

# Halifax Perceptions of Change Survey



How residents of Atlantic Canada perceive change, and whether or not they are open to it, is a question of pressing social and policy importance. The region has been experiencing some of the most profound economic, social, cultural, physical, and environmental changes in recent Canadian history. However, a lack of data on the region has hampered the ability to systematically examine those changes and public perceptions of them.

For this reason, the Perceptions of Change project was launched at Dalhousie University, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In consultation with colleagues at Memorial University, University of New Brunswick, McMaster University, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, and Western University, a team of researchers at Dalhousie conducted a telephone survey of Halifax residents in the spring of 2017. The purpose of this survey was to assess what changes Haligonians have observed over the last five to 10 years, both in their own neighbourhoods and the city as a whole, and to better understand how they feel about those changes.

Overall, survey results show that Haligonians are quick to note changes to the built environment, recognizing widespread construction and infrastructure renewal over the last five to 10 years. They also observe improvement in the city's economy, as well as increased social and cultural diversity. At the same time, Haligonians are more divided in their perceptions of change in the natural environment, and less clear about changes occurring at the neighbourhood level. Even so, when they do see changes in these areas, they usually perceive them in a positive light.

Executive summary:

- Haligonians identified changes to the built environment as the biggest changes in the city.
- Fifty-four percent of participants believed the city's overall economic conditions had improved. Fewer reported economic improvements in their neighbourhoods, and the majority disagreed that their neighbourhoods had become more affordable.
- The majority of participants believed the city had become more diverse and has more senior citizens. These changes were also observed at the neighbourhood level.
- On average, Haligonians believed that 53% of their neighbours share similar values and beliefs, and, in general, they reported high levels of "fitting in" to their neighbourhoods.
- Ninety-nine percent of participants noted the construction of new buildings and homes in their city, and 73% within their neighbourhoods.
- The majority of participants believed that their neighbourhood facilities and amenities were sufficient, but they were divided on whether or not facilities and amenities had improved.
- The majority of participants reported no change in the condition of buildings and houses or in the prevalence of rental housing in their neighbourhoods.
- Perceptions of changes in the natural environment, both in the city and in participants' neighbourhoods, were mixed. The majority reported no change to air quality, but there was an even split in perceptions of change in water quality and in the number of green spaces.
- Perceptions of the ethnocultural make-up of Halifax neighbourhoods were similar to the figures reported in 2016 Census data for the city overall. Participants estimated higher numbers of residents with low incomes and unemployed residents in their neighbourhoods than census data reports for the city as a whole, and they estimated a lower prevalence of rental housing.

**MOST NOTICEABLE CHANGES**

When Haligonians were asked to identify the biggest changes in the city over the last five to 10 years, the top five changes mentioned were construction/development, buildings, housing/apartments, infrastructure, and the downtown/waterfront area.

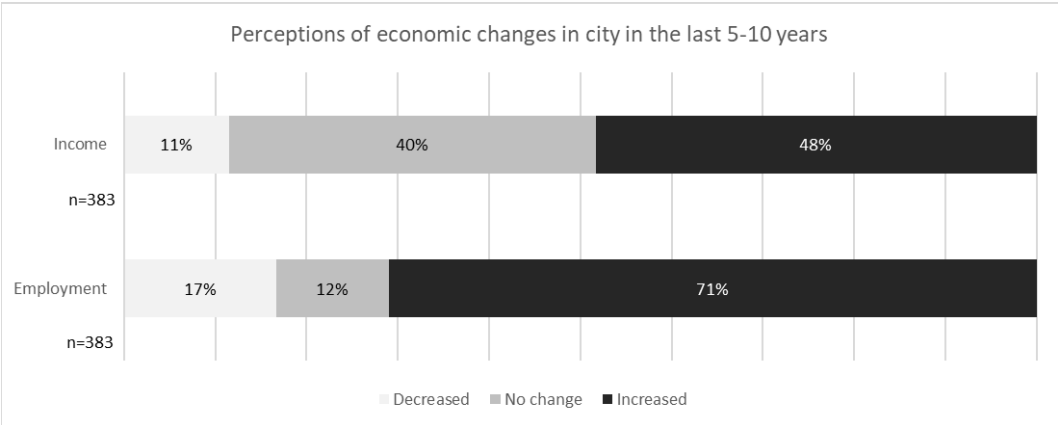
Top Five Most Noticeable Changes in Halifax		
1	Construction/Development	162 35%
2	Buildings	107 23%
3	Housing/Apartments	98 21%
4	Infrastructure	66 14%
5	Downtown/Waterfront	66 14%
n=465		

