



# NOVA SCOTIA YOUTH POLL Report 1



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## Who We Are

The poll was administered by the **Springtide Collective**, a new public interest group committed to improving the state of democracy for Nova Scotia. One of the core values of the Springtide Collective is intergenerational equity, specifically as it exists in the democratic process. The Nova Scotia Youth Poll (NSYP) is meant to provide politicians, parties and other political groups in Nova Scotia with a better understanding of youth political opinions so that political actors can make decisions in the best interest of all generations of Nova Scotians.

The **Democracy 250 Youth Engagement Legacy Trust** provided the funding to administer this poll. The Trust exists, in part, to build on and support continuation of the youth engagement activities related to citizenship and the democratic process begun by D250 initiative in 2008.

## Suggested Citation

Coffin, Mark & McCorquodale, Megan. (2013, June). Nova Scotia Youth Poll: Report 1. Halifax: Springtide Collective.

## Executive Summary

- Interviewers polled 693 people between the ages of 18-30 via face-to-face surveys at various locations across Nova Scotia between March 19th and April 10th, 2013
- If the election were held on the survey date, 31% of respondents would vote Liberal and 28% would vote for the NDP – a statistical tie. The Progressive Conservatives received 12% of the support of respondents while the Green Party received 11% of support – another statistical tie.
- When asked who would make the best Premier of Nova Scotia, 29% would prefer Stephen McNeil and 28% would prefer Darrell Dexter. Jamie Baillie was preferred by 10%, while John Percy followed close behind with 9%. Undecided voters accounted for 22% of respondents.
- “Jobs and the economy” was identified more than any other issue as “the most important issue facing Nova Scotia today.” It was selected by two out of five (42%) respondents.
- “Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation” (13%), “The environment” (8%), and “A balanced budget” (8%) were the next most important issues.
- Fewer young Nova Scotians identified “Energy” as “the most important issue facing Nova Scotia today” (4%) than any of the other issues.
- Less than a third (30%) of young Nova Scotians could recognize Premier Darrell Dexter, and roughly one in ten recognized each opposition leaders Stephen McNeil (12 %) and Jamie Baillie (9%).
- Liberal Leader Stephen McNeil was the preferred choice for Premier among the majority of respondents who recognized him (54%). Respondents who were able to recognize any of the three major party leaders (Dexter, McNeil, or Baillie) were decidedly more likely to prefer Stephen McNeil as Premier than those who did not recognize any of the party leaders.
- 8 out of 10 respondents indicated they would vote in a provincial election.
- One quarter (25%) of those not planning on voting would be more likely to vote if politicians focused more on issues that mattered to them; one in six (16 %) would vote if they felt it was clear their votes mattered.
- Of those who indicated they wouldn’t vote, or weren’t sure they would vote, 2% said “no matter what, I won’t vote,” when asked what could make them change their mind and vote, representing less than half a percent of all those surveyed.
- 7 out of 10 (72%) young Nova Scotians identified as somewhat interested or very interested in politics.
- Those who consider themselves very interested in politics are twice as likely to be dissatisfied with the current government (18%) than others (9%).
- Barely half of young Nova Scotians (51%) have “a fair amount” or “a great deal” of confidence in the work of the Nova Scotia legislature.
- On a number of levels, the data suggests political parties would be wise to make their policies and campaigns more relevant to young people and compete on their priority issues.
- When it comes to winning the support of young voters, the top three issues identified by respondents underscore the importance of sound economic policies that account for the needs of the poor and underprivileged, and economic growth that is sustainable and minimizes environmental impacts.
- The margin of error for this study is  $\pm 4\%$ , 19 times out of 20 with reference to the Nova Scotia university and college student population.
- In future reports, the Nova Scotia Youth Poll will explore youth policy preferences on various issues, detailed ranking of issues’ importance, understanding of the democratic process, and preferred modes of political engagement. Efforts will be made to enhance our current methodology.



## Why

The Nova Scotia Youth Poll (NSYP) is a project about gathering information on the voting behaviour and political opinions of young, voting aged Nova Scotians. Dominant political pollsters in Nova Scotia struggle with getting a sample of Nova Scotians that accounts for youth opinion. The dominant polling methods rely primarily on the participation of voluntary landline respondents or participants in online panels, and often fail to represent young voting aged adults. The NSYP used face-to-face interviews with the target demographic and received a majority response rate from those approached.

Young, voting aged adults are a demographic often dismissed in political decision-making. Low voter turnout among youth is a dominant media narrative, but few constructive actions have been taken, beyond political platitudes, to adequately understand and address the issue. One reason for this may be the fact that youth opinions are poorly understood by those most engaged in the political process, thus making it difficult for political groups to craft policies and campaigns with the young voter in mind.

Political polling has a role in influencing the actions of players in the political system. At best, political polls are used to identify the general priorities of the electorate during and between elections. The purpose of the NSYP is to provide those active in Nova Scotia politics with information that will help them encourage participation of youth in the political process. Future iterations of the NSYP will provide a deeper analysis of youth voting behaviour and political opinions.

