

# Civic and Political Engagement

This section focuses on citizens' engagement with their local community and participation in politics, issues and the electoral process.

## Local community engagement

### REQUESTING HELP FROM LOCAL PUBLIC

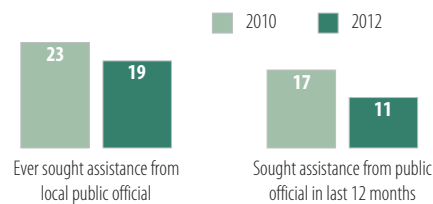
**OFFICIALS.** Measuring the extent to which Canadians are reaching out for assistance from public officials is one indicator of trust in local government and engagement in the local community. Overall, a noticeable minority of Canadians have requested help from local governments. Roughly one in five (19%) Canadians have asked for assistance from a local public official or local government at some point in the past, and one in ten (11%) have done so in the past 12 months.

The incidence of requesting such assistance is lower than in 2010, with the proportion of those reporting to have done so in the past 12 months down by a third (down 6 percentage points).

Efforts to seek assistance at some point in the past are most evident in Atlantic Canada (24%) and least so in Quebec (15%), both of which stand out from the rest of Canada. Incidence of requesting assistance is highest among those who are active in other areas of the community, such as attending town meetings and solving problems within their communities. Requesting assistance from local governing bodies is also most prevalent among Canadians aged 45 to 59 and those with lower household incomes, but does not vary by community size, gender or education level.

Of those who requested such help from local officials in the last 12 months, just over half (51%) reported their issue or request had been resolved, up slightly from the proportion of those who reported this in 2010 (42%).

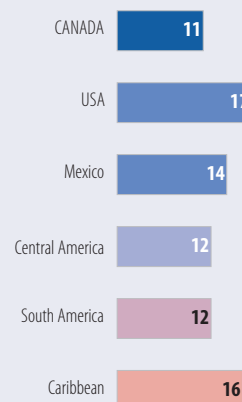
### Seeking assistance from local public officials



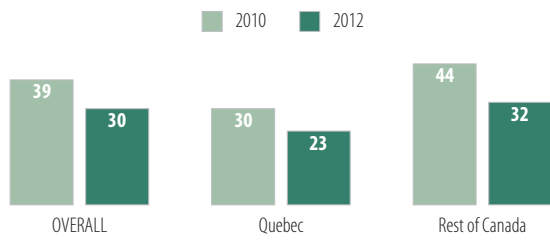
### International comparison

The incidence of requesting help from public officials is notably similar across the hemisphere. Canadians are somewhat more likely than citizens elsewhere to report this activity, although marginally less so than residents of the USA (22%), several Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador) and Haiti (21%). At the same time, Canadians are no more likely to have done so in the past 12 months, and those who have are less apt to report the issue they were seeking help on was resolved (the highest success rates are reported in the Caribbean).

### Sought assistance from public official in last 12 months



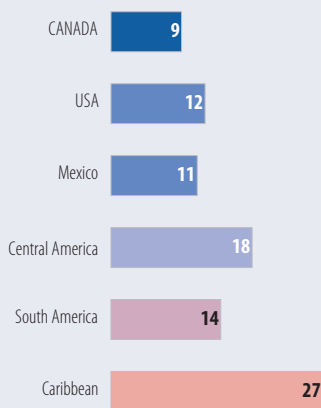
## Helped solve local community problem in last year



### International comparison

Canadians' efforts to help solve community problems are comparable to the hemispheric average, although they are less likely to be doing so frequently (at least once a month). Americans are marginally more apt to make such effort (but show the same downward trend since 2010) and the most active of all are citizens of Haiti (34% helping at least once a month), Paraguay (29%), Guatemala (25%) and Jamaica (24%).

### Helped solve local problem at least once a month



## HELPING TO SOLVE A PROBLEM IN THE COMMUNITY.

Another important aspect of community engagement is the extent to which people are actively helping to solve problems within their community. Generally, Canadians are more active in helping to solve local problems than in requesting help from the local government. Three in ten (30%) Canadians report having tried to solve a local problem at least once in the past 12 months, although only one in ten (9%) from this group indicate having done so on a regular basis (at least once a month).

Canadians' reported efforts to help others have declined since 2010 (when 39% reported to have done so at least once in the past 12 months), although the proportion most actively engaged (at least monthly) has held steady.