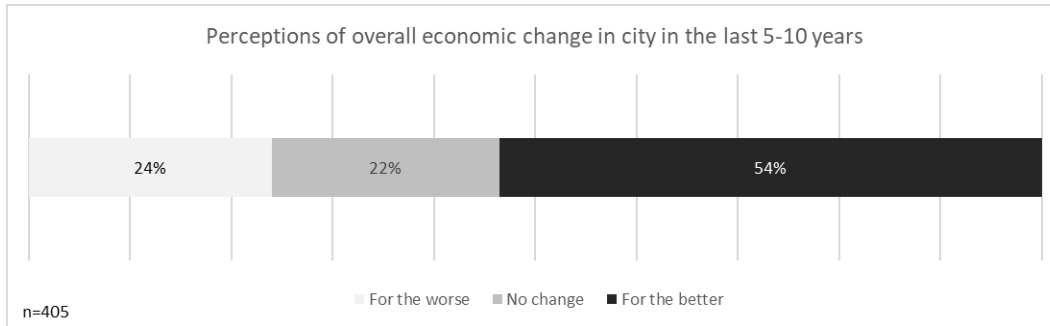
Thirty-five percent of participants in Halifax broadly referred to **construction and development** in the city. Similarly, 23% discussed **buildings**, remarking especially on new buildings as well as renovations to existing structures. Twenty-one percent of participants discussed **housing and apartments**, with many specifically mentioning new apartments and condos being built. Clearly, Haligonians are observing many changes to the built environment; these changes were by far the most popular themes raised by survey participants in the city.

**Infrastructure**, including road and highway construction, was discussed by 14% of participants. Fourteen percent discussed changes to the **downtown and waterfront** area, including development in the area and changes to downtown businesses. Finally, while it was not one of the top five themes discussed, 13.8% of Haligonians surveyed also mentioned growth in the population and size of the city.

**ECONOMIC CHANGES**

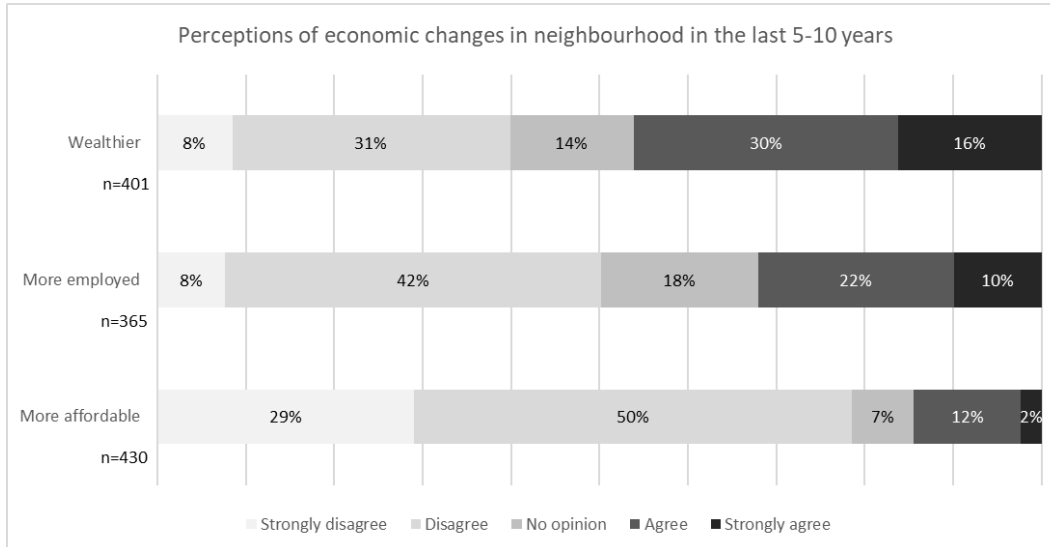
When participants were asked about economic changes in the city, 48% of Haligonians surveyed observed an increase in the average income and 71% noted higher rates of employment. When asked about their overall perception of economic changes in the city, 54% of participants reported seeing change for the better.



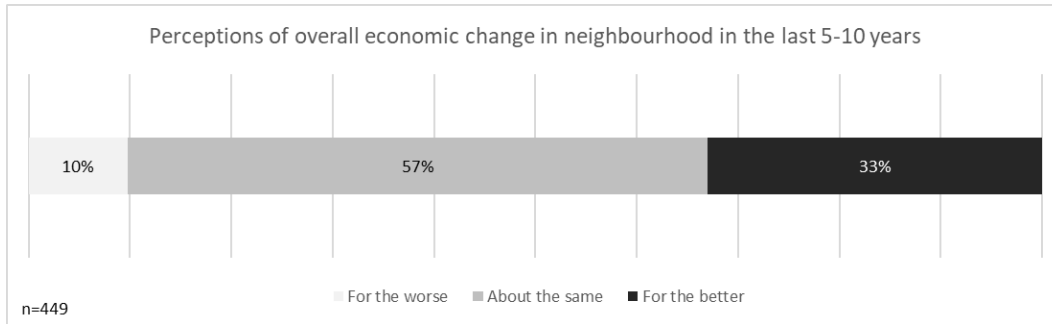


Survey participants were also asked about economic factors within their neighbourhoods. On average, they estimated neighbourhood unemployment rates at 11%, and they estimated that 23% of their neighbourhoods' residents had low incomes. These values are both higher than the 7% unemployment rate and 10% low-income rate estimates for Halifax as a whole provided by Statistics Canada based on the 2016 Census.