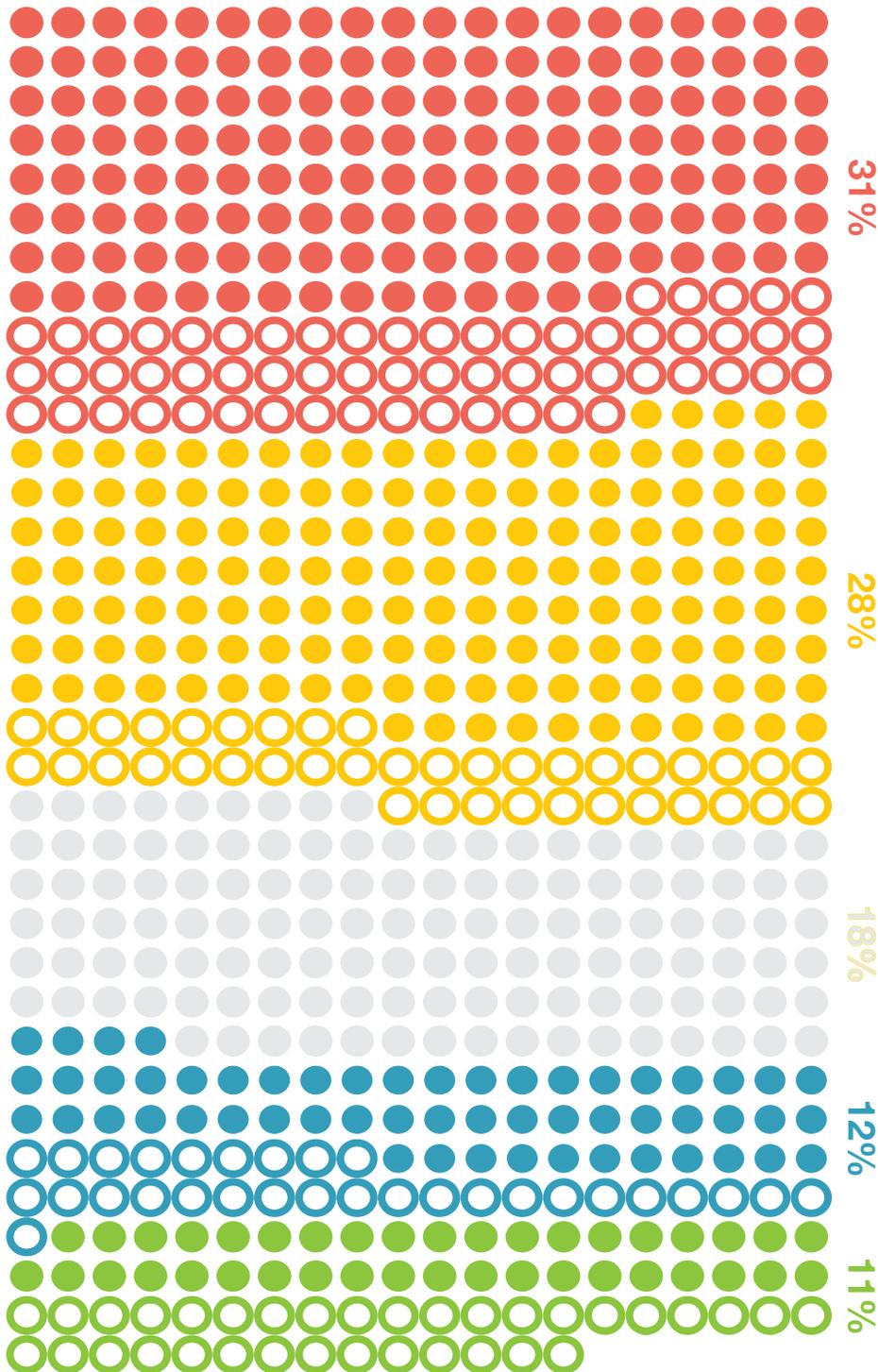
## What

In this poll we explore voting intentions; leader support; leader recognition; satisfaction in the current government; confidence in the legislature; and questions related to voter turnout. We also provide an analysis that is meant to empower politicians, parties and other political groups to understand how to use this information to make more informed political decisions.

## How

Interviewers polled 693 people between the ages of 18-30 at various locations across Nova Scotia between March 19th and April 10th, 2013. Interviews were conducted face-to-face on public property near university and community college campuses, and in high foot-traffic areas frequented by youth during daytime hours. Respondents who participated in the poll were passers-by who were asked to respond to the survey and willing to do so in exchange for a chance to win a popular tablet computer. Polling was conducted in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, the Halifax Regional Municipality, and the towns of Antigonish and Wolfville. The vast majority of those polled (90%) were either full- or part-time university or college students, with 63% between the ages of 18 and 22. The margin of error for this study is  $\pm 4\%$ , 19 times out of 20 with reference to the Nova Scotia university and college student population. Because of the overwhelming number of students represented in this sample, it is not possible to state a margin of error for the entire 18-30 year old population of Nova Scotia.

# What We Found



## Voting Intentions

**Liberal and NDP tied for first place, Progressive Conservatives and Greens tied for last place.**

If the election were held on the survey date, 31% of respondents would vote Liberal and 28% would vote for the NDP – a statistical tie. The Progressive Conservatives received 12% of respondents’ support while the Green Party received 11% of support – another statistical tie. The remaining 18% of respondents were either undecided or would not vote.