The level of active participation in helping others is similar across the country, with the notable exception of Quebec: one in four (23%) Quebecers report having helped solve a problem in their community in the past year, compared to one in three Canadians in other provinces. The decline in activity since 2010 is equally evident in both parts of the country. In 2010, Canadians young and old were equally likely to help solve problems in their community. This has changed in 2012, as older cohorts are now less likely to repeat such efforts since 2010, especially among those aged 60-plus.

Participation in helping others in the community is also more prevalent among men, Canadians with higher levels of education, and among both evangelical Christians and those who belong to non-Christian faiths. Participation rates are similar regardless of community size (urban and rural) or country of birth.

## ATTENDANCE AT LOCAL COMMUNITY MEETINGS.

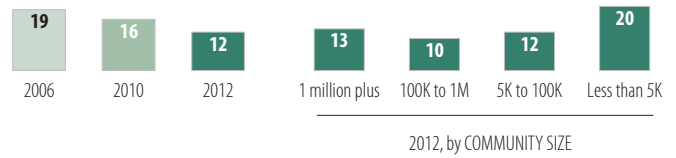
Town or city council meetings are important forums for learning and having a say about important local issues. A small proportion of Canadians attend such meetings in the community, and participation has declined since 2006. About one in ten Canadians (12%) indicated in 2012 that they attended a town meeting, city council meeting or other meeting in the last 12 months, compared with 19 percent in 2006 and 16 percent in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Attendance at town or city council meetings is most prevalent among Canadians living in smaller communities (population less than 5,000). Men are also twice as likely to attend these meetings as women (16% vs. 8%). Attendance is roughly the same throughout the provinces, as well as across income levels and age cohorts. Residents born elsewhere are equally as likely to attend these meetings as those born in Canada.

Canadians are more active in attending other types of meetings within the community, and participation rates have held largely steady since 2010. Roughly one in four (25%) attended a meeting of a *community improvement organization* in the past 12 months, and a slightly higher proportion attended meetings of a *religious organization* (29%); relatively few, however, attend such meetings more than once a month. Among Canadians with at least one child living in their household, 45 percent attended meetings of a *parents' association* in the past year. Reported attendance levels for these types of local meetings have held steady since 2010.

In all cases, attendance is more prevalent among Canadians with higher socio-economic status, as well as among those born outside of Canada. Attendance at religious meetings is most frequent among individuals identifying as evangelical Christians (58% report weekly attendance). Canadians who attend local community meetings are also more likely to be actively engaged in other areas of the community (e.g., requesting help from public officials or helping to solve community problems), as well as expressing a keener interest in politics.

## Attended town/city council meeting in the past year



## Attendance at community meetings in the past year

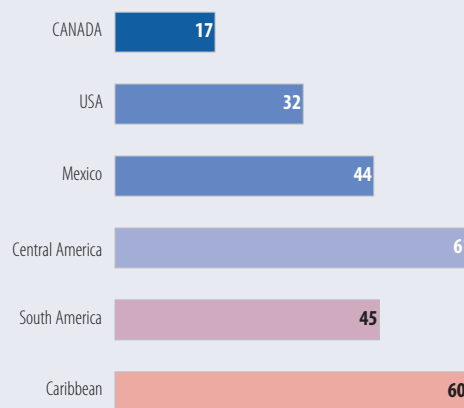


\* Those with children in household

## International comparison

Canadians' attendance at local town meetings and community improvement associations is average for the hemisphere, but is among the lowest when it comes to school parents' associations and religious organizations. By comparison, Americans are among the most active participants in local town meetings (along with residents of Haiti and the Dominican Republic).

## Attend religious meetings at least once a month



<sup>1</sup> Note possible mode effects between 2006 (where the survey was administered via telephone) and 2010 (online) – see Introduction for discussion of this methodological issue.

**CIVIC ACTION INDEX.** An index of “civic action” was created to provide a measure of citizens’ overall general level engagement in their communities. The index was created from seven specific local engagement actions reported on the survey (attended municipal meetings, helped solve local problems, follow the news daily, participated in demonstrations/protests, signed petitions, shared political information online and have an interest in politics).