Participants were asked their level of agreement to questions about economic changes in their neighbourhoods. Forty-six percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that people in their neighbourhood were wealthier compared to five to 10 years earlier. When asked if more people were employed compared to five to 10 years before, 32% agreed or strongly agreed. Just 14% agreed or strongly agreed that their neighbourhood had become more affordable over the same period, while 79% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

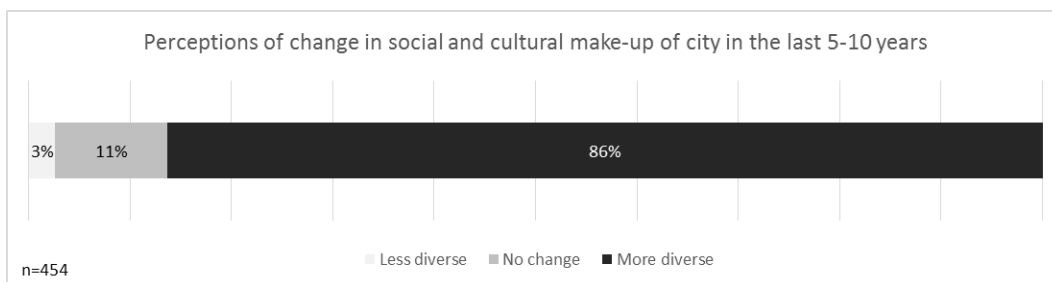
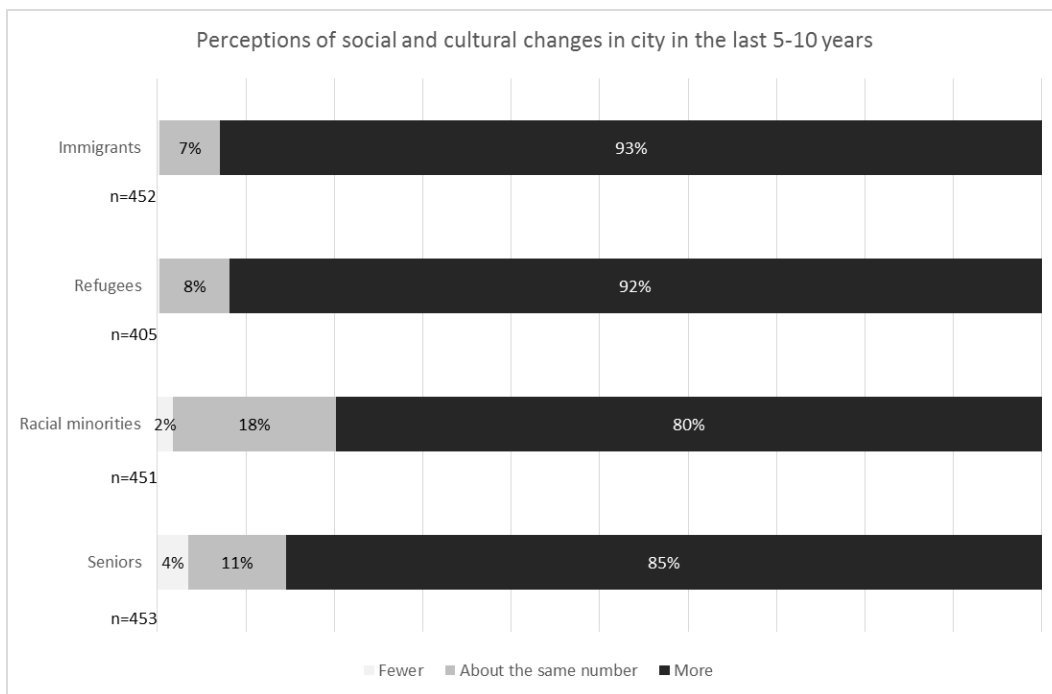


When participants were asked about their overall perceptions of economic change in their neighbourhoods, the majority, 57%, felt things were about the same, while 33% noted that it had changed for the better.

