

# Civic and Political Engagement

## Local Community Engagement

### REQUESTING HELP FROM LOCAL PUBLIC

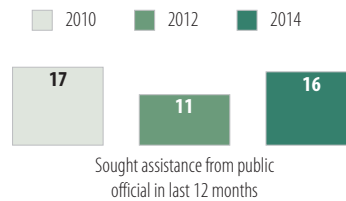
**OFFICIALS.** Rob Ford, Toronto's Mayor from 2010 to 2014, made a point of saying he always returned citizens' phone calls requesting help. One indication of trust in local government and engagement in the local community is the extent to which Canadians are reaching out for assistance from local public officials.

Overall, a distinct minority of Canadians are requesting assistance from local governments. About one in six (16%) have asked for assistance from a local public official or local government during the past 12 months. This is greater than the one in ten (11%) reporting having done so in 2012 and about the same as the number in 2010 (17%).

Requests for assistance were more prevalent among residents of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and those living in communities with a population of less than 5,000 (both 20%), as well as among the university-educated (22%), individuals for whom religion is very important (26%) and non-Christians (22%).

Perhaps contradictorily both individuals who express a federal voting preference for the NDP (22%) and those on the right of the political spectrum (27%) are among the most likely to have reported such contact with local officials. All of these groups were more likely to report such contact than in 2012.

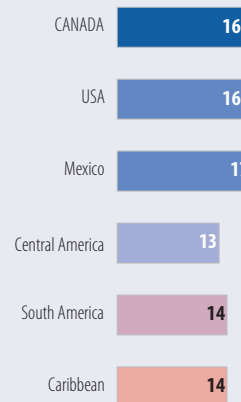
### Sought assistance from local public officials in last 12 months



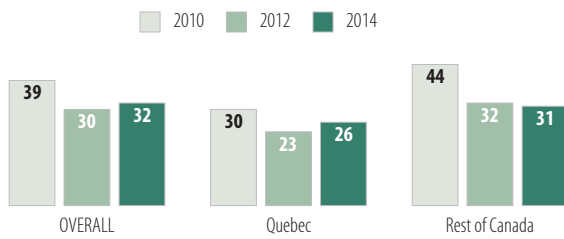
### International comparison

The incidence of requesting help from public officials in the previous 12 months is similar across the Americas, with the hemispheric average up two percentage points from 2012. Such efforts are now more likely to be reported in Nicaragua (22%, up 8 points since 2012) and Uruguay (23%, up 7), while declining in Haiti (to 11%, down 11) and Guyana (8%, down 6).

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



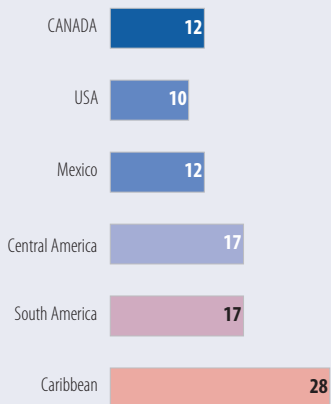
## Helped solve local community problem in last year



### International comparison

Canadians' efforts to help solve community problems at least once or twice a month in the past year is comparable to levels reported in the US and Mexico, but below that of other regions, especially in the Caribbean countries of Haiti (32%), Dominican Republic (24%) and Jamaica (23%). Since 2012, such efforts have increased most noticeably in Belize, Panama, Ecuador, Brazil, Paraguay and Chile, while declining in Trinidad and Tobago.

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



**HELPING TO SOLVE LOCAL PROBLEM.** Another key component of civic engagement is the initiative demonstrated by Canadians within their local communities as they work to solve local problems. In comparison with requesting help from local government, Canadians are more likely to report efforts to help solve problems in their local community.

Over three in ten (32%) report helping to find solutions to problems in their community at least once in the past 12 months, roughly similar to the level recorded in 2012, but down from 2010. A smaller proportion (12%) report engaging in this type of volunteer activity on a regular basis (at least once a month).

Residents of Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are among those more likely to have helped solve local problem. Quebecers residents are less likely to have done so, but show an increase since 2012 (along with residents of Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan), while participation is down in Alberta and B.C.

