Albertans' Opinion Structure on Six Policy Issues

Alberta Public Opinion Study – Fall 2010

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Methodology

- **Population** The province of Alberta has a total population of 3,720,946 residents (July 1, 2010) approximately 77% of which are 18 years of age or older for an adult population of approximately 2,865,000.

- **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 2010. Students interviewed 1,067 adult Alberta residents by telephone from October 2nd to 3rd 2010 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

- **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 $\pm$ 3.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when analyzing sub-samples of the data (Calgary $\pm$ 5.1 percentage points, Edmonton and immediate area $\pm$ 5.3 percentage points, North $\pm$ 7.2 percentage points, South $\pm$ 7.6 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. These questions arose out of the interests of Lethbridge 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 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 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 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 (70.4%) support same-sex marriages having the same legal status as traditional marriages. Support is strongest in Calgary (70.9%) and Edmonton (72.3%) but majority support also exists in all areas of the province.

Region*	Calgary 2009	Calgary 2010	Edmonton 2009	Edmonton 2010	North 2009	North 2010	South 2009	South 2010	Alberta 2009	Alberta 2010
Agree	73.7	70.9	65.5	72.3	58.6	67.8	58.3	68.3	65.7	70.4
Disagree	26.3	29.1	34.5	27.7	41.4	32.2	41.7	31.7	34.3	29.6

Abortion choice A clear majority of Albertans support keeping abortion choice a private matter to be determined by a woman and her doctor (80.8%). Support is highest in Edmonton (81.2%) and Calgary (81.1%), and only slightly lower in other areas of the province.

Region*	Calgary 2009	Calgary 2010	Edmonton 2009	Edmonton 2010	North 2009	North 2010	South 2009	South 2010	Alberta 2009	Alberta 2010
Agree	79.1	81.1	81.0	81.2	72.5	80.7	73.3	79.1	77.6	80.8
Disagree	20.9	18.9	19.0	18.8	27.5	80.7	26.7	20.9	22.4	19.2

Capital punishment A majority of Albertans (57.4%) support reinstating capital punishment for first degree murder. Calgarians are least supportive (53.5%) while other Albertans outside of the two major cities are most supportive.

Region*	Calgary 2009	Calgary 2010	Edmonton 2009	Edmonton 2010	North 2009	North 2010	South 2009	South 2010	Alberta 2009	Alberta 2010
Agree	50.9	53.5	58.6	55.0	62.9	64.7	72.3	62.7	59.0	57.4
Disagree	49.1	46.5	41.4	45.0	37.1	35.3	27.7	37.3	41.0	42.6

Legal medical marijuana A clear majority of Albertans (75.8%) support legal marijuana use for medical purposes. Little regional variance is evident, although southern Albertans are slightly less supportive (69.9%) than are other residents.

Region*	Calgary 2009	Calgary 2010	Edmonton 2009	Edmonton 2010	North 2009	North 2010	South 2009	South 2010	Alberta 2009	Alberta 2010
Agree	77.0	76.7	75.5	79.4	66.1	72.8	73.2	69.9	73.8	75.8
Disagree	23.0	23.3	24.5	20.6	33.9	27.2	26.8	30.1	26.2	24.2

Decriminalize recreational marijuana A majority of Albertans (58.6%) are opposed to decriminalizing marijuana for recreational purposes. Albertans outside of the two major cities are most opposed.

Region*	Calgary 2009	Calgary 2010	Edmonton 2009	Edmonton 2010	North 2009	North 2010	South 2009	South 2010	Alberta 2009	Alberta 2010
Agree	39.7	46.0	38.3	45.8	28.7	34.5	35.2	29.6	36.5	41.4
Disagree	60.3	54.0	61.7	54.2	71.3	65.5	64.8	70.4	63.5	58.6

Legalize doctor-assisted suicide A majority of Albertans (68.3%) support legalizing doctor assisted suicide for the terminally ill.