**Figure 1 - Voting Intentions & Leader Support**

- = One respondent
- Would vote
  - Liberal
  - NDP
  - Conservative
  - Green
- Would vote for party and prefers party’s leader as Premier
  - Stephen McNeil
  - Darrell Dexter
  - Jamie Baillie
  - John Percy
- Would not vote/undecided
  -



## Leader Support

### Leader support mirrors party support closely

Similarly, 29% of respondents would prefer Stephen McNeil of the Liberal Party as Premier of Nova Scotia, and 28% would prefer Darrell Dexter of the NDP. Jamie Baillie of the Progressive Conservative Party was preferred by 10% of respondents with John Percy of the Green Party close behind at 9%. Undecided voters accounted for 22% of respondents.

## Leader Recognition

### Less than a third of young Nova Scotians could recognize Premier Darrell Dexter. Opposition leaders Stephen McNeil and Jamie Baillie were each recognized by roughly one in ten respondents.

Respondents were shown a picture of each of the four provincial party leaders and asked to identify them by name. Interviewers prefaced the question by indicating the pictures were of “politicians in Nova Scotia” and recorded only whether the responses were correct or incorrect. Only 1% of respondents could identify John Percy of the Green Party, while 9% could identify Jamie Baillie of the Progressive Conservative Party, 12% could identify Stephen McNeil of the Liberal Party and 30% could

identify Darrell Dexter of the NDP.

### More than half of those who could identify Stephen McNeil would prefer him as Premier.

Two party leaders, Jamie Baillie and Stephen McNeil, were more likely to receive the support from those who recognized them. This “recognition advantage” was strongest for Stephen McNeil. Among those respondents who could identify Stephen McNeil, 54% would prefer him as Premier, compared to 26% of respondents who could not identify him, but who would prefer him anyway. Among those respondents who could identify Jamie Baillie, 20% would prefer him as Premier, compared to 9% of respondents who could not identify him but who would prefer him regardless.

The remaining leaders, Darrell Dexter and John Percy, were less likely to receive the support of those who recognized them. Among those respondents who

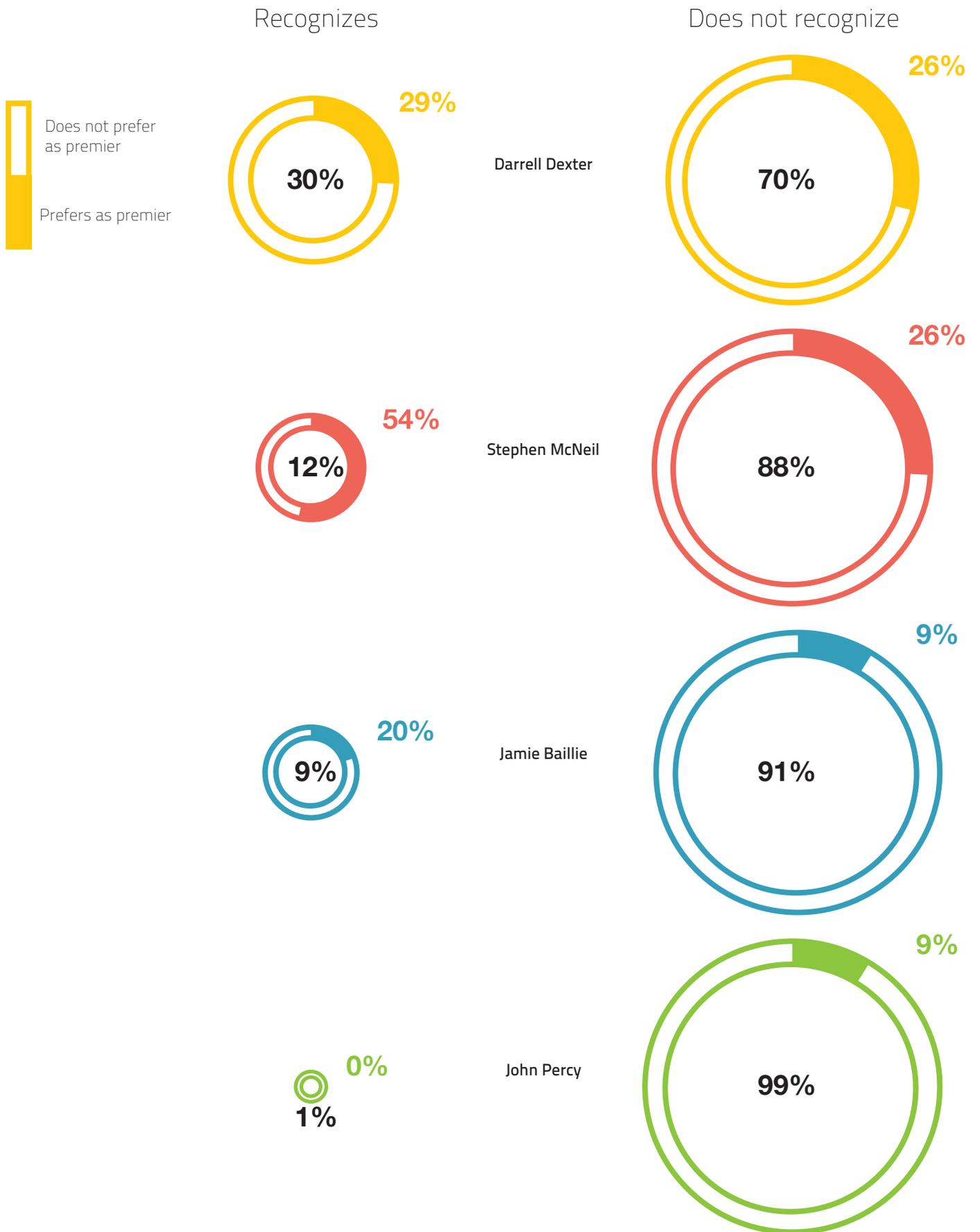
but would prefer him regardless. While 9% of respondents who could not identify John Percy would prefer him as Premier, none of the respondents who could identify him would prefer him as Premier.