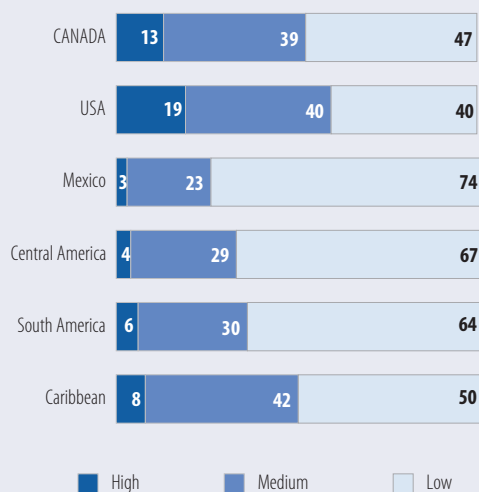
Canadians were categorized into one of three levels of civic action: high (13% of the population), medium (39%) and low (47%), based on the number of these actions reported on the survey. This index allows for a useful way by which to understand how attitudes and behaviours about such issues as democracy and politics are linked to individuals’ level of civic engagement.

Who in Canada is most likely to be in the high civic action group? These individuals are most likely identify as left on the political spectrum (29%), adhere to a non-Christian religious faith (29%) or live in Vancouver (22%). To a lesser extent this group is more likely to be male, under 30 years of age, hold a university degree, and live either in major urban centres or rural communities. Civic action scores do not vary by household income or place of birth.

### International comparison

The civic action index was also created for the other countries in the hemisphere (excepting Bolivia, one of the index items was not included on the survey). Canada (13%) and the USA (19%) have the highest proportion of citizens in the high civic action group, with the lowest proportions in such countries as Mexico (3%), Brazil (5%) and Jamaica (4%), where majorities fall into the “low civic action” group.

### Civic action index

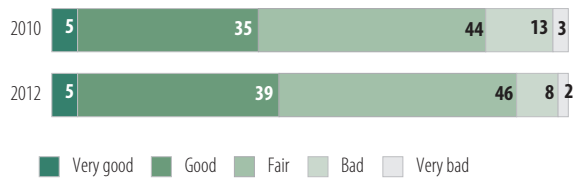


**QUALITY OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES.** A primary connection that many residents have with their community is through the services provided by their local municipality, including police, schools, waste disposal and public transit. Over the past decade, fiscal pressures have made it increasingly difficult for local governments to maintain consistent service levels.

Despite this trend, Canadians are generally satisfied with the services provided by their municipal government, and this sentiment has strengthened since 2010. Nearly half say that these services are either very good (5%) or good (39%), while only one in ten (10%) say they are bad or very bad. A plurality (46%) give somewhat faint praise in rating their local service quality as “fair.” Ratings of municipal services has gone up since 2010, when four in ten (40%) Canadians said services were either good or very good, while one in six (16%) said they were bad or very bad.

Satisfaction with municipal services is most prevalent among residents of Quebec, Canadians aged 60-plus and those with the most education, but no more than one-sixth in any group express clear dissatisfaction with the services provided by their municipality. Satisfaction does not vary depending on income, community size, or among different levels of active engagement in the community. Perceptions of community safety, however, play a large part in determining the quality of local services: Satisfaction is highest among people who say their neighbourhood is safe and not affected by gangs, and those who have not been the victim of a crime.