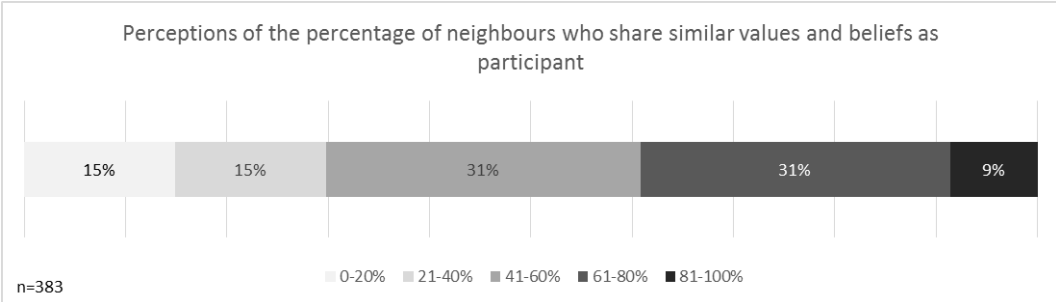


## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES

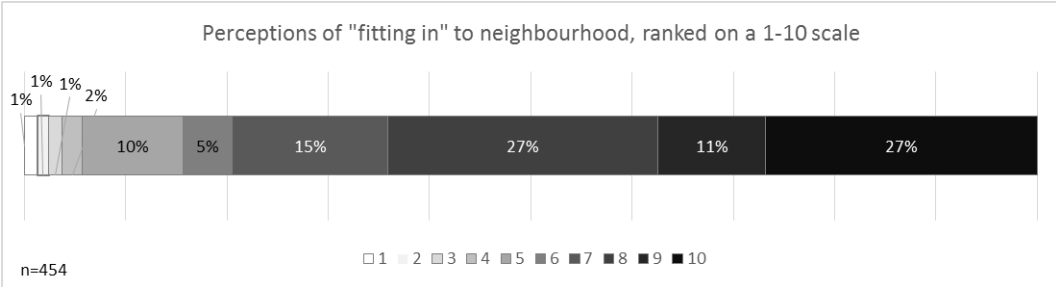
When participants were asked about social and cultural changes in Halifax over the last five to 10 years, 93% noted an increase in the number of immigrants; 92% mentioned an increase in the number of refugees; 80% noted an increase in the number of racial minority residents; and 85% mentioned an increase in the number of senior citizens. When asked whether the cultural make-up of the city had changed compared to five to 10 years ago, 86% of participants reported that, overall, the city had become more socially and culturally diverse.



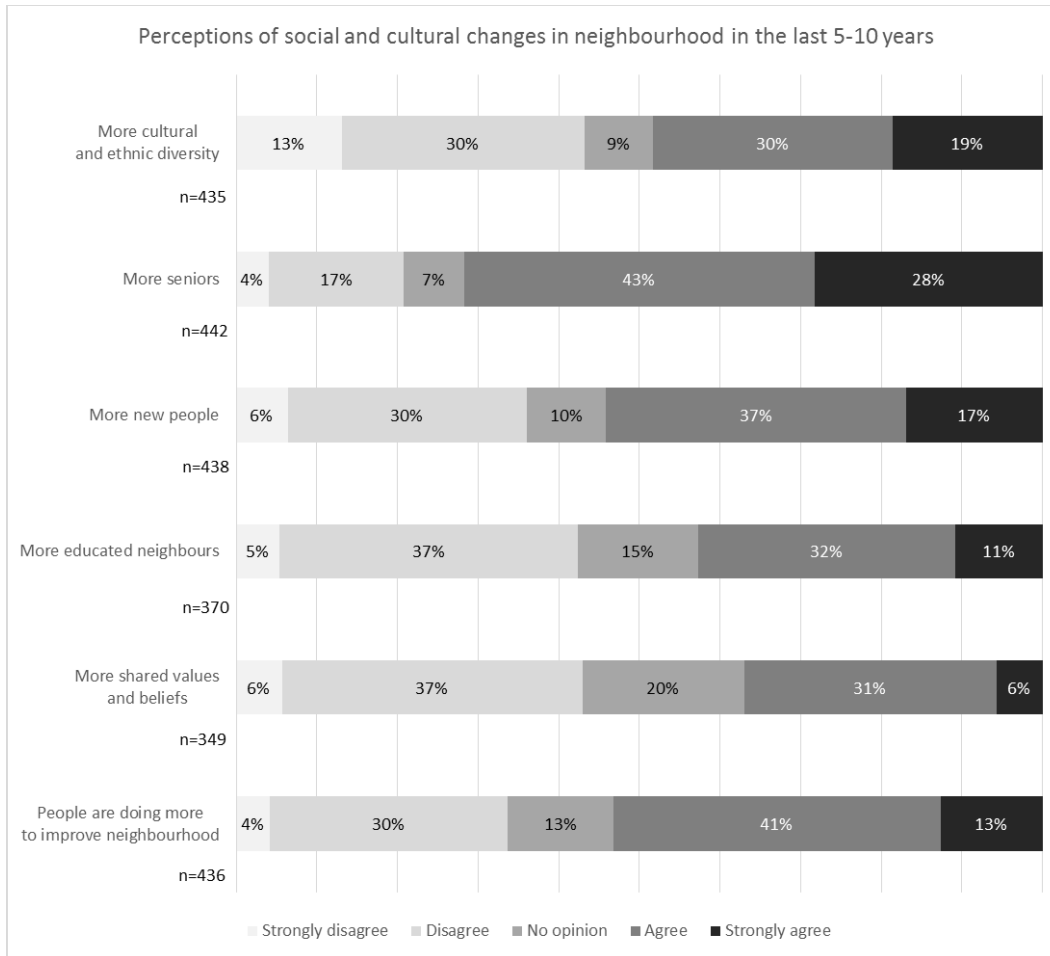
Participants were also asked about social and cultural diversity within their neighbourhoods. On average, Haligonians who participated in the survey estimated that 17% of their neighbours were racial minorities, 10% were immigrants, 3% were refugees, 46% had university degrees, and 36% were senior citizens. Participants' estimates of the prevalence of immigrants and refugees in their neighbourhoods were similar to 2016 Census figures for Halifax, which report 9% immigrants and 1% refugees. Participants' estimates for other measures were higher than those in the 2016 Census, which shows 11% racial minorities, 29% holding a university degree, and 16% senior citizens in the city.