Respondents who were able to recognize any of the three major party leaders (Dexter, McNeil, or Baillie) were decidedly more likely to prefer Stephen McNeil as Premier than those who did not recognize each of the party leaders. It is important to understand, however, that those who recognized party leaders at all represented less than a third of our entire sample.

More than half of those who could identify Stephen McNeil would prefer him as Premier

could identify Darrell Dexter as Premier, only 26% would prefer him as Premier, compared to 29% of those who could not identify him

Figure 2 - Leader support within leader recognition





## Issues

**“Jobs and the economy” was identified as “the most important issue facing Nova Scotia today” by two out of five young Nova Scotians. Fewer respondents identified “Energy” as the most important issue than any other issue.**

“Jobs and the Economy” was identified by the plurality of respondents as the most important issue facing Nova Scotia today. It was the number one issue for supporters of all four parties, garnering 42% of the total response. Other issues selected in decreasing order of popularity were Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation (13%), the Environment (8%), a Balanced Budget (7%), Primary and Secondary Education (7%), Health Care (6%), Higher Education (5%), Political Leadership (4%) and Energy (4%). It is worth noting that at a time when the political narrative in Nova Scotia is increasingly dominated by discussions about power rates, “Energy” was identified as the most important issue facing Nova Scotia fewer times than any of the other issues.

Figure 3 - Most important issue by voting intention & gender. Size of outer circle represents number of respondents who selected the corresponding issue.

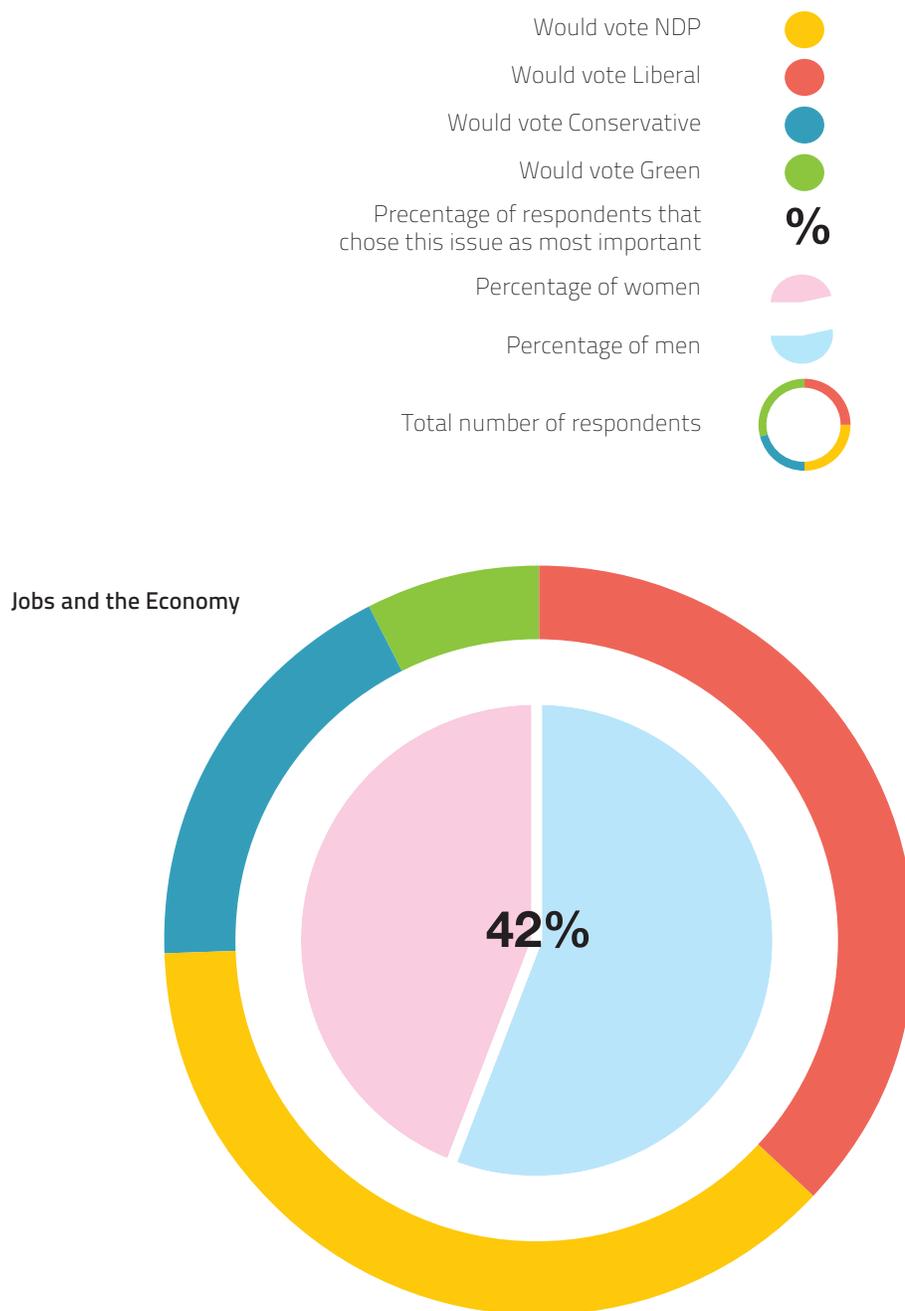
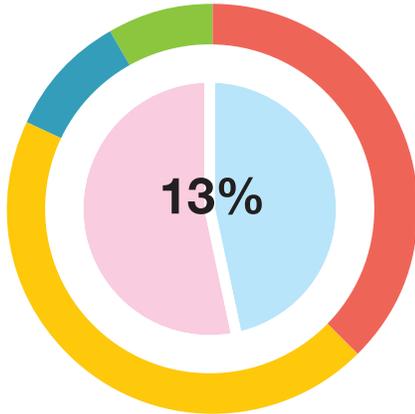
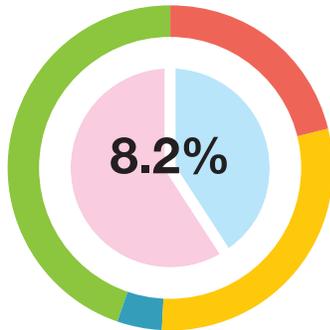