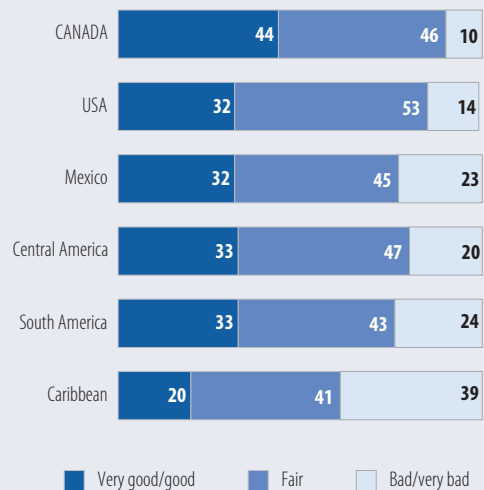
### Quality of local municipal services



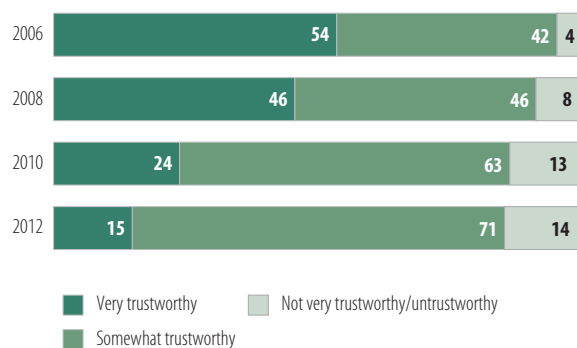
### International comparison

Canadians stand out as being among the most positive in the hemisphere about the services provided by their municipality. They are the second most likely to describe these services as very good or good (second only to Argentina), and are the least likely to say their municipal services are bad/very bad. The lowest levels of satisfaction are reported by residents of Haiti and Jamaica.

### Quality of local municipal services



## Trust people in your community

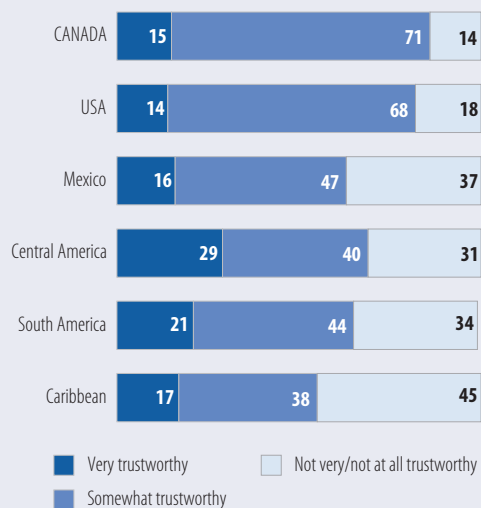


### International comparison

In terms of trust in ones neighbours, Canadians are generally comparable to other countries, but also less likely than any other to describe their neighbours as not very trustworthy/untrustworthy. Canadians' views are comparable to those of Americans and more positive than Mexicans. Residents in Central America are, on average, the most trusting, while Caribbean residents are the least positive – most notably in Haiti, where two-thirds consider their neighbours to be not very trustworthy or untrustworthy.

Since 2006, trust in neighbours has remained largely stable across most of the hemisphere, with the notable exception of declines in the USA and Canada.

### Trust in people in your community



## ARE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY TRUSTWORTHY?

A key indicator of connection to one's local community is the extent to which others are seen as trustworthy. Most Canadians place some degree of trust in their neighbours, but notably less so than in previous years. Nearly nine in ten Canadians say the people in their community are either very trustworthy (15%) or somewhat trustworthy (71%), compared with a small minority (14%) who believe they are not very trustworthy or untrustworthy. But strong trust in members of the community has fallen since 2006, when a majority of Canadians considered others in their community to be very trustworthy.<sup>2</sup>

Trust in community members is highest in the Atlantic provinces, where three in ten (28%) say members of their community are very trustworthy, in contrast to Quebec and British Columbia, where only one in ten (11% each) share this view. Residents of smaller, rural communities tend to be more trusting of their neighbours than residents of larger urban centres – except in Toronto, where trust levels are at the national average (and well above Montreal and Vancouver).

Trust in one's neighbours is also stronger among Canadians with higher levels of education and income, but does not vary by gender, religion or country of birth. Trust is also highest among older Canadians; however, the proportion of those aged 60-plus expressing high trust in their neighbours has declined more dramatically than among other age groups since 2010 (down 15 percentage points). Not surprisingly, strong trust of others coincides with perceptions of neighbourhood safety and trust in ones' municipal government.

The notable decline in community trust among Canadians (and Americans) suggests an important trend may be taking place, but awaits further corroboration from other research. The most recent national data from Statistics Canada on "sense of belonging to ones community" is from 2010, which shows a stable trend dating back to 2006. At the same time, the latest report from the new Canadian Index of Wellbeing reports a noticeable decline of 24 percent in Canadians overall wellbeing between 2008 and 2010, which the report concludes is driven in large part by a drop in living standards resulting from the recent economic recession.

<sup>2</sup> The significant drop in "very trustworthy" responses between 2006 and 2010 is likely due at least in part to the shift in mode from telephone to online surveys.

There are several trends that might help explain a declining sense of trust in ones neighbors, including increasing levels of immigration and ethnic diversity within the population, growing income inequality, and the shrinking number of families with young children (who often serve as important connectors to neighbours).

