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Nova Scotia's Alcohol Consultation Public Opinion Polling Results

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Treasury Board

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Methodology

Background

In June 2025, Crestview and Infuse PR were engaged to measure Nova Scotians' perceptions of potential changes to where alcohol—such as beer, wine, spirits or ready-to-drink products are sold and consumed. Through public opinion polling, this survey touched on perceptions, concerns and a multitude of individual policy and harms if access to alcohol is expanded in Nova Scotia. Questions included but were not limited to, alcohol purchase behaviours, current levels of accessibility, and opinions on expansion, social responsibility, trade barriers and buying local.

Objective

The public opinion polling was designed to engage a representative sample of the public to participate in the overall consultation. The insights gathered through this survey will provide the Province of Nova Scotia with the public's opinions to help inform decision-making on this issue.

Approach

The survey used a mixed-methodology approach, using both online and telephone-based sampling. Overall, a representative sample of n=1,501 Nova Scotian adults participated in the survey. Participation was split between 1,001 online survey responses and an additional 500 telephone-based survey responses, utilizing Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI). To qualify to participate in the survey, Nova Scotian adults had to have reached the age of majority—19 years of age or older. The survey was offered in English. This short survey took Nova Scotians approximately 10 minutes to complete and was in the field between May 30 – June 16, 2025.

Please note: Many questions offered the option of selecting multiple responses, therefore results may exceed 100%. Also, due to rounding not all responses will add to 100%.

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Consumption Habits

80% of Nova Scotian adults purchased alcohol in the past 12 months. The 20% of individuals who did not purchase alcohol in the past year or do not drink still had opinions regarding proposed access points for alcohol sales.

Purchasing Habits

Most Nova Scotian adults purchased alcohol directly from the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC) or an Agency Store, with fewer than 15% buying direct from producers. Participants preferred beer (55%), followed by wine (50%) and spirits (48%). The majority (67%) have not bought alcohol outside the province; however, among those who did, most used province or state-run alcohol stores, such as the LCBO in Ontario (58%).

Alcohol Access

The majority of the proposed alcohol access points did not receive strong support from Nova Scotian adults. Among all options, grocery stores had the highest level of approval at 42%. In contrast, gas stations and open consumption received the most opposition when asked at all points in the survey. Open consumption received a 44% disapproval rating compared to a 22% approval rating. Additionally, gas stations were the only access point to have a negative approval rating. If more retail options were instituted, more than half of Nova Scotian adults agreed (56%) that limitations on the types of products available should be required.

Executive Summary

Opinions on Expansion

When asked, 54% of Nova Scotian adults said they completely or somewhat support selling alcohol in convenience stores, grocery stores, and gas stations. The top reasons for supporting this change were convenience and accessibility (64%), support for local businesses and economic growth (11%), and increased choice and competition (9%). Among those who opposed the idea, the main concerns were increased accessibility (26%) and issues around underage access and safety (24%).

Alcohol Access – Open-ended

The most common themes expressed in open-ended questions supporting expanded access were convenience and the economic incentives for local businesses. For open consumption, many respondents cited personal freedoms and creating a more relaxing and welcoming environment for tourism. Conversely, common themes in opposition to expanded consumption included concerns about crime, the increased potential for youth alcohol access, and the possible harms of addiction and substance abuse for both families and individuals. Open consumption also raised issues related to impaired driving and public drunkenness.

Interprovincial Trade

86% percent of Nova Scotian adults supported opening interprovincial trade for alcohol. In addition, 61% of respondents indicated that they would continue to purchase brands and products from Nova Scotia, even if more non-local options became available. Only 11% expressed that they would likely stop purchasing local products.