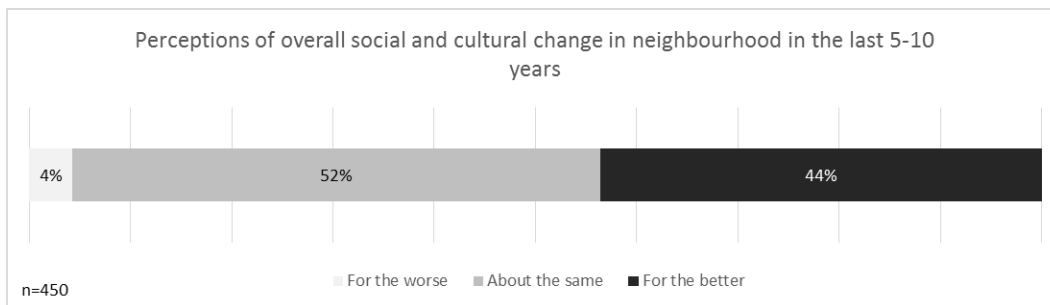
When asked what percentage of people in their neighbourhood shared similar values and beliefs, participants estimated, on average, that 53% of people did. The most common estimate was 50%, but a wide range of estimates were offered, with the majority of participants estimating between 40% and 80%. When asked how well they believed they “fit in” to their neighbourhood on a scale from one to 10, where 10 is the strongest sense of fitting in, Haligonians on average reported “8,” largely expressing a strong sense of fitting in and belonging.



Participants also rated their level of agreement with statements on social and cultural changes in their neighbourhood. When asked if their neighbourhood had become more culturally or ethnically diverse compared to five to 10 years ago, 49% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that it had; 71% agreed or strongly agreed that the number of senior citizens had increased in the same period; 54% agreed or strongly agreed that there were more new people in their neighbourhood; 43% agreed or strongly agreed that their neighbours had become more highly educated; 37% agreed or strongly agreed that more people shared the same values and beliefs as them; and 54% agreed or strongly agreed that people were doing more to improve their neighbourhood compared to five to 10 years ago.

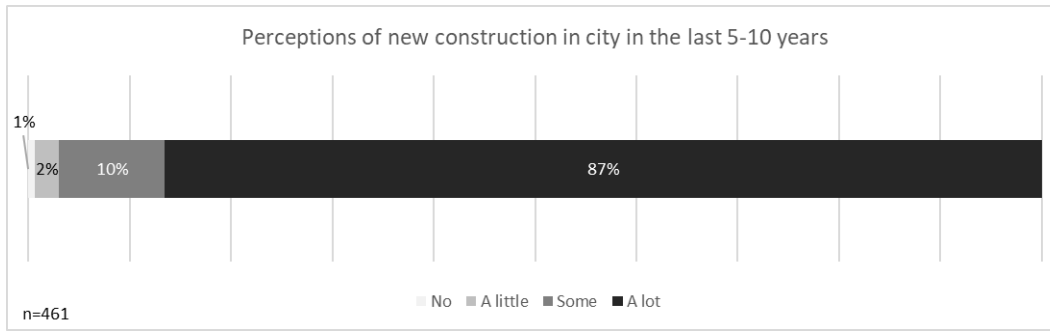


Overall, when participants were asked to assess the social and cultural changes in their neighbourhood, the majority, 52%, said that things were about the same, 44% felt the changes were for the better, and only 4% judged changes to be for the worse.



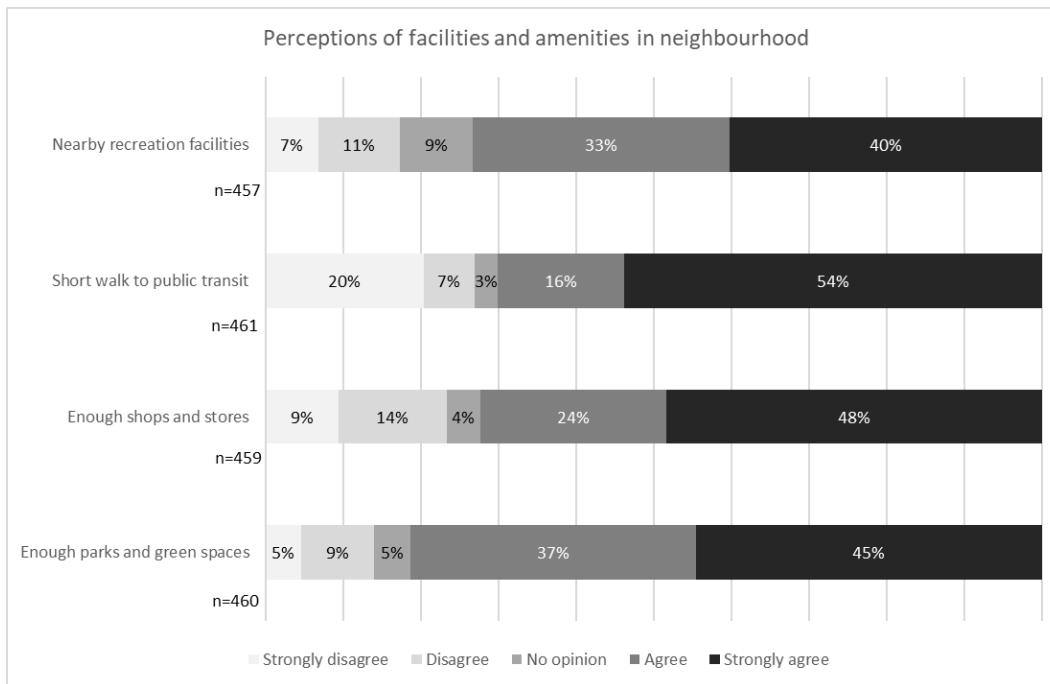
## CHANGES TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Survey participants were asked questions about their perceptions of the built environment and their access to amenities and services. When Haligonians taking part in the survey were asked whether they observed new construction in the city, 87% reported noticing “a lot” of new construction compared to five to ten years ago. Overall, 99% of participants noted some amount of new construction in the city.



