

Attitudes Toward Changes to CBC Regional Programming in Atlantic Canada

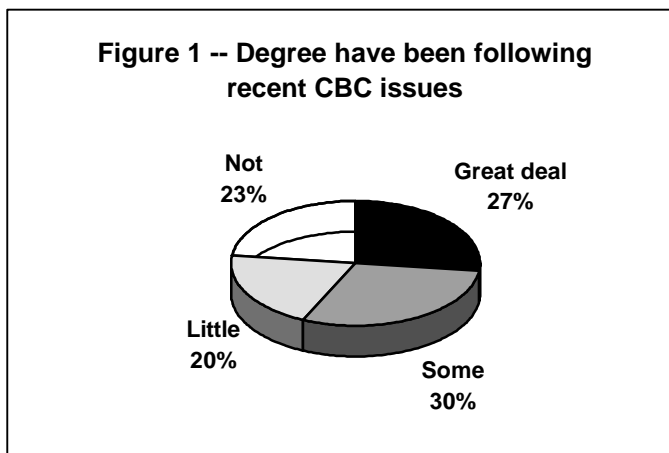
**A COMPAS Survey for the University of King's College
School of Journalism in association with the
Friends of Canadian Broadcasting
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The recent debate about changes to CBC regional programming has captured the attention and interest of the vast majority of Atlantic Canadians. And, most are not pleased with the direction of the changes. Seven-in-ten oppose the changes and two-thirds want their local MP to fight to preserve the existing supertime news shows. One-in-two report that the government's performance on this issue makes them less likely to consider voting Liberal at the next opportunity.

These are some of the key findings from a recent COMPAS survey conducted May 31 and June 1, 2000, after the most recent announcement from the CBC about plans to cut regional news programs from one hour to one-half an hour.

Proposed changes to the CBC have captured the attention of Atlantic Canadians

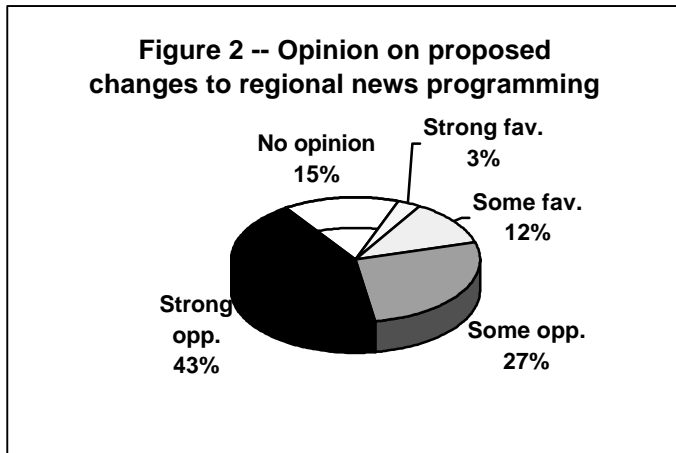
Over three-quarters of Atlantic Canadians (77%) have been following the recent issues surrounding "the CBC and the future availability of supertime news shows in Atlantic Canada..." like *COMPASS* in PEI, *1st Edition* in Nova Scotia, *NB Now* in New Brunswick and *Here and Now* in Newfoundland and Labrador (Figure 1).



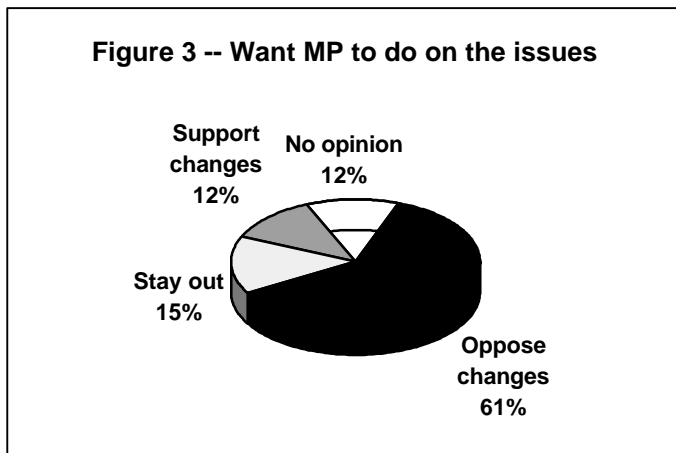
The interest of Atlantic Canadians' in CBC issues is not surprising given that the vast majority (83%) report that they have watched the news shows in question in the last month. This includes 41% who say that they have watched the program(s) "regularly," 24% "occasionally," and 18% "a few times."