Region*	Calgary 2009	Calgary 2010	Edmonton 2009	Edmonton 2010	North 2009	North 2010	South 2009	South 2010	Alberta 2009	Alberta 2010
Agree	66.0	68.2	65.3	73.4	57.7	61.6	67.4	65.8	64.3	68.3
Disagree	34.0	31.8	34.7	26.6	42.3	38.4	32.6	34.2	35.7	31.7

Notes: Due to rounding, proportions may not total exactly 100; * sig < 0.05
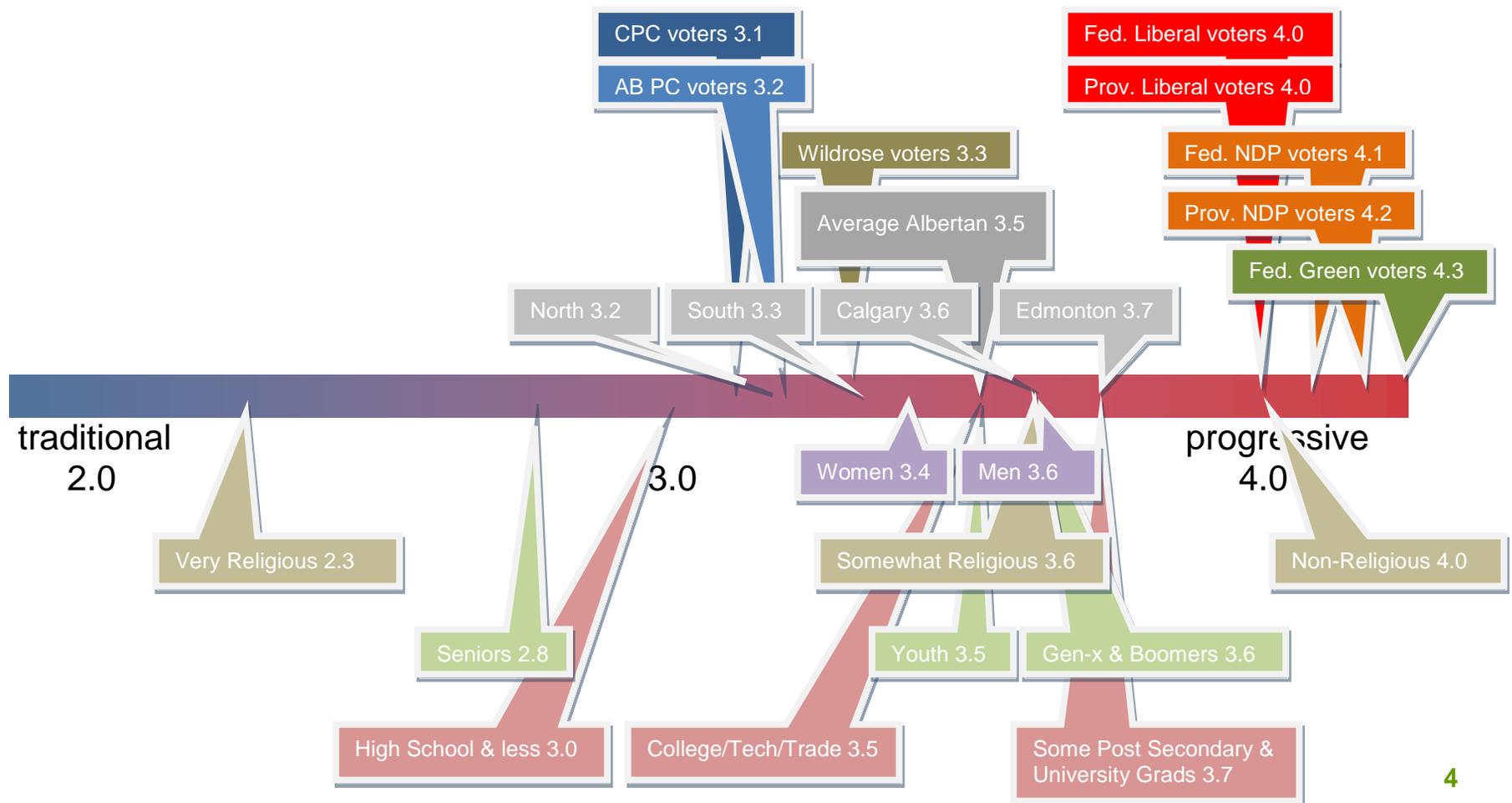
Issues Index (2010) (means)

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, regions and the Alberta average score placed above the bar. A selection of various demographic groups are found below the bar.

Clear divisions exist between Conservative Party of Canada, Alberta PC, and Wildrose 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 average Albertan.