Regarding the condition of buildings and homes, participants estimated on average that 18% of buildings and houses in their neighbourhood were in need of repair. They were also asked to estimate the percentage of rental housing in the neighbourhood; on average, participants put this figure at 22%. Participants’ average estimate of houses and buildings in need of repair is higher than the 7% estimate for Halifax as a whole reported in the 2016 Census. Their estimate of the prevalence of rental housing is lower than Statistics Canada’s estimate of 40%.

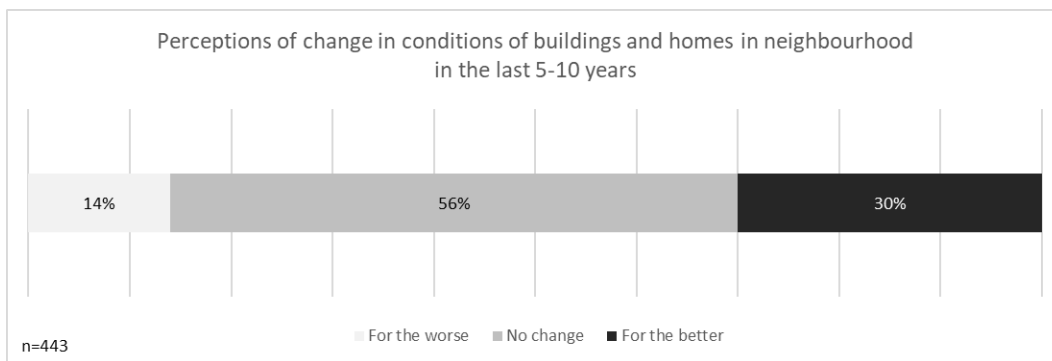
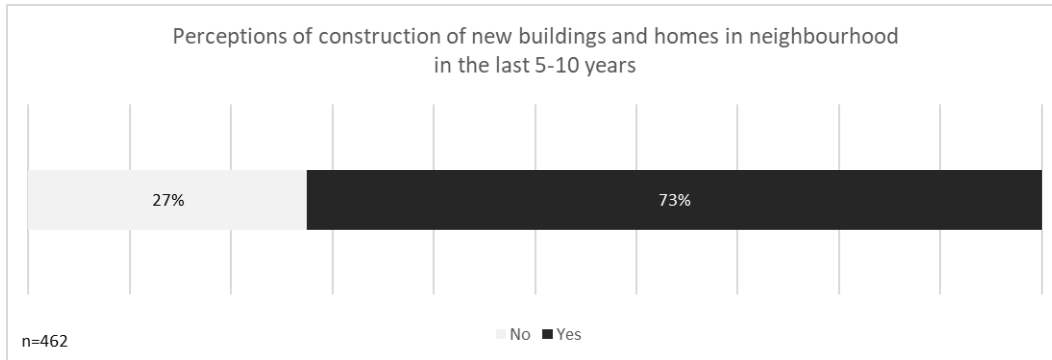
When asked about facilities and amenities in their neighbourhoods, 73% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that there were nearby recreational facilities; 70% agreed or strongly agreed that public transit was available within a short walk of their home; 72% agreed or strongly agreed that there were enough shops, stores, markets or other places in their neighbourhood to buy what they need; and 82% agreed or strongly agreed that there were enough parks and green spaces in their neighbourhood.



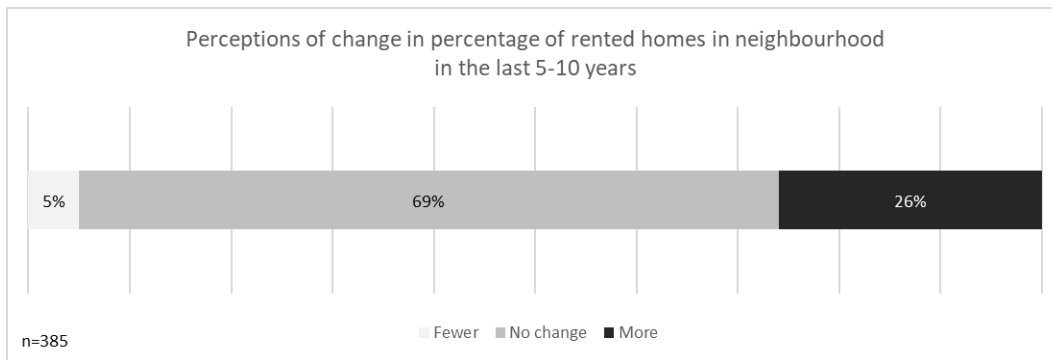
When participants were asked about changes to the built environment in their neighbourhood, 73% reported that new buildings and homes had been constructed and 30% observed improvements in the



conditions of buildings and homes in the last five to 10 years. The majority, 56%, had observed no change in conditions.