## Political engagement

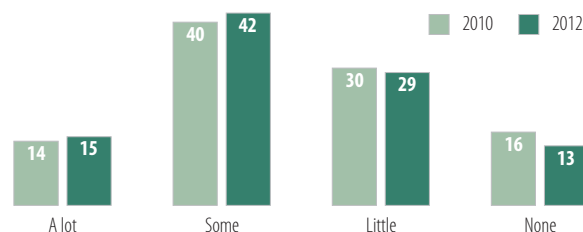
**GENERAL INTEREST IN POLITICS.** Most Canadians express a general interest in politics, with a majority expressing a lot (15%) or some (42%) interest, compared with those who express little (29%) or no (13%) interest in politics. These numbers are virtually identical to those measured in 2010. Strong interest in politics is most pronounced among Canadians high on the civic action index (54% say a lot of interest), as well as among men and older citizens, and least evident among Canadians under 30 and evangelical Christians. Interest levels do not vary by household income or political orientation.

Three in ten Canadians (28%) strongly agree they understand the most important political issues of the country (up from 22% who expressed this view in 2010), compared with only nine percent who strongly disagree (11% in 2010). This growing sense of strong understanding about Canadian politics over the past two years has taken place exclusively among Canadians 45 and older, and those 60-plus (38%) are now almost twice as likely to hold this view compared with those under 30 (20%). Across the country, strong understanding of important political issues is most evident among men, Canadians with at least some college education, those scoring high on the civic action index, those who show a lot of interest in politics, and those who identify clearly with either the left or right side of the political spectrum.

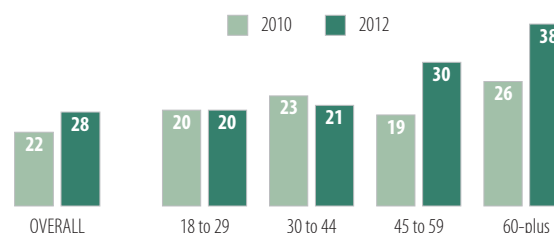
### International comparison

Within the hemisphere, Canadians are the most likely to describe themselves as having “some” interest in politics (versus a lot or little/none), although they are above average in their level of understanding of important domestic political issues. Americans stand out as expressing the strongest level of interest in politics (49%, versus only 20% who say little or none) and considering themselves to be well-informed. Interest in politics is considerably lower throughout most of Latin America, and in some countries three-quarters say their level of interest is little to none (e.g., Bolivia, Costa Rica, Chile, Haiti).

### Personal interest in politics

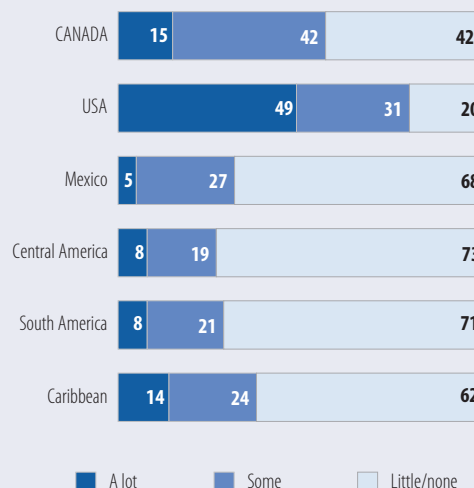


### You feel you understand the most important political issues of the country\*



\* 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)

### Personal interest in politics



## ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ISSUES.

To what extent are Canadians active in expressing their political views through collective efforts? A significant minority report making some efforts to do so, with more than four in ten (44%) having in the past 12 months signed a petition, shared political information online using social media (e.g., Facebook or Twitter), or participated in a demonstration or protest march.

**Signing petitions.** Of the three activities, signing a petition requires the least effort on the part of citizens and has the highest rate of participation, with one in three (33%) Canadians indicating they have signed one in the last 12 months. This action is by far most commonly reported by individuals on the left side of the political spectrum (56%), compared with those on the right (33%) and in the middle (30%). Petition signers are also somewhat more likely live in Atlantic Canada, have a university degree and be under 30 years of age.

