

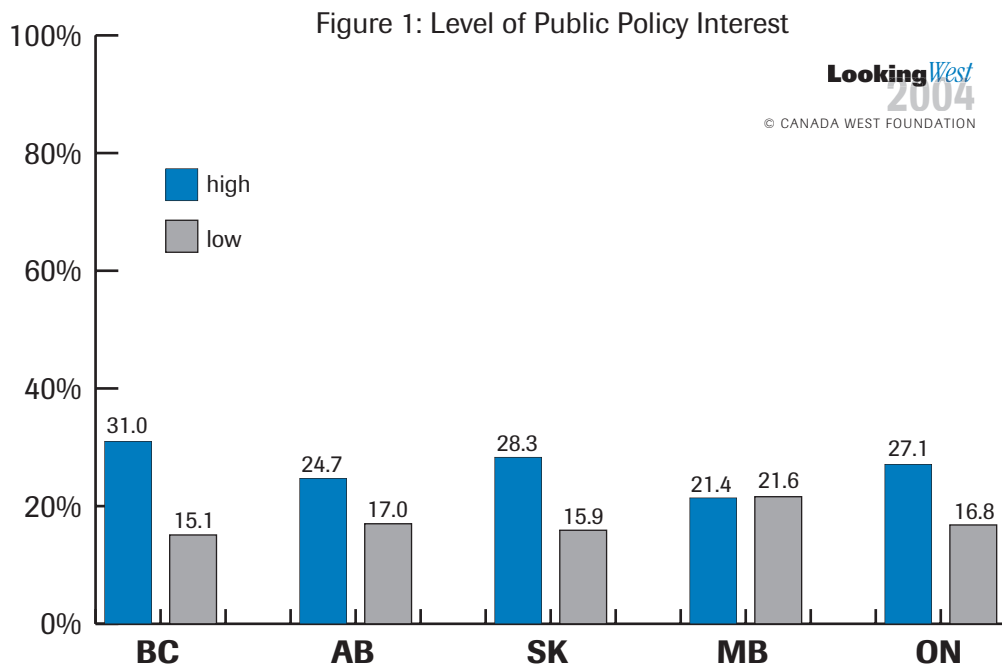
# Interest in Public Policy

The final question asked of Looking West 2004 respondents concerned policy interest. Respondents were asked, “How would you rate your personal interest in public policy issues? High level of interest; moderate level of interest; low level of interest.” This question was asked of the 3,200 western Canadian respondents, as well as 800 Ontario respondents.

The data reveal that public policy interest varies modestly by province, but varies considerably with a number of demographic variables. In terms of provincial variations, BC respondents report the greatest level of interest in public policy, with nearly one-third (31.0%) stating a high level of interest and only 15.1% stating a low level of interest. Saskatchewan and Ontario are next, with almost twice as many respondents reporting high interest than reporting low interest. Manitoba stands out as the only province in which an equal percentage reports low interest in public policy as reports a high level of interest. In all provinces, the majority indicates a moderate level of interest; BC has the lowest percentage reporting moderate interest (53.8%) and Alberta has the highest (58.0%). Variations by urban size are modest.

There were numerous demographic differences; indeed the only demographic variable that did not impact level of interest in public policy is whether one was or was not born in Canada. The largest gaps are seen in educational status: respondents with graduate degrees report the highest level of interest in public policy of all demographic cohorts, and are the only cohort in which the plurality reports a high (rather than a moderate) level of interest. The percentage of respondents reporting a high level of interest in public policy rises with educational attainment, from a low of 19.4% for those with less than a high school diploma to a high of 48.1% of those with graduate degrees – a difference of almost 30 percentage points. Conversely, the percentage of respondents reporting a low level of interest in public policy declines with educational attainment, from a high of 23.1% of those with less than a high school diploma to a low of 6.6% for those with graduate degrees.

Significant differences are also seen with age category, with interest in public policy increasing with age. Almost one-third (31.0%) of respondents under the age of thirty report a low level of interest in public policy, while less than one in ten (6.6%) of respondents aged 70 and over reports low interest – a gap of almost 25 percentage points.



How would you rate your personal interest in public policy issues? High level of interest; moderate level of interest; low level of interest.

The differences by income category are also notable; again, linear patterns are seen, with the number of respondents reporting low interest declining as income rises and the number reporting high interest rising as income rises. Respondents in the highest income category (\$150,000 and over) report a particularly high level of interest in public policy at 42.4%.

Lastly, a gender gap is seen, with men more likely than women to report a high level of interest in public policy, and women more likely than men to report a low level of interest in public policy. This gap is modest compared to the age, education and income gaps.

Overall, the data demonstrate that older, wealthier and more highly educated individuals report higher levels of interest in public policy, while younger, less wealthy and less educated individuals report lower levels of interest in public policy. The four cohorts in which a greater percentage reports low interest than reports high interest include: income under \$30,000; age under 30 years; less than high school diploma; and high school diploma.

Figure 2: Level of Public Policy Interest, West and Ontario Combined

	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>
Male	13.8%	54.1%	31.9%
Female	19.3%	57.2%	23.2%
<i>Difference between low and high</i>	<i>5.5</i>		<i>8.7</i>
Income under \$30,000	23.3%	55.1%	21.1%
Income \$30,000 – 69,999	16.0%	57.7%	26.1%
Income \$70,000 – 149,999	14.1%	53.5%	32.4%
Income \$150,000 and over	10.1%	47.5%	42.4%
<i>Difference between low and high</i>	<i>13.2</i>		<i>21.3</i>
Age under 30 years	31.0%	53.4%	15.4%
Age 30–49 years	18.2%	57.8%	23.8%
Age 50–69 years	10.5%	54.9%	34.6%
Age 70 years and over	6.6%	54.9%	37.1%
<i>Difference between low and high</i>	<i>24.4</i>		<i>21.7</i>
Less than high school education	23.1%	56.5%	19.4%
High school diploma	20.2%	59.7%	19.9%
Some university/college/technical school	19.0%	52.4%	28.4%
Completed college/trade/technical diploma/degree	18.0%	60.0%	21.8%
University bachelor’s degree	10.9%	52.6%	36.5%
Graduate degree	6.6%	45.4%	48.1%
<i>Difference between low and high</i>	<i>16.5</i>		<i>28.7</i>
Born in Canada	17.0%	55.7%	27.2%
Born outside Canada	14.8%	56.5%	28.3%
<i>Difference between low and high</i>	<i>2.2</i>		<i>1.1</i>



This summary was authored by CWF Director of Research Loleen Berdahl, and is part of the Canada West Foundation’s Building the New West Project. The Kahanoff Foundation, Western Diversification, the Privy Council Office, the Government of Saskatchewan, and Alberta International and Intergovernmental Relations provided funding support for this research study. The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Canada West Foundation’s donors, subscribers or Board.