Atlantic Canadians overwhelmingly oppose the proposed CBC changes

Despite the fact that the CBC backtracked somewhat on its original idea to totally replace the regional supertime news programs, Atlantic Canadians still oppose the proposed reductions to regional programming. Respondents were asked, "The CBC has announced that regional supertime news shows like...will be cut from one hour to thirty minutes and combined with a new national supertime news show produced outside of Atlantic Canada. Do you strongly favour...strongly oppose this?" Figure 2 shows that a full 70% oppose the plan, including approaching half (43%) who "strongly" oppose it.



Atlantic Canadians' opposition to the proposed changes prompts a strong majority to feel that their MP should get involved in the issue and fight to save the existing programs. Respondents were asked, "What would you advise your federal Member of Parliament to do on this issue...stay out of the issue altogether, support the proposed changes, oppose the proposed changes and work to save the existing programs, other?" Figure 3 shows that almost two-thirds (61%) want their MP to get involved and fight to save the existing programs.



Noteworthy are further findings which show that opinions toward changes to the CBC's regional programming vary only marginally across important subgroups of the public. For example, opposition to the changes stands at:

- 79% in Newfoundland and Labrador, 71% in Nova Scotia, 63% in New Brunswick and 67% in PEI.
- 68% among younger voters (18-34 yrs), 75% among the 35-54 year segment, and 65% among older residents (55 yrs/older).
- 67% among men and 73% among women.
- 70% among current Liberal supporters, 75% among PCs, 78% among NDP supporters, and 62% among current Alliance voters.

Furthermore, the percentages in each subgroup that would advise their MP to oppose the changes and work to save the existing programs are:

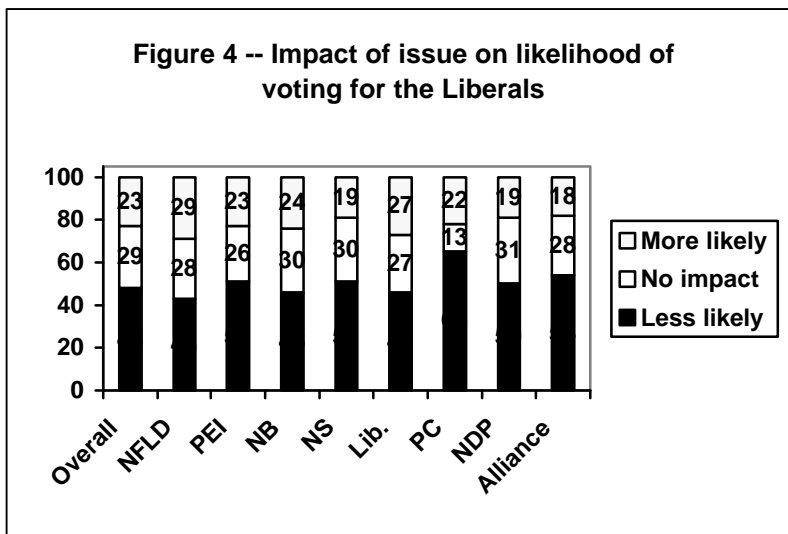
- 75% in Newfoundland and Labrador, 57% in Nova Scotia, 55% in New Brunswick and 61% in PEI.
- 54% among younger voters (18-34 yrs), 69% among the 35-54 year segment, and 55% among older residents (55 yrs/older).
- 59% among men and 62% among women.
- 67% among current Liberal supporters, 67% among PCs, 65% among NDP supporters, and 61% among current Alliance voters.