Participation in civic problem solving varies directly by age, as those under 45 are more likely to engage with their community than older age groups. Active community involvement is also more likely on the part of the university-educated, those for whom religion is very important (particularly evangelical Christians and those who belong to non-Christian faiths), and among those on the political right.

### ATTENDANCE AT LOCAL COMMUNITY MEETINGS.

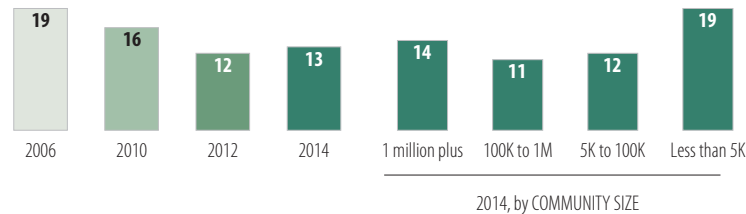
Meetings of city and town councils offer citizens an opportunity to gain information on local issues and to have a say in decisions made about those issues. Relatively few (13%) Canadians in 2014 report having attended a **town meeting, city council meeting or other types of civic meetings** in the past 12 months. This is comparable to the 2012 level (12%), but represents a decline since 2010 (16%) and 2006 (19%).<sup>1</sup>

Attendance at town or city council meetings is about the same in all provinces but more prevalent among Canadians living in communities with less than 5,000 population, as in 2012. Attendance at these meetings is reported most frequently by men, younger people, the university educated, those with household incomes above \$100,000, and individuals on the right of the political spectrum, representing an increase from 2012 in all cases except men.

Canadians are more likely to attend other types of community meetings in the previous 12 months, including those with **community improvement organizations** (25%) and those with **religious organizations** (31%). In both cases attendance levels are unchanged from 2012. Among Canadians with at least one child living in their household, 50 percent attended meetings of a parents' association in the past year, up from 45 percent in 2012.

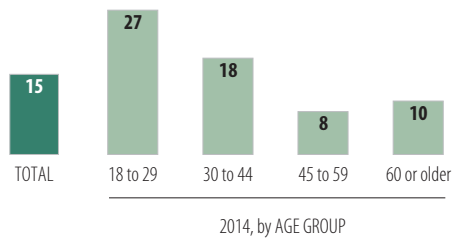
Attendance at meetings of community improvement and religious organizations is more characteristic of residents with a university education, individuals born outside Canada and those on the political right. Religious attendance is most frequent on the part of individuals describing themselves as evangelical Christians (55% report weekly attendance).

Attended town/city council meeting in the past year



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

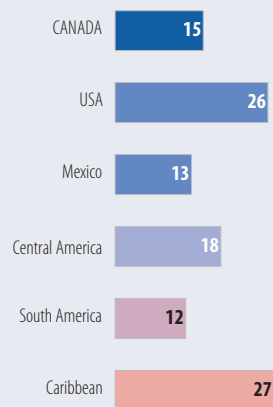
### Attended meetings of political party/ organization in past year



#### International comparison

Canadians' participation in meetings with political parties or organizations matches the hemispheric average, but there is considerable variation across countries. Attendance at such meetings in the past year is reported by a quarter or more of people living in the USA, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (which has the highest proportion at 34%). By contrast, fewer than one in ten has attended such meetings in the past year in Costa Rica, Peru, Chile and Argentina.

### Attended meetings of political party/ organization in past year



### MEETINGS OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS.

Concern about low political participation among Canadians has been growing in recent years as voter turnout at elections has declined. A new question on the 2014 survey measured citizens' engagement in politics through their attendance at political meetings.

The findings reflect the low participation in electoral turnout, with just 15 percent of Canadians attending meetings of a political party or organization in the past year. Participation is noticeably higher among Canadians under 30 years of age (27%), as well as citizens with a university education (23%), and those for whom religion is very important. In no group, however, do more than one in ten report attending political party or organization meetings more than once or twice in the past 12 months.