Executive Summary

80%

Purchased alcohol in Nova Scotia in the last 12 months, 20% did not

52%

Purchased alcohol from NSLC stores (at least monthly), 24% from Agency Stores

67%

Did not purchase alcohol in a retail setting outside Nova Scotia in the last 12 months, while one-third did

83%

Felt purchasing alcohol is very or somewhat accessible in Nova Scotia, only 4% felt purchasing alcohol is inaccessible

55%

Of Nova Scotian adults would not like to see more retail locations selling alcohol, while 45% would like more retail locations

54%

Supported Nova Scotia selling alcohol in convenience stores, grocery stores and gas stations, 22% oppose this, and 23% neither support nor opposed

39%

Were very likely (8-10) to purchase alcohol in convenience stores, grocery stores and gas stations, while 29% were neutral (3-7) and 32% were not likely (0-2)

Executive Summary

80% Would expect to be able to purchase alcohol at NSLC

36% Supported selling alcohol through gas stations, 21% were neutral, and 41% opposed

53% Supported selling alcohol through grocery stores, 19% were neutral, and 27% opposed

47% Supported selling alcohol through convenience stations, 20% were neutral, and 32% opposed

49% Supported selling alcohol through large retail chains, 20% were neutral, and 30% opposed

43% Agree that alcohol should be available for open consumption in designated public spaces at designated times, while 16% were neutral, and 40% disagreed

86% Would like the option to purchase alcohol directly from producers in other Canadian provinces within Nova Scotia, 14% reported no

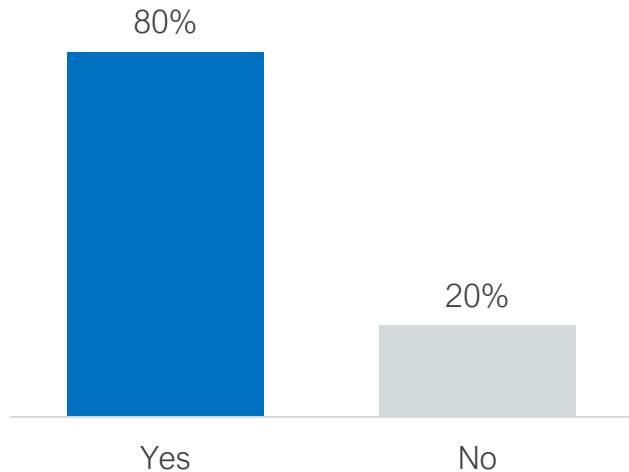
Purchase Behaviour



Purchasing Alcohol

Overall, 80% or four-in-five Nova Scotian adults purchased alcohol in the last 12 months—which includes purchasing in a store (NSLC, or private retailer), at a distillery, winery or brewery, or at a bar or restaurant. This result is on par with results from the 2023 Canadian Substance Use Survey (CSUS).

Have you purchased alcohol in Nova Scotia in the last 12 months? This includes purchasing alcohol in a store (NSLC, or private retailer), at a distillery, winery or brewery, or at a bar or restaurant.



Percent of the Canadians who have consumed 1 or more alcoholic drinks in the past 12 months (2023*):

79.3%

Percent of the Nova Scotia population who have consumed 1 or more alcoholic drinks in the past 12 months (2023*):