Atlantic Canadians are critical of the federal government's performance on the issue; Liberal fortunes in Atlantic Canada could suffer

Almost twice as many Atlantic Canadians feel that the proposed changes to CBC regional programming are a result of "funding cuts made to the CBC over the past several years by the federal Liberal government" (47%) than attribute them to "a preference by CBC management to make most of the cuts to regional television compared to national shows" (26%). The remaining 27% are not sure which of the two is the root cause.

Consequently, the federal government receives low marks from Atlantic Canadians when they are asked, "Judging from what you've seen and read about this issue over the past few weeks, how would you rate the federal Liberal government's performance in dealing with the issue...excellent, good, fair, poor or very poor?" Only 10% of respondents rate the government's performance "good" or "excellent," while 39% rate it "poor" or "very poor." The remaining 34% gave a rating of "fair," while 16% had no opinion.

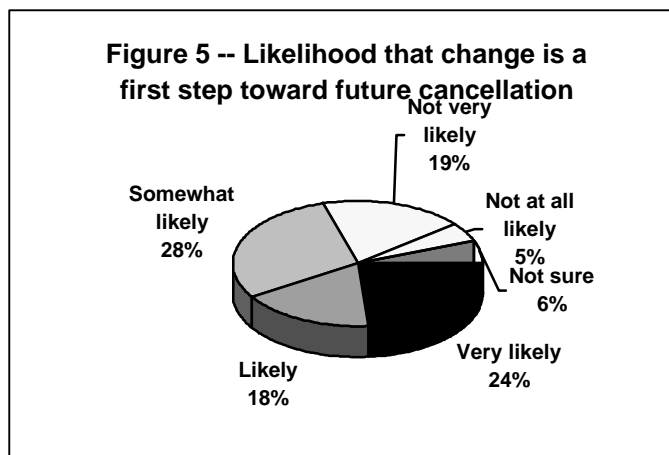
Atlantic Canadians feel strongly enough about the way the issues have played-out that many say that the recent decisions are likely to have an impact on their voting behaviour in the next federal election. Respondents were asked, “Is the decision to cut regional supertime news programs like...important enough to you that it might have some impact on your likelihood of voting for the federal Liberals



in the next federal election...that is would it make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely or much less likely to consider voting for the federal Liberals (no impact volunteered)?” Figure 4 shows that twice as many Atlantic Canadians overall say that they are less likely than say they are more likely to vote for the Liberals because of the issue. The results show further that the issue has had a strong net negative impact on likelihood of voting Liberal in each of the four provinces and even among residents who say they are Liberal supporters.

Atlantic Canadians are skeptical about the future availability of their regional news programs

Despite the fact that the supertime news programs received somewhat of a reprieve from the original proposal to cut them altogether, Atlantic Canadians are skeptical about longer-term plans for their regional programs. Respondents were asked, “Some people believe the CBC’s decision to cut back regional news shows from one hour to thirty minutes, and cancel the late night CBC



regional news is just a first step and is a clear sign that the CBC is going to cancel all of its regional news shows in a year or two. Do you think this is very likely...not at all likely?” Figure 5 shows that 70% of Atlantic Canadians think

that this is at least “somewhat” likely, including a full one-quarter (24%) who think it is “very” likely.

Methodology

COMPAS Inc. conducted a telephone survey among a representative, random sample of 400 Atlantic Canadians (18 years of age and older, English only) on May 31 and June 1, 2000. One hundred interviews were conducted in each of the four Atlantic provinces. Region-wide results are weighted to bring each province back into proportion. The region-wide results are accurate to within +/-5% or better, 95% of the time. Each province’s results are accurate to within +/-10% or better, 95% of the time. Confidence limits associated with other subgroup results vary according to the number of interviews in each subgroup. Questions about the survey can be directed to the principal COMPAS investigators, Mr. Chris Martyn, Senior Partner, or Ms. Jennifer Lang, Research Analyst.

Questionnaire

1a). If a federal election were being held today, which federal party's candidate would you vote for...(ROTATE)...? IF UNDECIDED, DON'T KNOW, REFUSED ASK 1b). Then which federal party would you lean toward if a federal election were being held today...(ROTATE)...?