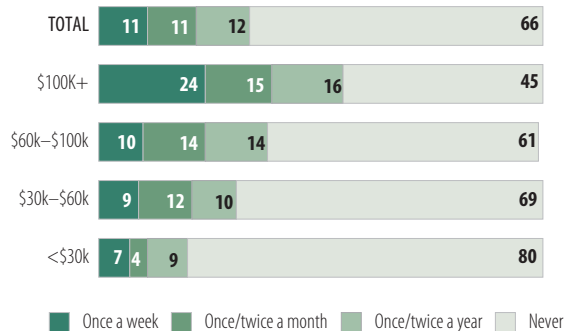
**PARTICIPATION IN GROUP SPORTS.** “Social capital” is the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks, and the underlying premise is that “the people who do better are better connected.” This principle also applies at the aggregate level, in terms of mutual trust and reciprocity among groups and individuals. Social capital might be considered an essential “lubricant” that makes it possible for societies to function and for people to get along peacefully even when they have little else in common. It is now widely recognized that sport serves as a means of building social capital (Skinner, et.al., 2008), with evidence published from a number of countries.<sup>2</sup>

The 2014 survey included a new question to measure active participation in sports (e.g. team sports) as an indicator of social capital. Overall, one in three (34%) Canadians reports having participated as a player with other people in the practice of a sport in the past year, with one in ten (11%) doing so about once a week.

Not surprisingly, frequent participation is most evident among Canadians under 45, men, and those with household incomes of \$100,000 or more. By comparison, such participation is lowest among Quebecers and rural residents, as well as among low income residents and those living in rural areas (eight in ten among these latter groups never did so over the past year).

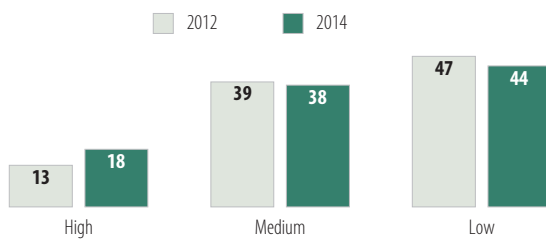
## Participation/player in team sport in past year

By household income



<sup>2</sup> Skinner, J., Zakus, D. & Cowell, J. (2008). Development through sport: Building social capital in disadvantaged communities. *Sport Management Review*, 11, 253-275.

## Civic Action Index



**CIVIC ACTION INDEX.** An index of “civic action” was created to provide a measure of citizens’ overall level of 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). This index offers 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.

Canadians were categorized into one of three levels of civic action: high (18% of the population), medium (38%) and low (44%), based on the number of these actions reported on the survey. These proportions reflect an overall aggregate increase in civic activity from 2012, with the high action group increasing by five percentage points.

Canadians most likely to be in the high civic action group include those on both the left (28%) and the right (30%) of the political spectrum, those under 30 years of age (26%), those who hold a university degree (29%), and for whom religion is very important (30%). Low civic engagement is most evident in the three Prairie provinces, among rural residents and lower income Canadians.

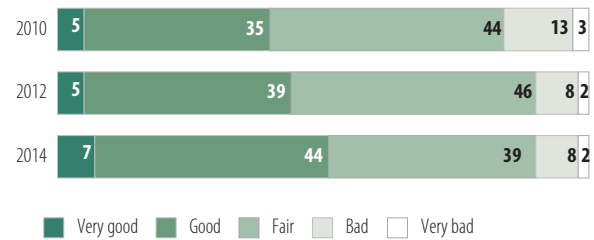
Growth in the high civic action category is evident across most of the population but is most significant among Canadians on the political right (up 14 points since 2012, compared with a 1 point drop among those on the left). Such increase is also more evident among Canadians under 30 (up 9 points), those with a university degree (up 11) and those born outside the country (up 9).

**QUALITY OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES.** A key priority for many residents is the services provided by their local municipality, including public transit, schools, water supply and waste disposal, and police and fire services. Across Canada, local governments have faced increasing pressures to balance citizens' desire for high quality municipal services against expectations for low taxes and balanced budgets.

Despite heated debates and controversy over service delivery in many cities, Canadians are more likely than not to express satisfaction with the services provided by their municipal government, and this sentiment has been growing since 2010. Half of citizens now rate their municipal services as very good (7%) or good (44%) (up 7 percentage points from 2012), with another four in ten (39%) describing these services as "fair." As in 2012, one in ten rate municipal services in their community to be bad (8%) or very bad (2%).

