	3.4
Gender	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>			
	3.3	3.5			
Income	<u>Under \$50,000</u>	<u>\$50-\$100,000</u>	<u>Over \$100,000</u>		
	3.1	3.5	3.8		
Religious Participation	<u>1-3 per month/more</u>	<u>Several per year</u>	<u>Rarely/never</u>		
	2.3	3.5	3.9		
Age	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-44</u>	<u>45-64</u>	<u>65 and older</u>	
	3.5	3.5	3.5	2.9	
Education	<u>High School or less</u>	<u>Some Post Secondary</u>	<u>College-Tech-Trade</u>	<u>University Grad</u>	
	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.7	

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

Same-sex marriage by demographic group (%)

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

Women (72.4%) are more supportive than are men (59.2%), upper income residents (73.2%) and university graduates (70.9%) are more supportive than are other income and education groups, while Liberal, NDP and Green voters are significantly more supportive than are federal and provincial Conservatives or Wildrose Alliance supporters. Seniors (47.2%) and the highly religious (59.1%) are most to oppose same-sex marriage equality.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	59.2	72.4	65.7
Disagree	40.8	27.6	34.3

Household Income*	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	62.9	65.7	73.2
Disagree	37.1	34.3	26.8

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	40.9	69.3	76.4
Disagree	59.1	30.7	23.6

Education*	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	60.6	65.2	64.2	70.9
Disagree	39.4	34.8	35.8	29.1


Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	72.5	76.0	64.1	52.8
Disagree	27.5	24.0	35.9	47.2

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose Alliance	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	57.7	54.4	80.4	77.6	67.3
Disagree	42.3	45.6	19.6	22.4	32.7

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	56.9	81.1	84.2	77.6	71.4
Disagree	43.1	18.9	15.8	22.4	28.6

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

Abortion choice by demographic group (%)

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

Women (80.1%) are slightly more supportive than are men (75.0%), while NDP and Liberal voters are slightly more supportive than are Conservative and Wildrose Alliance supporters, but these differences are small and substantial majorities of all sub-groups support abortion choice. Religion has the strongest impact on opinion with only 50.7% of the most religious supporting abortion choice. Support climbs to 82.1% among those with moderate amounts of religious participation and peaks at 89.7% among the non-religious.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	75.0	80.1	77.6
Disagree	25.0	19.9	22.4

Household Income	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	78.9	74.9	83.4
Disagree	21.1	25.1	16.6

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	50.7	82.1	89.7
Disagree	49.3	17.9	10.3

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	74.1	79.3	75.5	81.0
Disagree	25.9	20.7	24.5	19.0

Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	74.5	74.8	79.8	78.0
Disagree	25.5	25.2	20.2	22.0

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose Alliance	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	75.0	70.8	82.6	86.2	76.8
Disagree	25.0	29.2	17.4	13.8	23.2

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	73.7	84.0	87.2	75.7	81.5
Disagree	26.3	16.0	12.8	24.3	18.5

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

Capital punishment by demographic group (%)

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

Men (65.1%) are more than are women (52.7%). 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 (59.5%) than supportive (40.5%). The youth are much less supportive (50.4%) than are seniors (69.0%). Also, federal and provincial conservative party voters and Wildrose Alliance supporters are considerably more supportive than are Liberal, NDP or Green partisans.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	65.1	52.7	59.0
Disagree	34.9	47.3	41.0

Household Income*	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	66.9	61.1	50.0
Disagree	33.1	38.9	50.0

Religious Attendance	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	57.5	59.7	58.4
Disagree	42.5	40.3	41.6

Education*	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	77.5	65.8	66.3	40.5
Disagree	22.5	34.2	33.7	59.5

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	50.4	57.7	57.8	69.0
Disagree	49.6	42.3	42.2	31.0

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose Alliance	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	65.7	73.8	41.0	45.0	59.1
Disagree	34.3	26.2	59.0	55.0	40.9

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	68.0	43.9	43.8	31.1	60.2
Disagree	32.0	56.1	56.3	68.9	39.8

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

Medical marijuana by demographic group (%)

Majorities in all demographic groups within Alberta agree that marijuana should be legal for medical purposes. Significant income, education, age, religious and federal partisan differences emerge within the demographic sub-sectors of Alberta society.