Figure 3 - Most important issue by voting intention & gender (continued)

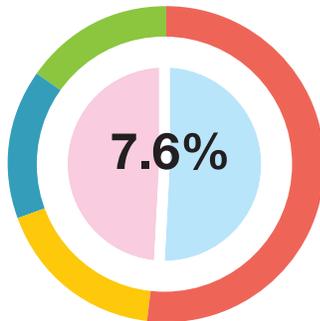
Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation



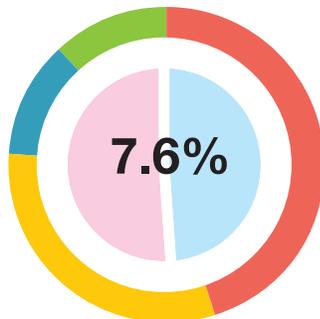
The Environment



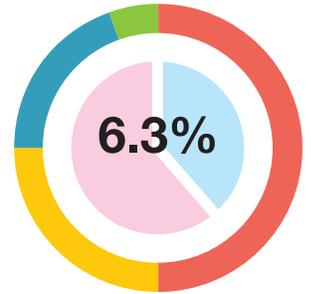
A Balanced Budget



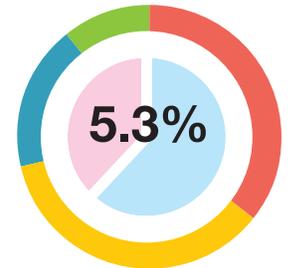
Primary & Secondary Education



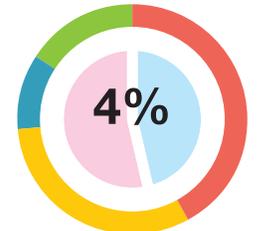
Health Care



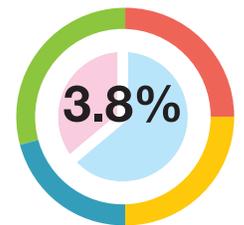
Higher Education



Political Leadership



Energy



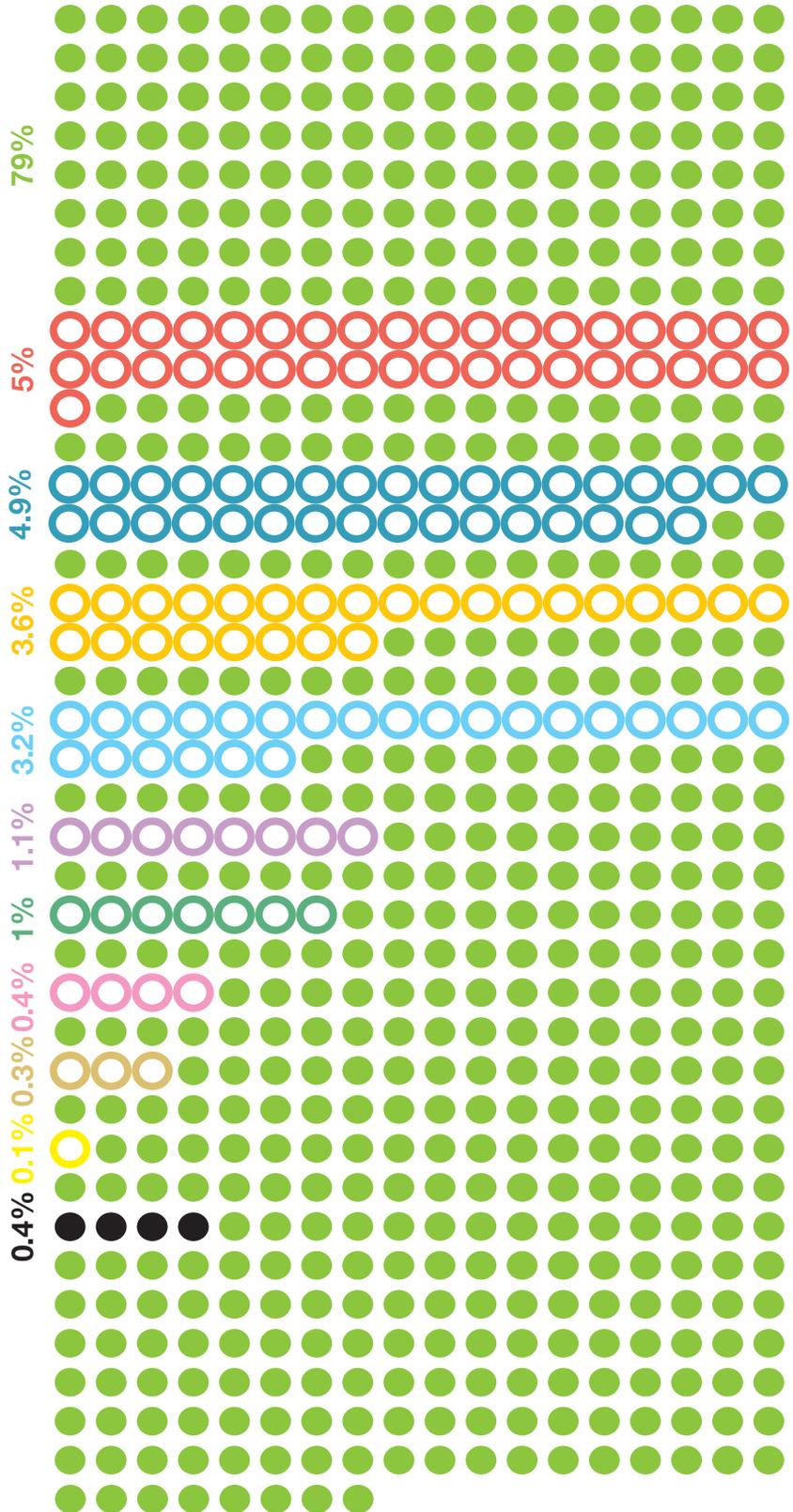
## Voter Turnout

One quarter of those not planning on voting would be more likely to vote if politicians focused more on issues that mattered to them; one in six would vote if it was clear their votes mattered.

When asked specifically whether or not they would vote in a provincial election if it were being held on the survey date, 79% of respondents polled said they would vote. Those who indicated they would not vote, or were undecided about whether they would vote, were asked what factor would be most likely to change their mind and influence them to vote. One quarter (25%) of these respondents indicated that politicians focusing more on "issues I care about" would convince them, while 23% would vote if they knew more about when and where to vote<sup>1</sup>, and 16% would be more likely to vote if they felt it was clear their votes mattered. Only 2% of these respondents would not vote under any circumstances, representing less than half a percent of all respondents surveyed.