Summary Decided and Lean Vote

	%*
Liberal	48
Progressive Conservative	24
NDP	18
Reform Conservative Alliance	7
Other	3

*Excludes 36% no opinion/undecided

Now I'd like to focus on issues involving the CBC...As you may be aware there has been discussion recently about the future role and direction for CBC television.

2). Some of this discussion is about the CBC and the future availability of regional supertime news shows in Atlantic Canada like...(READ APPROPRIATE SHOW NAME FOR PROVINCE OF INTERVIEW). Is this an issue that you are aware of and have been following a great deal, some, a little, or not at all?

PEI	"COMPASS"
Nova Scotia	"1 st Edition"
New Brunswick	"NB Now"
Newfoundland/Labrador	"Here and Now"

A great deal	Some	A little	Not at all	No opinion
%	%	%	%	%
27	30	20	21	1

3). The CBC has announced that regional supertime news shows like...(READ APPROPRIATE SHOW NAME FOR PROVINCE OF INTERVIEW)...will be cut from one hour to thirty minutes and combined with a new national supertime news show produced outside of Atlantic Canada. Do you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this? (Neither/Don't care volunteered)

Strongly favour	Somewhat favour	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Neither	No opinion
%	%	%	%	%	%
3	13	28	43	7	8

4). Which of the following two statements best explains why this is happening...(ROTATE)...?

	%
Funding cuts made to the CBC over the past several years by the federal Liberal government	47
A preference by CBC management to make most of the cuts to regional television compared to national shows	26
No opinion	28

5). What would you advise your federal Member of Parliament to do on this issue...(ROTATE)...?

	%
Stay out of the issue altogether	15
Support the proposed changes	12
Oppose the proposed changes and work to save the existing programs	61
Other (Specify)	1
No opinion	11

6). Do you think that reduced regional CBC television services reflects any lack of understanding or concern by...(ROTATE)...about the needs and desires of Atlantic Canadians...a great deal, some, a little, not at all?

	A great deal	Some	A little	Not at all	No opinion
	%	%	%	%	%
a). The federal Liberal government	35	32	17	9	8
b). The CBC	34	35	13	9	9
c). Canadians in other regions of the country	30	38	15	9	8

7). Have you watched CBC's main regional news program called...(READ APPROPRIATE SHOW FOR PROVINCE OF INTERVIEW)...in the last month...regularly, occasionally, a few times, never?

Regularly	Occasionally	A few times	Never	No opinion
%	%	%	%	%
41	24	18	16	*

8). Some people believe the CBC's decision to cut back regional news shows from one hour to thirty minutes, and cancel the late night CBC regional news is just a first step and is a clear sign that the CBC is going to cancel all of its regional news shows in a year or two. Do you think this is ...not at all likely, not very likely, somewhat likely, likely or very likely?

Not at all likely	Not very likely	Somewhat likely	Likely	Very likely	No opinion
%	%	%	%	%	%
5	19	30	18	24	6

9). As you may have heard, the CBC originally had said it would be canceling all of the regional supertime news shows. Which of the following statements do you think best explains the final decision to keep the shows but cut them from sixty minutes to thirty minutes...(ROTATE)...?

	%
There were too many protests from ordinary people who opposed the cuts	33
Mr. Chretien wants to call an election, and the Liberals might have lost some votes in Atlantic Canada	21
The CBC's Board of Directors simply decided on a different solution	23
No opinion	23

10). Judging from what you've seen and read about this issue over the past few weeks, how would you rate the federal Liberal government's performance in dealing with the issue...excellent, good, fair, poor or very poor

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor	No opinion
%	%	%	%	%	%
1	10	34	28	12	16

11). Is the decision to cut regional supertime news programs like...(READ APPROPRIATE SHOW NAME FOR PROVINCE OF INTERVIEW)...important enough to you that it might have some impact on your likelihood of voting for the federal Liberals in the next federal election...that is, would it make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely or much less likely to consider voting for the federal Liberals? (No impact volunteered)

Much more likely	Somewhat more likely	Somewhat less likely	Much less likely	No impact	No opinion
%	%	%	%	%	%
7	16	25	23	19	10