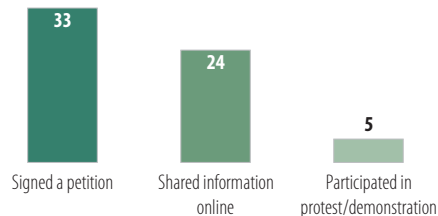
**Sharing political information with social media.** The emergence of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter has made it possible to share ideas and information like never before. As with signing a petition, sharing information on social networks is simple, but requires a bit more effort on the part of the user. One in four (24%) Canadians report having read or shared political information online using social media in the last 12 months. This group is notable in being younger (42% of those aged 18-29, compared to only 14% among those aged 60-plus) and leaning towards the left side of the political spectrum (39%). Sharing political information via social media does not vary noticeably by province, community size, education or household income.

### Participating in demonstrations and protest marches.

Participation in demonstrations and protest marches requires more effort and commitment. Only five percent of Canadians have taken part in such activities in the last 12 months, which is unchanged since 2010. Participation levels are highest among residents of Quebec (8%) and British Columbia (7%), and among Canadians under 30 (12%), as well as among both the least educated (less than high school, 9%) and the most educated (university degree, 8%).

Given the recent student strikes in Quebec, it should be no surprise that young Quebecers aged 18 to 29 are among the most likely in Canada to have participated in demonstrations

## Political actions taken in last 12 months



in the past year (16% in 2012 and 12% in 2010). The most active group, however, is youth in B.C. (19%, compared to 17% in 2010), likely reflecting the anti-HST movement in that province that led to a repeal of the unpopular tax.

Is it the same citizens who are involved in all three forms of political activism? In each case, participants are more likely to be under 30 years of age, left-leaning in their political orientation, and civically engaged in other ways. At the same time, these characteristics only partially define those who are politically active in these ways, and these activities are reported by Canadians from all segments of the population.

### International comparison

Canadians and Americans stand out as being the most politically active in engaging in petition signing and social media, although Americans are considerably more so (52% have signed petitions in the past year, and 42% have read or shared political information via social media). Across Latin America, roughly one in ten report either activity in the past year, although there is some regional variation (residents of Suriname and Uruguay are comparatively active via social media).

Participation in demonstrations and protest marches is comparatively uncommon across most of the hemisphere. Fewer than one in ten report such activity in the past year, with the exceptions of Haiti (18%), Bolivia (17%), Peru (13%) and Paraguay (12%).

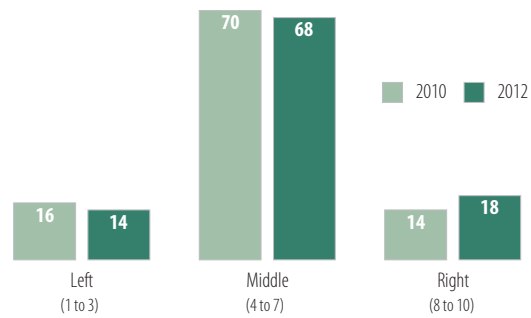


**GENERAL POLITICAL ORIENTATION.** Politics in the 20th century has long been defined along a “left-right” spectrum, and while this dialectic no longer dominates political thought, it still holds meaning. The Canadian public has been historically characterized as largely “centre-left” on this spectrum, but after six-plus years of a Conservative government in Ottawa, some commentators are suggesting that Canadians’ political orientation and values are shifting to the right.

Where do Canadians place themselves on this spectrum today? As in 2010, seven in ten Canadians consider themselves to be in the middle of the political spectrum (assigning a rating of 4 to 7 on a 10 point scale), with the remainder divided between those on the left (13%) (1 to 3) and those on the right (17%) (8 to 10). About one in ten (12%) were unable to place themselves on this spectrum, and were removed from the analysis.<sup>3</sup> Since 2010, there has been a minor shift (3 percentage points) from the left side of this spectrum to the right, with the majority remaining squarely in the middle.

The balance of political orientation is notably consistent across the population, with the majority in all groups identifying with the middle ground. A left political orientation is most evident among Quebecers (especially in Montreal), Canadians under 30 and those with no religious affiliation. Right-leaning Canadians are most likely to live in Alberta, be in the top income bracket and born outside of Canada. Those on the left are more likely to be actively engaged in their local community (29% with a high civic action index), compared with those on the right (16%) or in the middle (11%).