**Figure 4 - Voter turnout (green) and what would increase respondents' likelihood of voting (other colours)**

- Would vote
- Would vote if...
- politicians focused more on issues I care about
- I knew more about where and when to vote
- Other
- it were clear that my vote mattered
- politicians behaved with more civility and respect
- I wasn't so busy
- there were different candidates or political parties running
- I was on the list of electors
- there weren't so many elections
- no matter what, I won't vote



% - indicates percentage of total respondents

## Interest in Politics

**7 out of 10 young Nova Scotians are interested in politics.**

Of the people interviewed, 72% were either “somewhat interested” (52%) or “very interested” (20%) in politics. Unsurprisingly, more than half of those who were not interested in politics would not vote, while those who were interested in politics were more likely to vote. Male and female respondents were equally likely to vote if an election were held on the survey date.

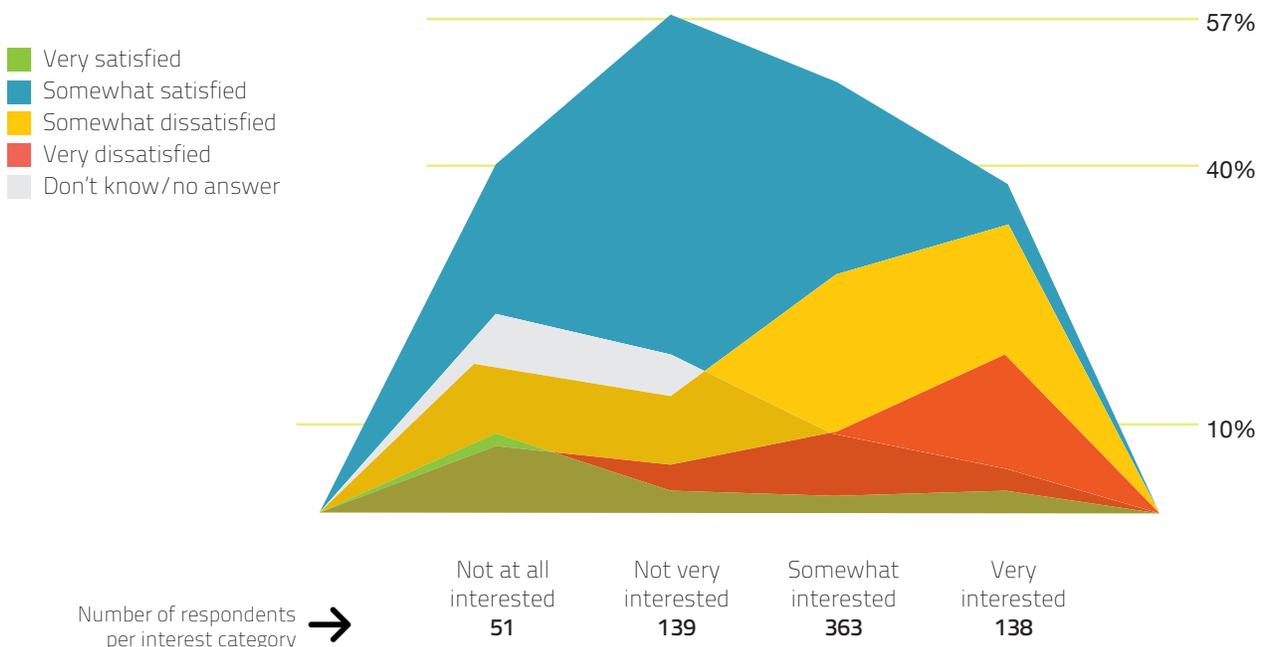
## Satisfaction with Current Government

**Those who are very interested in politics are twice as likely to be dissatisfied with the current government than others.**