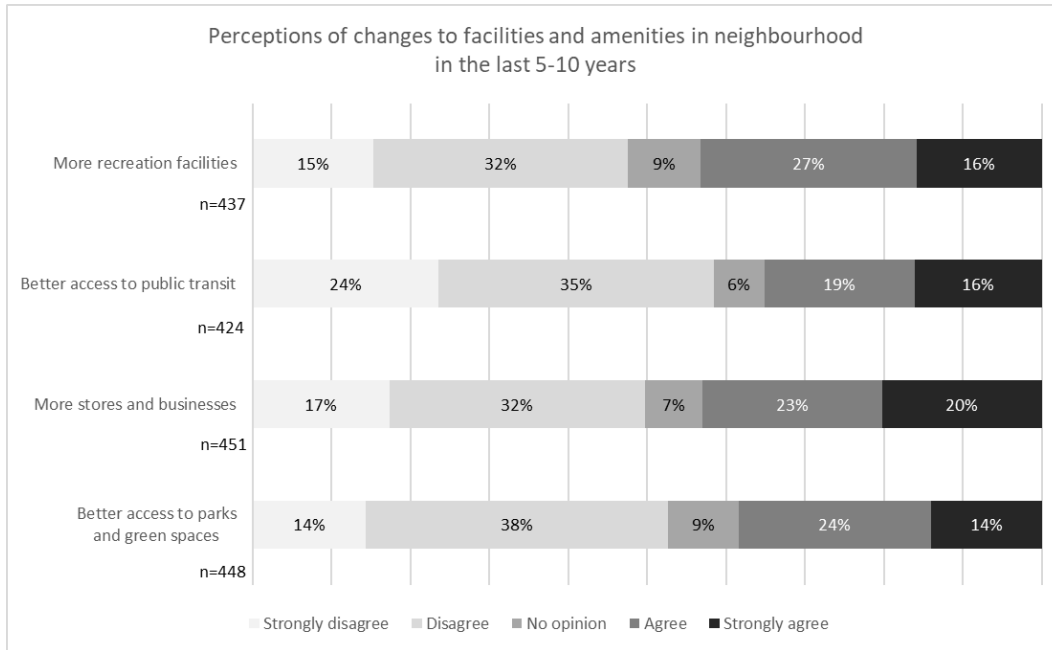


Participants were also asked about housing tenure: 26% of those surveyed noted more rental housing in their neighbourhood compared to five to 10 years earlier. However, the majority, 69%, did not perceive any change.

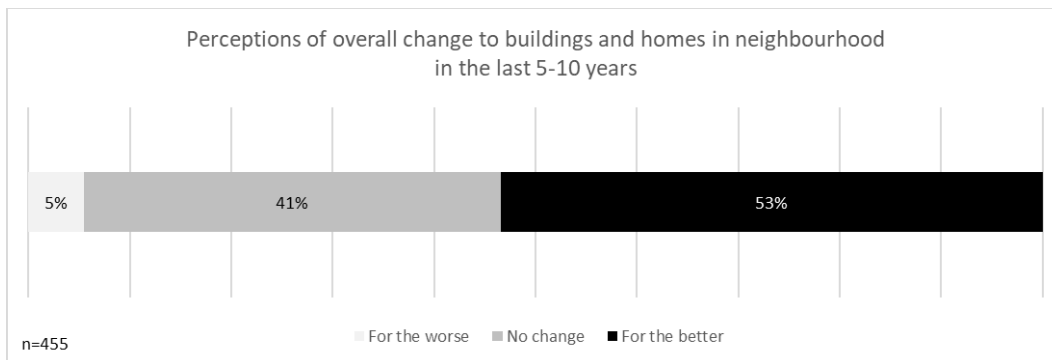


Participants were also asked for their level of agreement with several statements on changes to the amenities and services available in their neighbourhood: 43% agreed or strongly agreed that there was better access to recreational facilities in the neighbourhood at the time of the survey compared to five to 10 years before; 35% agreed or strongly agreed that there was better access to public transit; 43% agreed or strongly agreed that the number of stores and businesses in their neighbourhood had

increased; and 38% agreed or strongly agreed that there was better access to parks or green spaces compared to five to 10 years earlier.