Satisfaction with municipal services is notably consistent across the country, with positive views most widely expressed among Canadians with the highest levels of education and income. In no group, however, does more than one in six describe local services as bad. Citizen satisfaction with municipal services has increased since 2012 across all groups but most significantly among top income earners, Canadians aged 30 to 44, residents of mid-sized cities, and residents of Ontario and Alberta.

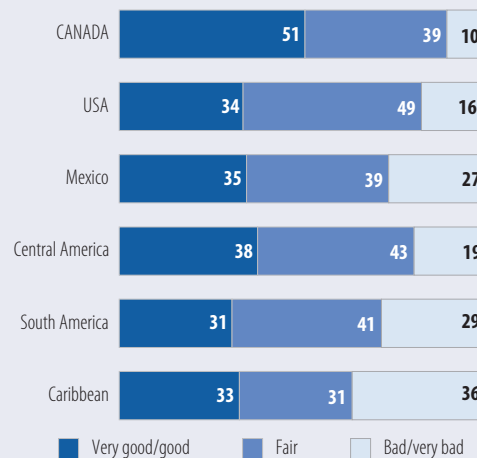
### Quality of local municipal services



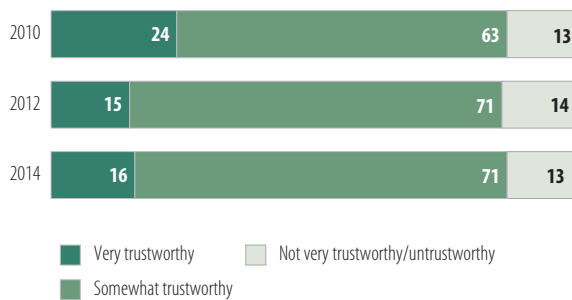
### International comparison

As in 2012, Canadians stand out as being among the most positive in the hemisphere about the services provided by their municipality. Ratings of very good or good have increased across much of the Americas over the past two years, most significantly in Panama (48%, up 26 points) and Haiti (34%, up 26), while declining modestly in the larger South American countries of Brazil (26%, down 5) and Argentina (46%, down 4). Municipal services are least apt to be seen as very good or good in Venezuela (25%), Peru (22%) and Jamaica (21%), although ratings in all three countries have increased marginally since 2012.

### Quality of local municipal services



## Trust in people in your community



## ARE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY TRUSTWORTHY?

An important benchmark of a local community's strength is the extent to which people see others as trustworthy. Most Canadians place some degree of trust in their neighbours, although relatively few do so unreservedly.

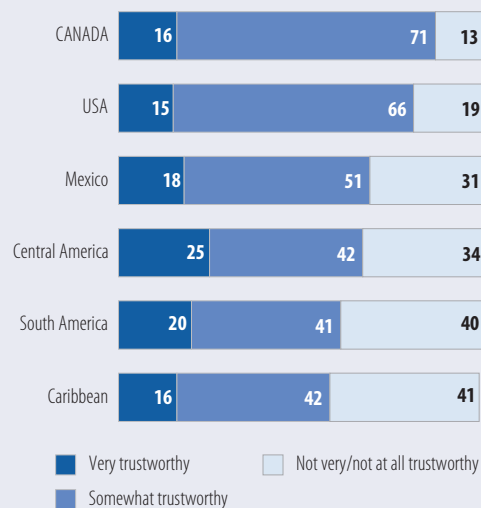
One in six (16%) say people in their community are very trustworthy, while most (71%) consider them to be "somewhat" trustworthy. Levels of reported trust are unchanged from two years ago, but lower than in 2010 when one in four (24%) said people in their community were very trustworthy.

As in 2012, trust in ones neighbours is strongest in Atlantic Canada and weakest in Quebec, with other provinces falling in between. This sentiment is also stronger among Canadians whose religious faith is Protestant and for whom religion is important. Trust is somewhat weaker in larger cities (notably Montreal), and among those with less education and income, as well as among individuals expressing dissatisfaction with their life overall (as in 2012). Over the past two years, trust in others has strengthened among Canadians 60 and older, after declining between 2010 and 2012.