Just over 52% of respondents were either very satisfied (3%) or somewhat satisfied (49%) with the performance of the Nova Scotia Government led by Premier Darrell Dexter, with only 36% either somewhat dissatisfied (25.5%) or very dissatisfied (10.5%). These results show significantly more satisfaction in the current government than that expressed by Nova Scotians who participated in the most recent Corporate Research Associates quarterly poll, in which only 40% of respondents were completely satisfied or mostly satisfied with the performance of the provincial government.<sup>2</sup>

Those who were very interested in politics were twice as likely to be very dissatisfied with the current government (18%) than other respondents (9%), while those who were not at all interested in politics were more likely to be very satisfied (10%) than other respondents (2%).

**Figure 5 - Satisfaction with current government by interest level in politics**



<sup>1</sup> Interviewers reported that this answer was frequently used as a proxy for an option that was not included on the survey, particularly “if I knew more about politics.” Therefore, this response likely represents an inflation of the number of people who actually feel that knowing more about where and when to vote would influence them to vote.

<sup>2</sup> CRA (2013, March). NS Liberals Maintain Lead over NDP Although Margin Declines.



## Trust and Confidence in Nova Scotia's Legislature

**B**arely half of young Nova Scotians have "a fair amount" or "a great deal" of confidence in the work of the legislature.

Asked about their level of trust and confidence in the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia, 43% of respondents reported having "not very much" (37%) or no confidence at all (6%) in the work of the legislature. A slim majority (51%) responded positively – expressing either "a fair amount" (47%) or "a great deal" (4%) of confidence in the work of the legislature in holding the Premier and Cabinet accountable.

## Federal Voting Intention

**L**ess than three quarters of respondents would vote for the same party provincially as federally.

If a federal election were held on the survey date, 34% percent of respondents would vote Liberal, 28% would vote NDP, 14% would vote Conservative, 9% would vote Green and the remaining 15% were undecided or would not vote. Of the people who had decided on the party they would vote for in a federal election, 72% would vote for the same party provincially. This suggests that, in addition to undecided voters, there are a significant number of voters who are willing to move their vote across parties, depending on the level of government.

## Insights

**T**he purpose of the NSYP is to better understand youth political opinions and behaviour, and to provide analysis for politicians, parties and other political groups to understand how to use this information to make more informed political decisions. This section provides the latter.

The results from the first round of surveying for the NSYP indicate that the majority of respondents are evenly split in their support for the Liberals and the NDP. Each party would

be wise to craft platform policies that speak directly to the issues identified as important by young voters. When given nine issues to choose from, there was resounding recognition that jobs and the economy were the most important issues facing Nova Scotia today. Job creation and economic growth are complex policy issues for even an informed political observer to un-

derstand, let alone a first time voter. While it will certainly be important for parties to make the jobs and economy portions of their platforms convincing to young voters (and all voters), it would be strategic to also acknowledge the next most important issues to young voters: social welfare and poverty alleviation, and the envi-

**The top three issues identified here underscore the importance of economic policies that account for the needs of the poor and underprivileged, and economic growth that is sustainable and minimizes environmental impacts**

ronment. When it comes to winning the support of young voters, the top three issues identified here underscore the importance of economic policies that account for the needs of the poor and underprivileged, and economic growth that is sustainable and minimizes environmental impacts.

There are a significant number of voters who

are undecided about which party they would vote for and whether or not they would vote in a provincial election. Those who are undecided on whether or not they would vote at all are more likely to be enticed

as federally, there is certainly an element of wiggle room in that, in addition to the large number of undecided voters, there are a significant number of voters who are willing to move their vote across parties,

to the social desirability bias. The social desirability bias understands that positive responses to questions like “will you vote” and “how interested are you in politics” are more socially acceptable, and these results are presumed to be inflated from reality. Additionally, the vast majority of those approached to participate in the poll did so, and this is relevant to our survey results. The high response rate was likely due to the fact that there is a greater social compulsion to accept an invitation to participate in a face-to-face survey, compared to an online or telephone poll. This likely means the respondents are more representative of the average young person than the types of polls (phone and online) that are easier to refuse, but often overwhelmingly attract those who already participate in elections.<sup>4</sup> However, the face-to-face nature of the poll is also likely to increase the social desirability bias on several questions because there is less social distance between the respondent and the interviewer.

## Political interest was high with three quarters (73%) of respondents reporting to be somewhat or very interested in politics

to vote if politicians pay attention to their issues, or if it is made clear their votes matter. Also, it is unclear to what extent the Green Party will field candidates in the provincial election. At last report, the party had only a single registered riding association across the entire province.<sup>3</sup> Should the party not field candidates across the province, the 11% of voters who would otherwise vote Green will need to consider which party measures closest to the Green values. Judging from the importance Green voters placed on issues after jobs and the economy, a party’s environmental policy will be key in earning the support of these voters, should the Green party not field candidates extensively. A competitive campaign with clearly marked differences between the stances of the political parties, particularly when it comes to the issues identified here as important to young voters, would be most likely to draw the otherwise non-voting youth out in the upcoming election.