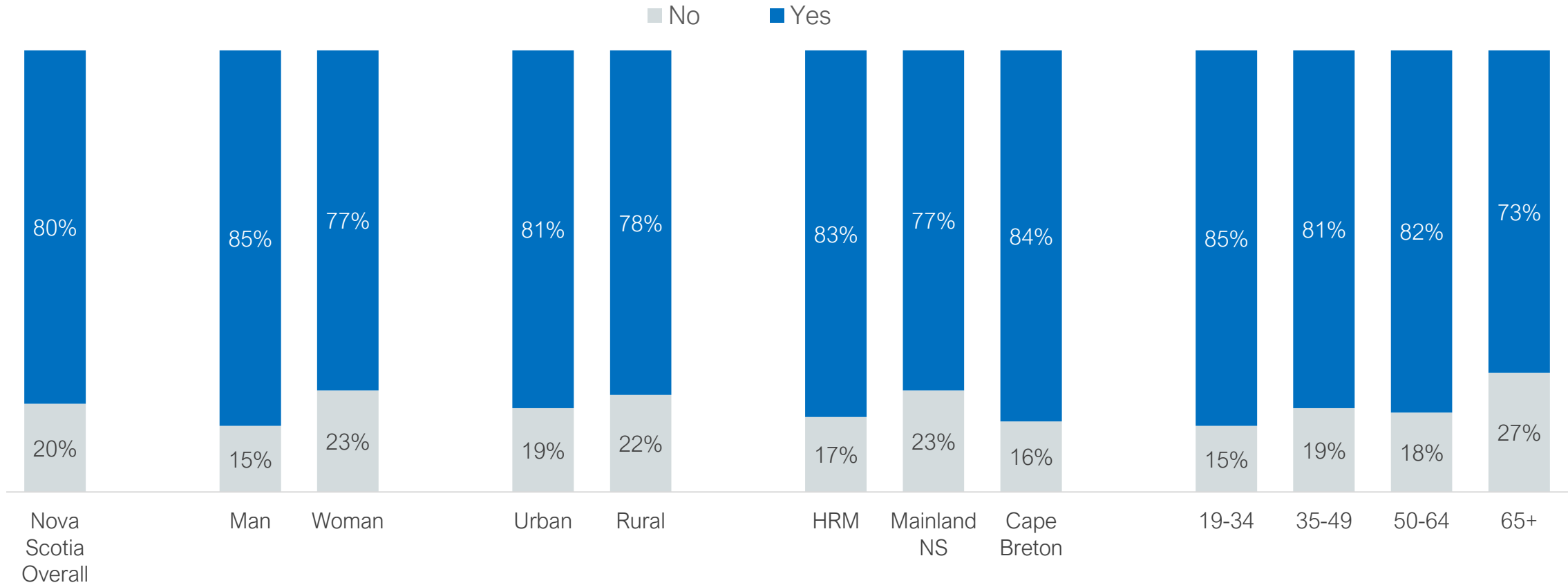
80.8%

*Source: The Canadian Substance Use Survey (CSUC) calculates these numbers with Canadians 15 years of age or older. This Nova Scotia Alcohol Consultation Polling calculated adults 19 years of age or older.

Purchasing Alcohol by Demographics

Men were slightly more likely to purchase alcohol than women (85% versus 77%). Results remain consistent throughout demographic groups. Purchasing alcohol starts to wane with those 65+.

Have you purchased alcohol in Nova Scotia in the last 12 months? This includes purchasing alcohol in a store (NSLC, or private retailer), at a distillery, winery or brewery, or at a bar or restaurant.



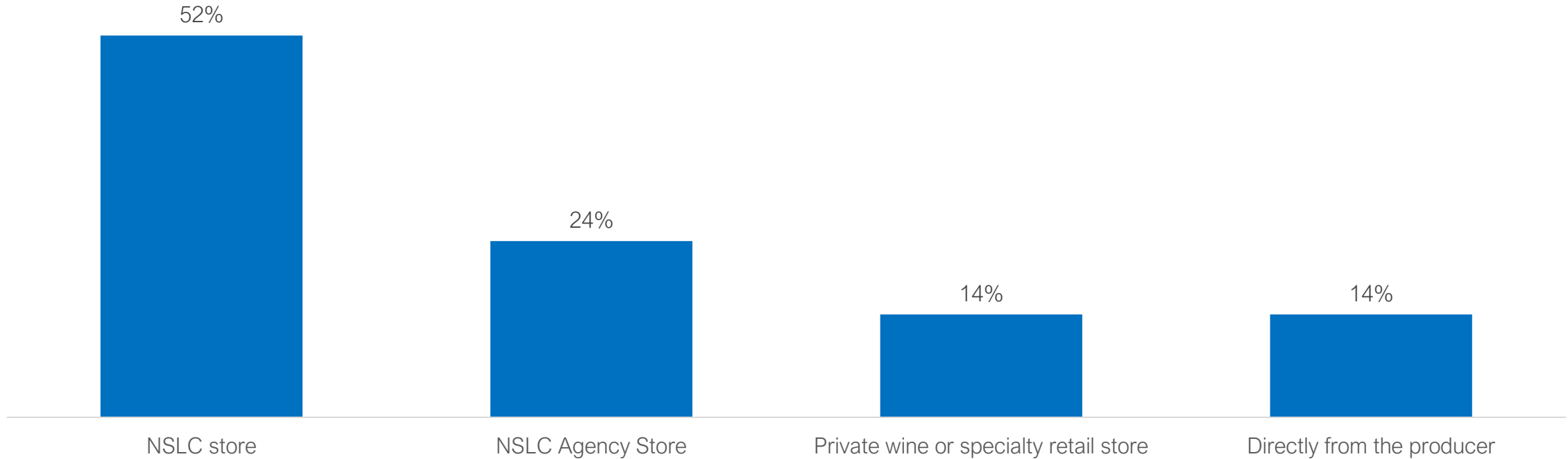
Base Total (n=1,501)

Purchase Frequency

The majority of Nova Scotian adults typically purchased alcohol monthly, from NSLC stores (52%) or NSLC Agency Stores (24%).