### International comparison

Canadians are generally comparable to the hemispheric average in terms of viewing their neighbours as very trustworthy, but much less likely than people in other countries to consider them untrustworthy. A strong sense of trust is most widely expressed in most of Central America, along with people in Paraguay (40% say very trustworthy), Chile (31%) and Uruguay (30%). By comparison, this assessment is least evident in Peru (6%) and Jamaica (11%). The proportion who see their neighbours as untrustworthy is most prevalent in Haiti (51%); but this reflects a significant improvement from 2012 when 66% expressed this view, followed by Brazil (47%) and Peru (45%).

## Trust in people in your community





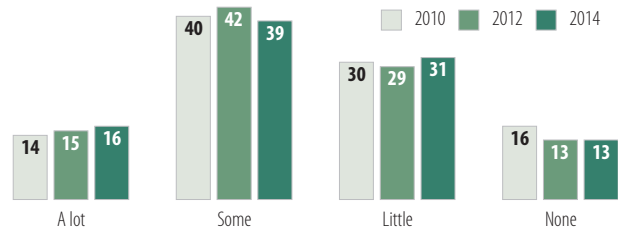
## Political Engagement

**GENERAL INTEREST IN POLITICS.** A majority of Canadians express a general interest in politics with one in six (16%) stating they have “a lot of interest”, while an additional 39 percent say they have “some” interest. This compares to those who have little (31%) or no (13%) interest in politics. These results are largely unchanged since 2010.

A strong interest in politics is most likely to be expressed by better educated Canadians, men, those on both the left and right along the political spectrum, and those for whom religion is very important. Reported level of interest in politics is consistent across supporters of the different Federal political parties, and notably lower among those without a party preference. Not surprisingly, the group most apt to be closely following politics are those high on the civic action index (51%, compared with only 1% among those with a low index score).

Another indicator of political interest is the extent to which Canadians follow the news. Seven in ten (72%) Canadians say they follow the news on a daily basis, compared with just five percent who rarely or never do so. Reported levels of interest in the news is about the same as in 2012. Those most apt to follow the news regularly include Quebecers, and those on the political right. Older Canadians are more likely than younger age groups to follow the news daily, but once again this gap is somewhat lower than in 2012.

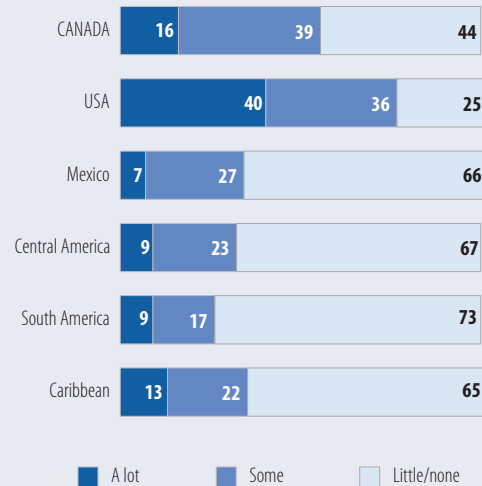
### Personal interest in politics



### International comparison

Canadians fall somewhere in the middle in terms of their general interest in politics. They are somewhat below the average in expressing a lot of interest in politics, but are less likely than citizens of other countries to have little or no interest. Americans continue to stand out as having the greatest interest in politics, but this proportion has declined noticeably since 2012 (to 40%, down 9 points). Three-quarters or more of citizens living in Brazil, Peru, Haiti and Guyana say they have little or no interest in politics.

### Personal interest in politics

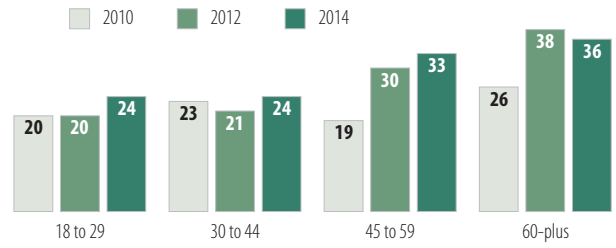


Three in ten (29%) Canadians strongly agree that they understand the most important political issues in the country, about the same level as in 2012 but up from 2010. By comparison, fewer than one in ten (8%) continue to strongly disagree.