With less than three out of four respondents indicating they would vote for the same party provincially

depending on the level of government. This may also indicate weak party allegiances among these voters within the province as well, creating room for votes to shift within a competitive campaign.

Political interest was high among Nova Scotia youth, with three quarters (73%) of respondents reporting they were somewhat or very interested in politics; yet recognition of the party leaders was low. The Premier himself, with all of the self-promotional advantages of being the head of government for Nova Scotia, was identified by less than a third of all respondents. Leader recognition among respondents is likely low, relative to the high self-reported interest levels in politics, due to a combination of factors. These factors likely include, but are not limited to: social desirability bias, interest in other types of politics, and limited opportunities for engagement between politicians and young people. Each of these factors is explored briefly here.

Self-reported interest in politics in our results may be inflated due

The question asking about interest level in politics did not specify which level of politics (e.g. federal, provincial or municipal) or type of politics (e.g. Canadian, American, International) respondents were interested in. Respondents who answered positively may be well aware of key players in federal politics, for instance, but not the personalities that dominate provincial politics.

The ability of respondents to recognize a leader’s face might also

<sup>3</sup>Elections Nova Scotia (2013, May). Status of Electoral District Associations.

<sup>4</sup>Elections Canada (2011, September). National Youth Survey Report.



be reflective not only of their political awareness, but also of the amount of time spent by a leader attending community events attended by young people; as well as the amount of a leader's time that is devoted to issues that affect youth, and subsequently reported in the media or through word of mouth.

While the NDP and Liberals are in a statistical tie, there is an indication that those paying attention to politics are less likely to prefer Darrell Dexter as Premier, and are more likely to prefer Stephen McNeil. Political trivia questions have been shown to be relatively strong proxies for political knowledge and political attentiveness.<sup>5</sup> This knowledge suggests that, given the increased likelihood of those able to recognize any major party leader to support Stephen McNeil, the Liberal Party has an advantage over the NDP. In another area of the survey, those who self-reported high interest in politics indicated they were more likely to vote. As explained above, some of these respondents self-report as such because of the social desirability bias of questions like these. We can presume that at least some of these respondents are not as interested as they say they are, and will not show up to vote as they say they will, due to lower than reported interest in politics. Using leader recognition as a proxy for political attentiveness and interest, we can presume that the number of respondents who intend to show up to vote will be lower, but those who do show up to vote are more likely to

## Research areas for future surveys include: policy preferences on various issues, detailed ranking of issue importance, understanding of the democratic process, and preferred modes of political engagement

support Stephen McNeil.

While confidence in the work of the legislature was high (53%) compared to responses from similar questions about our federal parliament,<sup>6</sup> it is worth noting that the survey dates overlapped with the early weeks of the most recent sitting of the legislature. Later in this sitting of the legislature, much of the legislative discussion and political reporting by media was increasingly focused not on issues, but on partisanship, posturing, and the behaviour of MLAs. This includes: the inappropriate use of MLA expense allowances, the month-long vacation of an MLA while the legislature was in session and the alleged assault of an MLA by a cabinet minister at Province House. Had the survey period for the NSYP occurred later, these activities might have impacted the amount of confidence reported by survey respondents. High confidence in the legislature may also be related to the social desirability bias, engendering a distorted response from those who claim to be interested in politics, but aren't.

## Next Steps

A follow-up survey is being developed and will be administered in the near future. Many of the questions explored in this survey are superficial – that is, the responses give an indication of the state of things, but do not probe into the reasons behind it. The methodology of conducting a cross-province poll will be further refined, and greater effort will be placed on attracting non-student youth participants and understanding regional trends within Nova Scotia.

Research areas for future surveys include: policy preferences on various issues, detailed ranking of issues' importance, understanding of the democratic process, and preferred modes of political engagement. Voting intentions, issue priorities and leader support will continue to be measured in all future iterations of the NSYP.

<sup>5</sup> Howe, Paul (2010) *Citizens Adrift: The Democratic Disengagement of Young Canadians*.

<sup>6</sup> Conference Board of Canada (2013). *Confidence in Parliament*.

## About the authors

### Mark Coffin, Founder and President @ Springtide Collective

Mark holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Dalhousie University. Mark has been an active political observer in Nova Scotia and has experience in survey design and analysis from sitting on a number of research steering committees, including the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) Committee for Information and Analysis and the steering committee for the National Student Survey. He previously worked as Executive Director of the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations, now Students Nova Scotia. He is currently completing his final year in a Master of Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax.

### Megan McCorquodale, Statistician @ Springtide Collective

Megan holds a Bachelor of Arts degree (Honours) in Mathematics & Statistics from Acadia University. She has worked as a Methodologist for Statistics Canada, and provided consulting services in technical analysis for researchers at the University of British Columbia. A Nova Scotia native, she is currently completing her final year in a Master of Science (Statistics) program at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

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# spring·tide *noun*

a set of extreme tides

at high tide, rising waters reach points usually untouched by ocean waves – sometimes powerful enough to move boulders and things previously undisturbed by normal high tides

at low tide, a springtide exposes elements that are usually covered up

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