CPC voters 3.1

AB PC voters 3.2

Fed. Liberal voters 4.0

Prov. Liberal voters 4.0

Wildrose voters 3.3

Fed. NDP voters 4.1

Average Albertan 3.5

Prov. NDP voters 4.2

Fed. Green voters 4.3

North 3.2   South 3.3   Calgary 3.6   Edmonton 3.7

traditional
2.0

3.0

progressive
4.0

Women 3.4   Men 3.6

Very Religious 2.3

Somewhat Religious 3.6

Non-Religious 4.0

Seniors 2.8

Youth 3.5   Gen-x & Boomers 3.6

High School & less 3.0

College/Tech/Trade 3.5

Some Post Secondary & University Grads 3.7

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Issues Index (means)

Index of Alberta Opinion Structure (mean scores)

Region	Calgary	Edmonton	North	South	All Residents
	3.6	3.7	3.2	3.3	3.5
Provincial Voters	AB PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
	3.2	3.3	4.0	4.2	3.3
Federal Voters	CPC	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
	3.1	4.0	4.1	4.3	3.4
Gender	Male	Female			
	3.6	3.4			
Income	Under $50,000	$50-$100,000	Over $100,000		
	3.4	3.5	3.8		
Religious Participation	1-3 per month/more	Several per year	Rarely/never		
	2.3	3.6	4.0		
Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	
	3.5	3.6	3.6	2.8	
Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad	
	3.0	3.7	3.5	3.7	

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

Same-sex marriage by demographic group (2010) (%)

Majorities of all but two demographic groups (the highly religious and seniors) 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 (76.6%) are more supportive than are men (64.2%), upper income residents (77.6%) and younger residents 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 (55.1%) and the highly religious (59.3%) are most to oppose same-sex marriage equality.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	64.2	76.6	70.4
Disagree	35.8	23.4	29.6

Household Income*	Under $40,000	$40,000 to $80,000	Over $80,000
Agree	69.5	65.7	77.6
Disagree	30.5	34.3	22.4

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	40.7	76.4	80.8
Disagree	59.3	23.6	19.2

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	63.1	74.4	72.0	71.4
Disagree	36.9	25.6	28.0	28.6

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	79.5	77.5	68.8	44.9
Disagree	20.5	22.5	31.2	55.1

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	59.9	65.4	81.4	87.1	73.0
Disagree	40.1	34.6	18.6	12.9	27.0

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	59.5	80.0	87.3	90.6	73.3
Disagree	40.5	20.0	12.7	9.4	26.7

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

Abortion choice by demographic group (2010) (%)

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 (81.2%) are equally supportive as women (80.4%), 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 strongly support abortion choice. Religion has the strongest impact on opinion with only 53.9% of the most religious supporting abortion choice. Support climbs to 87.4% among those with moderate amounts of religious participation and peaks at 89.0% among the non-religious.

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	81.2	80.4	80.8
Disagree	18.8	19.6	19.2

Household Income	Under $40,000	$40,000 to $80,000	Over $80,000
Agree	81.4	82.0	81.0
Disagree	18.6	18.0	19.0

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	53.9	87.4	89.0
Disagree	46.1	12.6	11.0

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	75.3	83.7	83.5	80.3
Disagree	24.7	16.3	16.5	19.7

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	75.5	78.8	84.0	82.3
Disagree	24.5	21.2	16.0	17.7

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	77.0	81.2	87.2	88.1	75.5
Disagree	23.0	18.8	12.8	11.9	24.5

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	77.4	88.8	88.6	86.4	77.6
Disagree	22.6	11.2	11.4	13.6	22.4

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

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Capital punishment by demographic group (2010) (%)

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

Men (58.8%) are more than are women (55.9%). 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 (61.7%) than supportive (38.3%). Seniors (65.8%) 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.

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents	
Agree	58.8	55.9	57.4	
Disagree	41.2	44.1	42.6	

Household Income*	Under $40,000	$40,000 to $80,000	Over $80,000	
Agree	62.4	59.4	49.1	
Disagree	37.6	40.6	50.9	

Religious Attendance	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never	
Agree	58.5	60.5	56.3	
Disagree	41.5	39.5	43.7	

Education*	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	78.6	62.9	63.7	38.3
Disagree	21.4	37.1	36.3	61.7

Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	56.9	57.1	55.7	65.8
Disagree	43.1	42.9	44.3	34.2

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	61.2	69.4	43.3	40.2	56.0
Disagree	38.8	30.6	56.7	59.8	44.0

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	66.5	39.9	49.3	37.7	54.0
Disagree	33.5	60.1	50.7	62.3	46.0

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

Medical marijuana by demographic group (2010) (%)

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

Men (78.7%) are more supportive than are women (72.8%). Lower income Albertans are somewhat less supportive (72.1%) than are other income groups. Seniors (63.8%) are less supportive than are other age groups. The highly religious (52.9%) are less supportive than are other Albertans, while federal Conservative partisans (68.9%) are slightly less supportive than are their Liberal (80.7%), NDP (86.5%) and Green (92.8%) counterparts.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	78.7	72.8	75.8
Disagree	21.3	27.2	24.2