Strong agreement about understanding the country's most important political issues is most characteristic of men, Canadians with a university degree, those earning incomes above \$100,000, those with a clear political orientation (left or right), and those who are very religious. Reported understanding of issues increases along with age cohort, but the gap between young and old has narrowed over the past two years.

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

By Age group



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

## ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ISSUES.

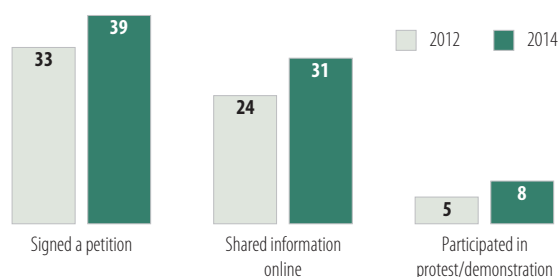
Opportunities to participate in politics are wide-ranging. How active are Canadians in directly expressing their political views? A majority say they have made at least some effort to do so in the past 12 months, having signed a petition, shared political information online using social media such as Facebook or Twitter, or participated in a demonstration or protest march. Political activity in all three forms was notably higher in 2014 than 2012, with the net level of participation (engagement in at least one of the three forms) now at 52 percent of Canadians (up from 44% in 2012).

**Signing petitions.** One of the most common and easiest forms of political engagement involves signing petition (especially now that most petitions are signed online). This type of action is most frequently reported by Canadians under 30 years of age, those with higher levels of education, those with no religion, and those on the left of the spectrum (57%). Increased activity since 2012 is evident across most groups, but most significant among Canadians on the political right (45%, up 12 points), as well as residents of B.C., Alberta and Quebec.

**Sharing political information on social media.** Political activity on the Internet is growing rapidly, especially on social media on sites like Twitter and Facebook where it is possible to share ideas and information and engage in political advocacy. Three in ten (31%) Canadians now report this type of activity (up from 24% in 2012). This type of engagement is most popular among younger Canadians, those with a university degree and those politically aligned on the right or the left. Those under the age of 30 (45%) are more than twice as likely to use social media for political expression as those 60 and over (19%). Growth in the use of social media is growing rapidly across most of the population, but most noticeably among those 30 to 44 and those on the political left (up 26 points since 2012).

**Participating in demonstrations and protest marches.** Given the greater commitment of time and energy entailed, participating in demonstrations or protest marches inevitably is confined to a small minority. Nevertheless conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine in 2014 prompted demonstrations and marches in Canada. Even UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon participated in a New York march to urge action on climate change.

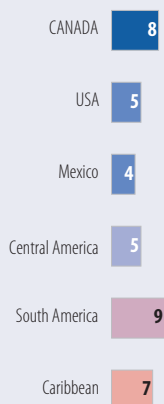
## Political actions taken in last 12 months



### International comparison

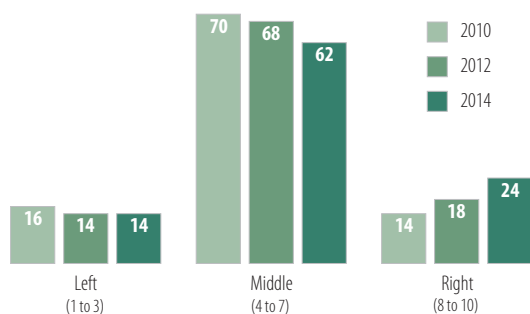
Canada is at the hemispheric average in terms of its citizens engaging in demonstrations and marches over the past year. This form of political action is most commonly reported in Paraguay (15%) and Bolivia (14%), and least common in Guatemala (2%) and El Salvador (3%). Since 2012, protest activity has increased noticeably in Venezuela (to 12%, up 8 points), while declining in Haiti (to 7%, down 11).