## General political orientation

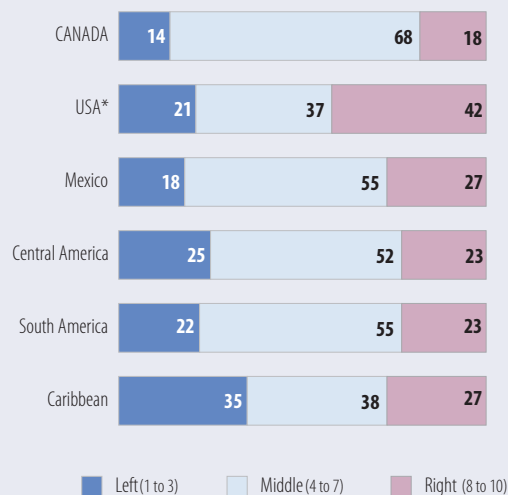


### International comparison

Across the hemisphere, the largest group of citizens place themselves broadly within the political centre, with representation marginally stronger on the right than on the left. Canadians stand out as being most likely to be in the middle (along with Peruvians and Argentinians). Americans, by contrast, are among the most politically polarized of all (only 37% are in the middle) and most heavily weighted on the right (at 42%, tied with citizens of the Dominican Republic).

In Central and South America, the majority place themselves in the centre, with an even balance between left and right regionally, but varying by country (Nicaragua, Guatemala and Uruguay shading to the left, with El Salvador, Colombia and Paraguay tilting to the right). Haitians stand out as being the most likely of any in the hemisphere to identify with the political left (46%).

### General political orientation



\* Data from Gallup (2012)

<sup>3</sup> The percentage of respondents who did not provide a response to the political orientation question were removed from the data and analysis, in order to facilitate comparison with the 2010 data (the 2010 survey did not offer a “decline to answer” option).

## Participation in the electoral process

**VOTING IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS.** Voting in elections is perhaps the most fundamental means of participating in a democratic system. And yet, there has been a noticeable decline in voter turnout in general elections in Canada for the past decade.

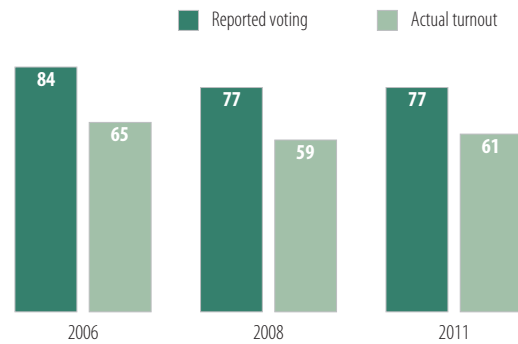
**Voter turnout in the last federal election.** Voting levels in the last several federal elections have been among the lowest recorded in Canada, and this downward trend is reflected in the reported voting levels. Three-quarters (77%) of eligible voters reported having voted in the last (May 2011) federal election, consistent with what was reported in 2008, but down from 2006 (84%). Reported voting levels have tracked consistently about 10 percent above the actual voting turnouts across the period.

In terms of who is most likely to vote, age is the most significant factor: Older Canadians are more likely to vote than young ones. Despite a small increase in turnout from 2010, only six in ten voters under 30 reported having voted in the last federal election, compared to nine in ten among those aged 60-plus. Reported voting in this election is also higher among civically-engaged Canadians, those with higher incomes and education, and those who place themselves on the left or right of the political spectrum (versus the middle). Reported voting does not vary across different provinces or by community size.

**Voting a duty or a choice?** The reasons for declining voter turnout are not fully understood, but some have suggested that citizens are now more likely to see voting as a choice (e.g., as just one of many consumer choices) rather than a civic duty (as a central requirement of citizenship). In fact, just over half (57%) of Canadians see voting as a duty, compared with more than four in ten (43%) who maintain it is a choice.