Household Income	Under $40,000	$40,000 to $80,000	Over $80,000
Agree	72.1	80.9	76.1
Disagree	27.9	19.1	23.9

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	52.9	76.7	87.0
Disagree	47.1	23.3	13.0

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	68.9	83.9	75.9	75.8
Disagree	31.1	16.1	24.1	24.2

Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	73.5	78.2	78.6	63.9
Disagree	26.5	21.8	21.4	36.1

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	70.0	75.9	79.1	90.0	72.1
Disagree	30.0	24.1	20.9	10.0	27.9

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	68.9	80.7	86.5	92.8	75.3
Disagree	31.1	19.3	13.5	7.2	24.7

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

Recreational marijuana by demographic group (2010) (%)

Majorities in most demographic groups within Alberta are opposed to marijuana being decriminalized for recreational purposes. Significant differences emerge between the sexes, age groups, religious groups and federal partisans.

Men (51.4%) are more supportive than are women (31.1%). The highly religious (19.1%) are much less supportive than are the non-religious (53.4%), while the youth (47.2%) are much more supportive than are seniors (28.0%). Majorities of Green party voters, federal and provincial Liberal partisans support decriminalization while nearly two-thirds of conservative and Wildrose partisans are opposed.

Gender*	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	51.4	31.1	41.4
Disagree	48.6	68.9	58.6

Household Income	Under $40,000	$40,000 to $80,000	Over $80,000
Agree	41.1	46.5	39.2
Disagree	58.9	53.5	60.8

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	19.1	40.4	53.4
Disagree	80.9	59.6	46.6

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	34.0	44.3	46.0	41.0
Disagree	66.0	55.7	54.0	59.0

Age*	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	47.2	40.1	43.2	28.0
Disagree	52.8	59.9	56.8	72.0

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	34.1	34.3	53.8	48.1	41.1
Disagree	65.9	65.7	46.2	51.9	58.9

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	33.4	45.5	46.8	62.3	43.8
Disagree	66.6	54.5	53.2	37.7	56.2

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

Legalize doctor-assisted suicide by demographic group (2010) (%)

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 (62.0%) are somewhat less supportive than are upper income residents (72.8%). Conservative and Wildrose partisans are slightly less supportive than are their Liberal, Green and NDP counterparts. Most importantly, highly religious residents (39.6%) are much less supportive than are the moderately religious (71.4%) and the non-religious (80.1%).

Gender	Male	Female	All Residents
Agree	69.0	67.5	68.3
Disagree	31.0	32.5	31.7

Household Income*	Under $40,000	$40,000 to $80,000	Over $80,000
Agree	62.0	67.6	72.8
Disagree	38.0	32.4	27.2

Religious Attendance*	2-3 times/month-more	Several times/year	Rarely-never
Agree	39.6	71.4	80.1
Disagree	60.4	28.6	19.9

Education	High School or less	Some Post Secondary	College-Tech-Trade	University Grad
Agree	65.6	66.7	73.9	66.7
Disagree	34.4	33.3	26.1	33.3

Age	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older
Agree	57.1	72.2	74.1	58.0
Disagree	42.9	27.8	25.9	42.0

Provincial Vote*	PC	Wildrose	Liberal	NDP	Undecided
Agree	65.6	67.8	71.1	77.3	64.1
Disagree	34.4	32.2	28.9	22.7	35.9

Federal Vote*	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Undecided
Agree	65.9	68.8	71.6	84.5	62.4
Disagree	34.1	31.3	28.4	15.5	37.6

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

Demographics

Area of Province (%)		Gender (%)		Income (%)		Education (%)		Age (%)	
Calgary	34.8	Male	50.2	Under $50,000	24.2	H-School/less	21.0	18-29	19.9
Edmonton	32.1	Female	49.8	$50-$100,000	37.4	Some P-Sec.	17.4	30-44	24.5
North	17.4			Over $100,000	38.4	Col-Tech-Grad	25.1	45-64	43.4
South	15.7					University Grad	36.5	65 or older	12.2

Mean age = 46.4 years old

Religious Participation (%)		Provincial Vote (%)		Federal Vote (%)	
2-3/month-more	26.1	PC	29.6	Conservative	47.4
Several/year	24.3	Wildrose Alliance	19.7	Liberal	15.9
Rarely-never	49.6	Liberal	17.0	NDP	8.1
		NDP	8.9	Green	7.1
		Undecided	18.0	Undecided	16.2

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.