### Participated in demonstration/march in past year



Given this context, it may not be surprising that close to one in ten (8%) Canadians report having participated in such events in the past year, up from five percent in 2012 and 2010. Such activity is most likely to be reported by residents of B.C. (13%), Canadians under 30 (14%), those with a university degree (13%) and those on both the political right (15%) and left (12%). Participation has increased across much of the population since 2012, but most noticeably in Atlantic Canada and B.C., in smaller communities, those with a university education and those on the political right.

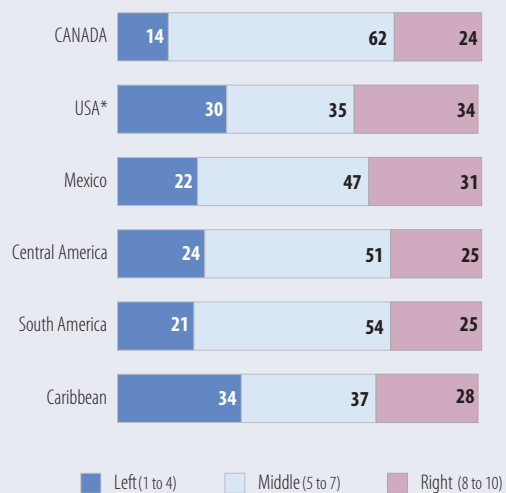
## General political orientation



### International comparison

As in 2012, Canadians are among the most likely to place themselves in the middle of the political spectrum, along with citizens of Peru, Argentina and Bolivia. Americans remain the most politically polarized, and also to identify with the political right, along with people living in Honduras, Venezuela, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic. Identification with the political left is most prevalent in Belize, Haiti and Nicaragua. Since 2012, political identification has shifted noticeably to the left in Belize, El Salvador, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia and Jamaica, while the opposite trend has taken place in Honduras, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. Over the past two years, polarization in both directions is evident in Mexico and Costa Rica.

### General political orientation



\* Data from Gallup (2014) - uses terms liberal, mixed and conservative

**GENERAL POLITICAL ORIENTATION.** The terms “left” and “right” have a political history dating to the aftermath of the French revolution and the seating patterns that event produced in the National Assembly. It became a convention in politics in the 20th century to define political views along a “left-right” spectrum even though the complexities of the modern world suggest it is an over-simplified conception of political differences. Nonetheless the terms “left, right and centre” have been commonly used to describe and analyze Canadian political thought. Generally Canadians have been thought of as being on the “centre-left.” But since 2006, the country has been led by a Conservative government that some have described as the most “right wing” in Canada’s history.

As in the two previous surveys, a majority (62%) of Canadians place themselves in the middle of the political spectrum (a rating of 4 to 7 on a 10 point scale). One in four (24%) say they are on the right (ratings of 8 to 10), while a smaller group (14%) identify with the political left (ratings of 1 to 3).<sup>3</sup> These latest results reveal a noticeable shift to the right over the past two years (a 6 percentage point move from the middle to the right), escalating a smaller shift between 2010 and 2012.

Left-right political orientation cannot be easily predicted based on group membership, but there are some noticeable, and in most cases predictable, patterns. Canadians on the left of the spectrum are more likely to be under 30 years of age, have a university education, support the NDP, and have no religious affiliation. The political right is most apt to be represented by men, Canadians in the top income bracket, immigrants and Conservative Party supporters.

The shift to the right since 2012 is evident across most groups, but most noticeably in B.C. and Quebec (while declining in Alberta), and among Canadians under 30. Citizens on both the left and right are more likely than those in the middle to be civically engaged, but since 2012 this involvement has increased significantly among those on the right (rising from 20% to 36%), while declining on the left (from 25% to 20%).

3 The percentage of respondents who did not provide a response to this 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.