Lower income Albertans are somewhat less supportive (68.5%) than are other income groups. Seniors (61.4%) are less supportive than are other age groups. The highly religious are less supportive than are other Albertans, while federal Conservative partisans are slightly less supportive (70.3%) than are their Liberal (77.2%), NDP (81.5%) and Green (89.5%) counterparts.

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	75.0	72.6	73.8
Disagree	25.0	27.4	26.2

Household Income*	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	68.5	79.2	78.3
Disagree	31.5	20.8	21.7

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	57.6	78.0	79.8
Disagree	42.4	22.0	20.2

Education*	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	71.6	70.8	74.3	77.5
Disagree	28.4	29.2	25.7	22.5

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	73.6	79.5	77.7	61.4
Disagree	26.4	20.5	22.3	38.6

Provincial Vote	PC	Wildrose Alliance	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	70.7	72.1	82.2	82.2	68.7
Disagree	29.3	27.9	17.8	17.8	31.3

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	70.3	77.2	81.5	89.5	75.7
Disagree	29.7	22.8	18.5	10.5	24.3

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

Recreational marijuana by demographic group (%)

Majorities in most demographic groups within Alberta do not agree that marijuana should be decriminalized for recreational purposes. Significant differences emerge between the sexes, age groups, religious groups and federal partisans.

Men (40.5%) are more supportive than are women (32.4%). The highly religious (20.5%) are much less supportive than are the non-religious (42.4%), while the youth (44.3%) are much more supportive than are seniors (24.6%). Majorities of Green party voters, federal and provincial NDP partisans supporting decriminalization while less over two-thirds of conservative and Wildrose partisans are opposed.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	40.5	32.4	36.5
Disagree	59.5	67.6	63.5

Household Income	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	34.3	39.6	37.7
Disagree	65.7	60.4	62.3

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	20.5	36.5	42.4
Disagree	79.5	63.5	57.6

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	35.2	36.7	38.5	36.0
Disagree	64.8	63.3	61.5	64.0

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	44.3	36.1	40.8	24.6
Disagree	55.7	63.9	59.2	75.4

Provincial Vote	PC	Wildrose Alliance	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	32.5	31.7	44.9	54.3	24.7
Disagree	67.5	68.3	55.1	45.7	75.3

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	29.8	45.6	51.9	56.9	34.2
Disagree	70.2	54.4	48.1	43.1	65.8

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

Legalize doctor-assisted suicide by demographic group (%)

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

Lower income residents (56.5%) are somewhat less supportive than are upper income residents (70.3%) and conservative party partisans are slightly less supportive than are their Liberal, Green, NDP and Wildrose Alliance counterparts. Most importantly, however, highly religious residents (32.7%) are much less supportive than are the moderately religious (66.1%) or the non-religious (78.7%).

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	63.1	65.7	64.3
Disagree	36.9	34.3	35.7

Household Income*	Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$80,000	Over \$80,000
Agree	56.5	65.5	70.3
Disagree	43.5	34.5	29.7

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	32.7	66.1	78.7
Disagree	67.3	33.9	21.3

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	63.8	64.6	65.0	64.6
Disagree	36.2	35.4	35.0	35.4

Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	56.6	66.1	69.1	59.0
Disagree	43.4	33.9	30.9	41.0

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose Alliance	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	56.7	62.9	65.6	75.9	70.5
Disagree	43.3	37.1	34.4	24.1	29.5

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	60.2	69.3	66.2	73.6	70.0
Disagree	39.8	30.7	33.8	26.4	30.0

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

Demographics

Area of Province (%)		Gender (%)		Income (%)		Education (%)		Age (%)	
Calgary	33.4	Male	50.1	Under \$50,000	28.1	H-School/less	19.4	18-29	12.4
Edmonton	31.8	Female	49.9	\$50-\$100,000	39.7	Some P-Sec.	20.9	30-44	26.3
North	19.3			Over \$100,000	32.2	Col-Tech-Grad	24.3	45-64	39.9
South	15.5					University Grad	35.4	65 or older	21.4

Mean age = 50 year

Religious Participation (%)	
2-3/month-more	28.6
Several/year	19.5
Rarely-never	51.9

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.