As with voting itself, views on this question are closely linked to age cohort. Older Canadians consider voting a duty, while younger Canadians consider it more of a choice. Across the country, seeing voting as a duty is somewhat more common among residents of Quebec (especially those in Montreal), as well as among Canadians with more education and those

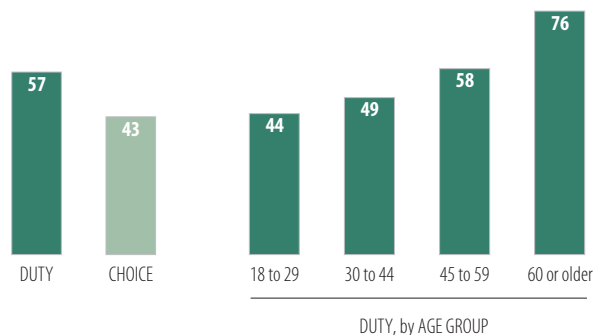
### Voting in last federal election



#### International comparison

Voting in the previous national election is reported by majorities in all countries, with the highest reported turnout numbers given by Americans (85%), and citizens of most South American countries (with Peru and Uruguay breaking the 90% threshold). Voting is least apt to be reported by those living in Honduras (51%), Paraguay (60%) and Jamaica (62%).

### Voting as a duty or a choice



high on civic action. Opinions on this question do not vary by gender, income, or whether individuals were born in Canada or elsewhere. Not surprisingly, attitudes toward voting are strongly linked to reported voting behaviour. Of those who consider voting a duty, 94 percent say they voted in the last federal election, compared to 60 percent among those who consider voting a choice.

<sup>4</sup> Research studies in Canada have consistently shown a greater proportion of eligible voters reporting to have voted in a particular election than was actually the case. Such over-reporting is due in part to social desirability (i.e., people wanting to present themselves in the most favourable light).

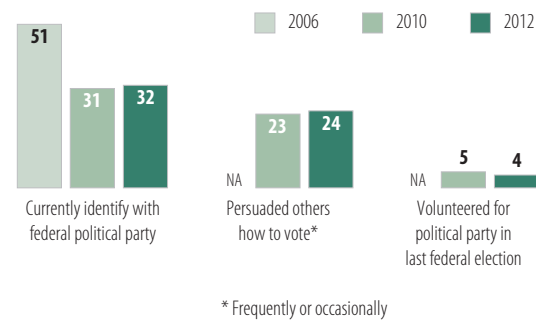
**PARTICIPATION IN PARTY POLITICS.** Beyond the simple act of voting, more active ways of participating in the political process include identifying with a particular party, volunteering one's time to work on election campaigns, and attempting to persuade others how to vote.

**Identifying with federal political party.** Identification with a federal political party used to be the norm in Canada, as most people readily identified as a Liberal, Conservative or NDP supporter (based on family history or group identification), but this is no longer so common. Only one-third (32%) of Canadians now identify with a federal political party, similar to the proportion indicating this in 2010, but down significantly from 2006, when half (51%) made such a declaration.

Federal party identification remains most common among older Canadians (41% of those aged 60-plus compared to only 24% for those under 30 years of age) and those with a college diploma (37%), as well as by those who place themselves on the left (45%) or right (47%) of the political spectrum (but understandably with very different parties). The likelihood claiming loyalty to a federal political party does not vary by province, community size or income.

**Persuading others to vote for a party or candidate.** Persuading others to vote a particular way is another way of being active in party politics. One in four Canadians say they either frequently (4%) or occasionally (20%) try to persuade others to vote for a party or candidate during election times, compared to those who rarely (29%) or never (47%) do so. These numbers remain essentially unchanged since 2010.

## Participation in party politics



Efforts to persuade others to vote for a party or candidate are most commonly reported by Canadians who identify with a particular party, those high on civic action, those who place themselves on either the left or the right of the political spectrum, those with more education and those who live in larger communities.

**Working for political parties.** One of the most active ways of participating in the political process is to volunteer for parties during elections. A small (4%) proportion of Canadians belong to this group of active individuals, similar to 2010 (5%).

Party volunteer work is most commonly reported (not surprisingly) by Canadians who score highly on civic action (12%), those who identify with a political party (8%) and also among evangelical Christians (10%). Participation levels are consistent across province and community size, as well as by age, education and household income.

## International comparison

Citizen identification with a national political party varies significantly across the hemisphere. Canadians fall well below average, but are similar to Mexicans and the regional average for Central and South America, followed by Nicaragua (54%) and Uruguay (53%). U.S. citizens (63%) are among the most likely to identify with a party, along with those living in the Dominican Republic (63%), while fewer than one in six citizens of Guatemala (13%) and Chile (14%) do so.

There is less variation in the incidence of persuading others how to vote or volunteering for a political party in the last national election. Once again, Americans are among the most active (almost half say they have done so at least occasionally), while Canadians are roughly at the average for the hemisphere.

## Identify with national political party