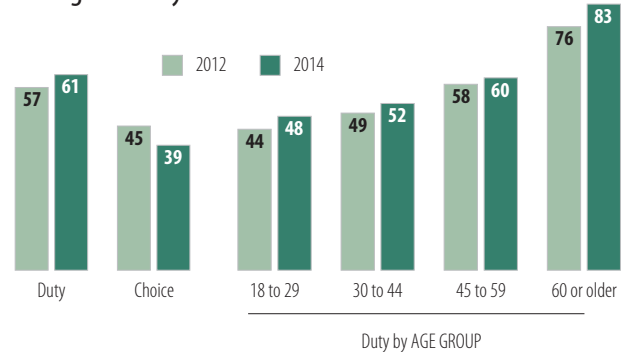
Voting in elections is the fundamental standard which defines representative democracies such as Canada. Although it is a normative value, voter turnout has largely been in decline for the past decade in Canada. Declining voter participation was confirmed in 2014 as turnout declined in two out of three provincial elections conducted this year, in Quebec and New Brunswick. Although the participation rate increased slightly in Ontario's 2013 election, this represented just a modest improvement (from 49% to 52% voter turnout), well below that of the other two provinces.

**Is voting a duty or a choice?** The reasons for the decline in turnout are thought to be the consequence of multiple factors, one of which is that the act of voting is increasingly considered an option (similar to choices one makes as a consumer) rather than a civic duty and obligation of citizenship.

Declining voter turnout notwithstanding, a clear majority (61%) of Canadians say voting is a duty (compared with those who say it is a choice (39%), reflecting a modest increase since 2012. As before, opinions on this issue are shaped by generation: Most Canadians 60 and older consider voting to be a civic duty, while fewer than half who are under 30 share this view. However, the latest increase in belief in voting as a duty is evident across all age cohorts.

Viewing voting as a duty is most evident in Quebec and among Canadians with higher levels of education and income, while least so among those who do not support any federal political party. Since 2012, this view has increased most noticeably among rural residents, Canadians with more education and income, immigrants, those in the middle of the political spectrum.

Voting as a duty or a choice



**Mandatory voting.** One reform proposed to address declining voter turnout is to make voting mandatory. Several countries enforce compulsory voting including Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru in the Americas.<sup>4</sup> The nation with the constitutional system most similar to Canada that practices compulsory voting is Australia. In most cases non-voting there is subject to a fine of 20 Australian dollars (similar in value to the Canadian dollar). Although Australia has had compulsory voting since 1924, it has faced a small decline voter turnout during the past decade, although its participation rate is much higher than Canada's. Its most recent election in 2013 had a turnout of 79.7<sup>5</sup> percent compared to Canada's turnout of 61.1 percent in the 2011 Federal Election.

While mandatory voting is now well established in other countries, it is not a popular concept in Canada. Only four in ten (41%) would favour making it mandatory for citizens to vote in federal elections, compared with 59 percent who oppose such a policy.

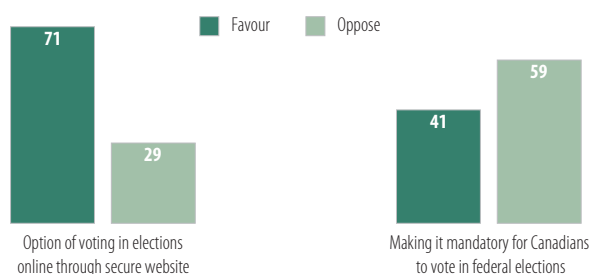
Opposition is the majority view across most of the population, and especially among rural residents, older Canadians and those who do not support any federal

party. Support is most evident among Montreal residents, Canadians under 30 (despite being the generation most apt to view voting as a choice), immigrants, those with a university degree, those on the political right, and those with high civic engagement.

**Online voting.** Voting online is currently a reality in a few municipal jurisdictions in Canada, including Peterborough and Markham (both in Ontario) and Halifax, Nova Scotia. Many widely expect that online voting will eventually become more widespread over time, but concerns remain about potential risks to the integrity of the voting process, including violation of privacy of the individual ballot, assurance that the electoral process remains free from interference, and that the vote count is accurate.

A large majority (71%) of Canadians support the idea that voters in Canada should have the option of voting in elections online through a secure website. Support is widespread across the country, but is most evident among citizens under the age of 45, those with university degrees, and especially among those born outside of Canada (80%). This view is least apt to be shared by Quebecers, and Canadians with less education and income.

### Support for changes to voting procedures



4 There are other countries in the Americas that nominally have compulsory voting where it is not enforced. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: [http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory\\_voting.cfm](http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm) Accessed September 29 at 13:40.

5 <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=AU> Accessed September 29 at 13:45