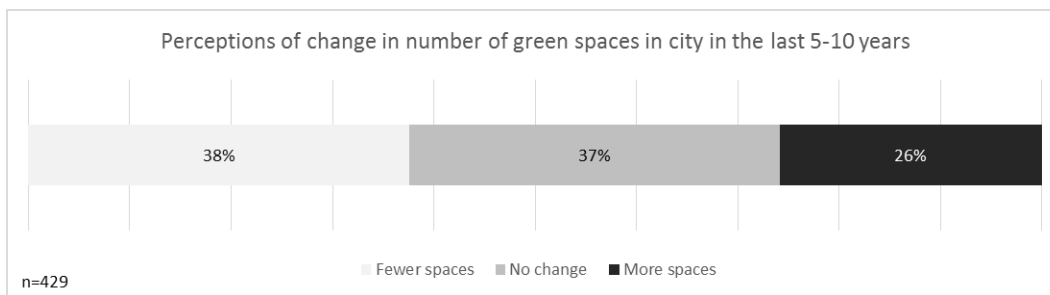
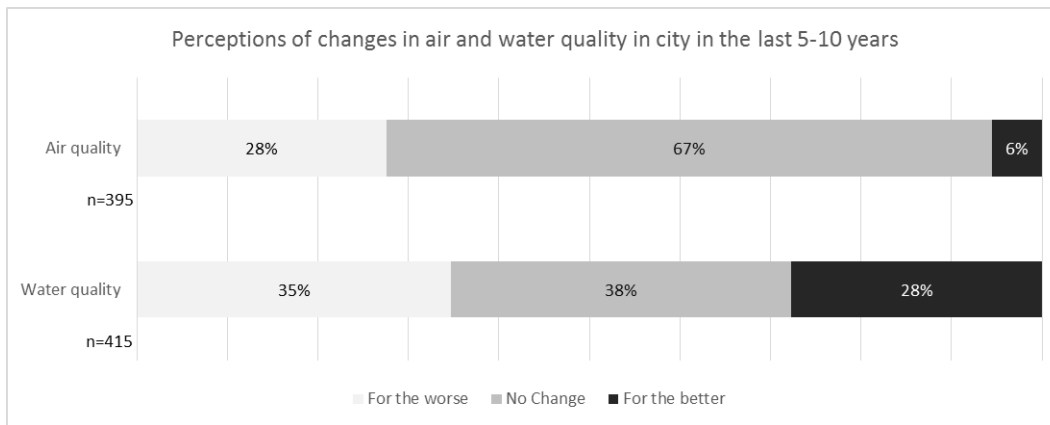


In Halifax, 53% of participants felt that changes in their neighbourhood’s built environment were for the better, and 41% felt that buildings and homes had generally stayed about the same in the last five to 10 years.

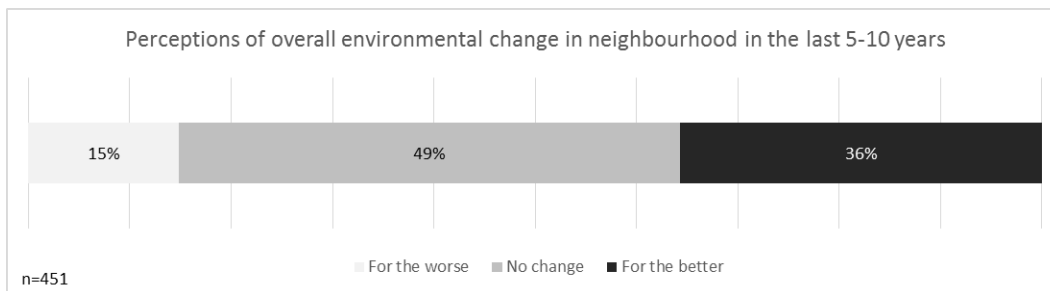


## CHANGES TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Participants were asked about their perceptions of change in the natural environment in Halifax. The majority of participants in the survey, 67%, reported no change in the city’s air quality over the last five to 10 years, while 28% observed that it had changed for the worse. No consensus emerges from participants’ perceptions of changes in the quality of the city’s natural bodies of water, with 38% reporting no change, 35% reporting change for the worse, and 28% noting change for the better. A similar pattern is seen with respect to changes in the number of green spaces in the city: 37% saw no change, 38% noted fewer spaces, and 26% observed more spaces compared to five to 10 years ago.



Forty-nine percent of Haligonians participating in the survey reported no overall change to the natural environment in their neighbourhood in the last five to 10 years, 36% reported change for the better, and 15% noted that change had been for the worse.



## WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY

More women than men participated in the survey: 63% women compared to 37% men. The majority of participants, 71%, owned their homes; 64% lived in detached houses. Almost all of the participants, 93%, spoke English as their first language. The average age of participants was 56. Seven percent identified as racial minorities, 9% as immigrants or refugees, 3% identified as Indigenous (Indian, Métis, or Inuit), and 56% were legally married.

The majority of participants, 69%, had some post-secondary education; 31% named a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education obtained. More than a quarter of participants, 28%, reported having

earned no employment income in the last year. The median individual employment income reported was between \$30,000 and \$40,000, and 20% reported spending more than a third of their incomes on housing and related expenses.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To understand Haligonians' perceptions of neighbourhood change, we conducted a telephone survey of 465 residents between April 8, 2017 and May 25, 2017. The survey had a 95 percent confidence level and a standard error of 0.025. We recruited participants through a random selection of telephone numbers assigned to the Halifax Census Metropolitan Area, from a list that included landline and mobile telephone numbers. Twenty-four percent of participants were recruited through mobile numbers. Only participants over the age of 18 and who reside in Halifax were invited to participate. To ensure confidentiality, the names and telephone numbers of the participants were not linked to their responses.

The survey was supervised by Professor Howard Ramos, Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University. For additional information, he can be reached at: [howard.ramos@dal.ca](mailto:howard.ramos@dal.ca)

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