How often do you typically purchase alcohol from the following retailers?

■ Monthly (Week + Month)



Base Total (n=1,501; Multi-select question)

Purchase Frequency

	Monthly (Past week + month)	Within the past week	Within the past month	Within the past two months	Within the past three to five months	Within the past six to twelve months	Over twelve months ago	Never / I do not purchase alcohol
NSLC Store	52%	27%	25%	9%	10%	9%	9%	12%
NSLC Agency Store	24%	9%	15%	7%	7%	8%	20%	34%
Private wine or specialty retail store	14%	5%	8%	5%	4%	6%	18%	53%
Directly from the producer	14%	5%	9%	5%	5%	8%	19%	48%

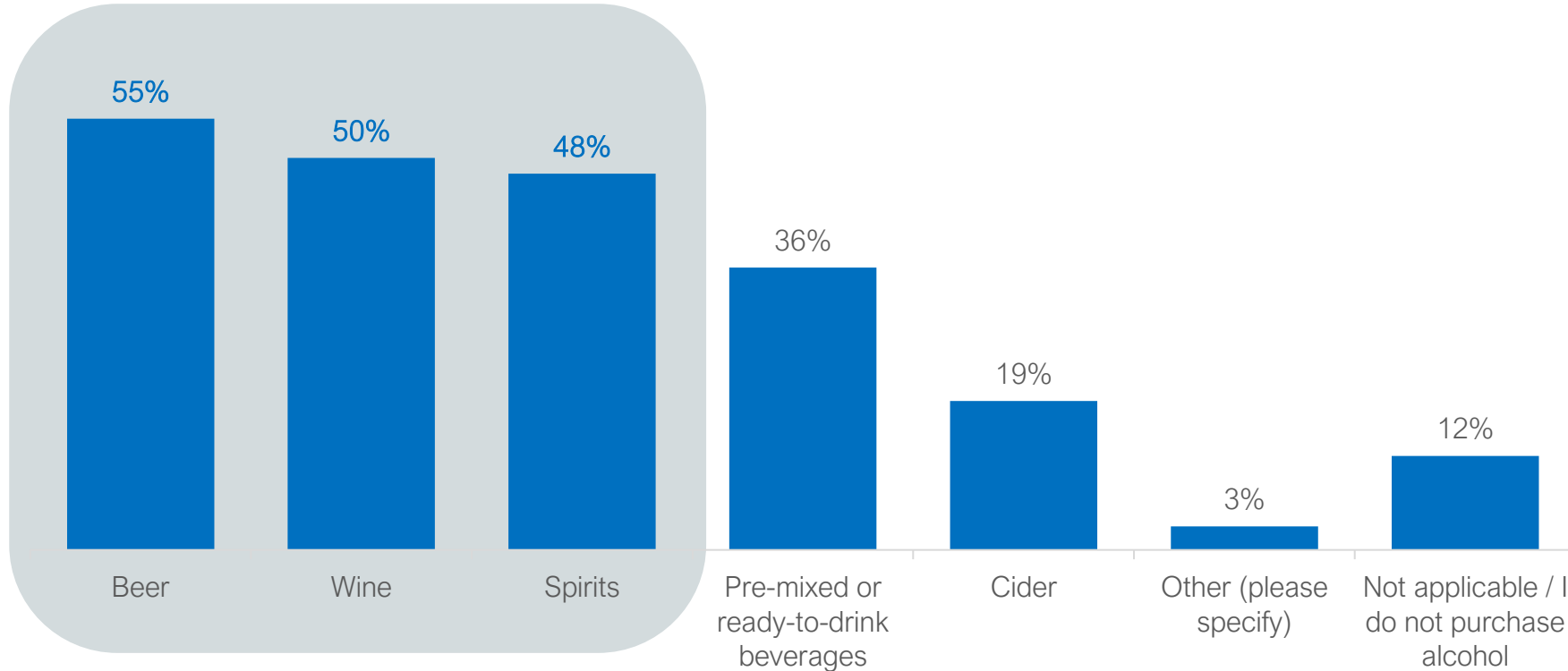
Base Total (n=1,501; Multi-select question)

Products

Beer (55%) was the top alcoholic product purchased, followed closely by wine (50%) and spirits (48%).

Comparing results, men were more likely to purchase beer than women (70% vs. 43%), women were more likely to purchase wine than men (56% vs. 45%), and the 19–34 age group was more likely than others to purchase cider (30% vs. the overall rate of 19%) and pre-mixed or ready-to-drink beverages (50% vs. the overall rate of 36%).

Which of the following product(s) do you purchase?



Other mentions included spirits, liqueurs, and specialty wines:

- Liqueurs (Baileys, Tia Maria, Irish Cream)
- Spirits (Rum, Vodka, Tequila, Whiskey, Brandy, Sherry)
- Wines (Champagne, Fortified wine, Sparkling wines)

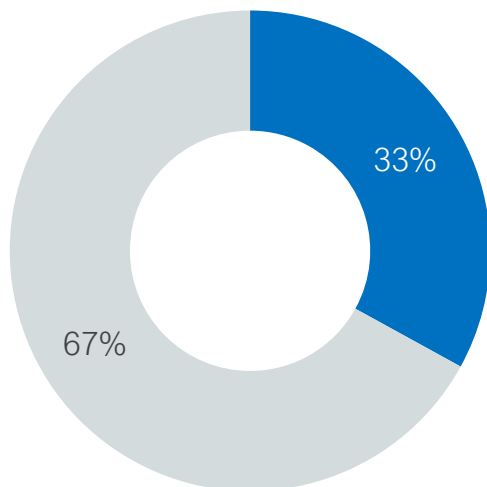
Base Total (n=1,501) ; Multi-select question.

Out-of-Province Purchases

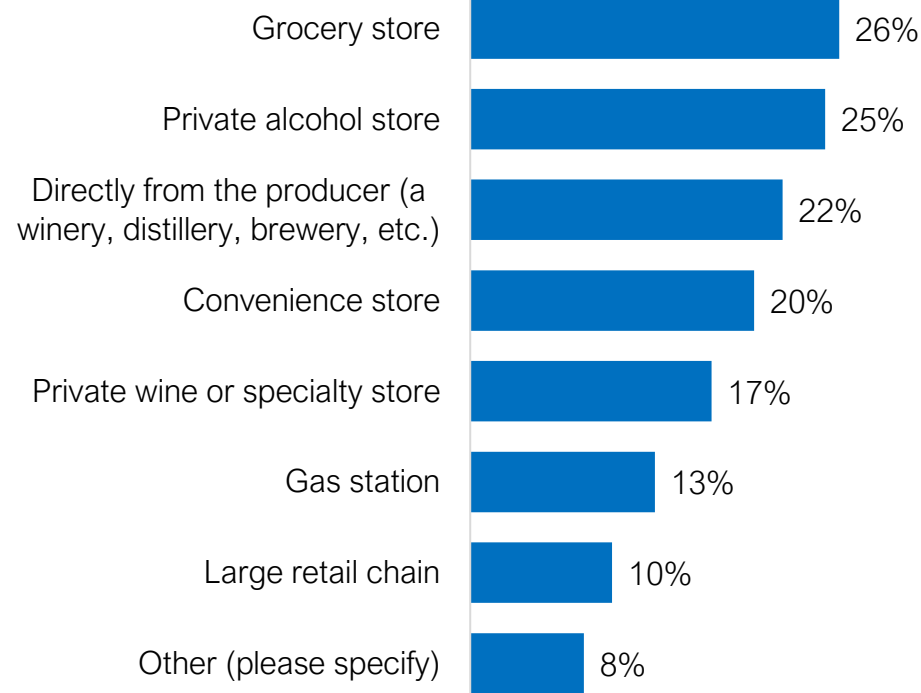
One-third Nova Scotian adults (33%) purchased alcohol outside of the province within the last 12 months. Of those who purchased out of province, provincial or state-operated stores were the most common retail setting.

Did you purchase alcohol in a retail setting outside of Nova Scotia in the last 12 months?

■ Yes ■ No



In which type of retail setting did you purchase alcohol?



LEFT: Total (n=1,501)

RIGHT: Total (n=496 ; Multi-select question)

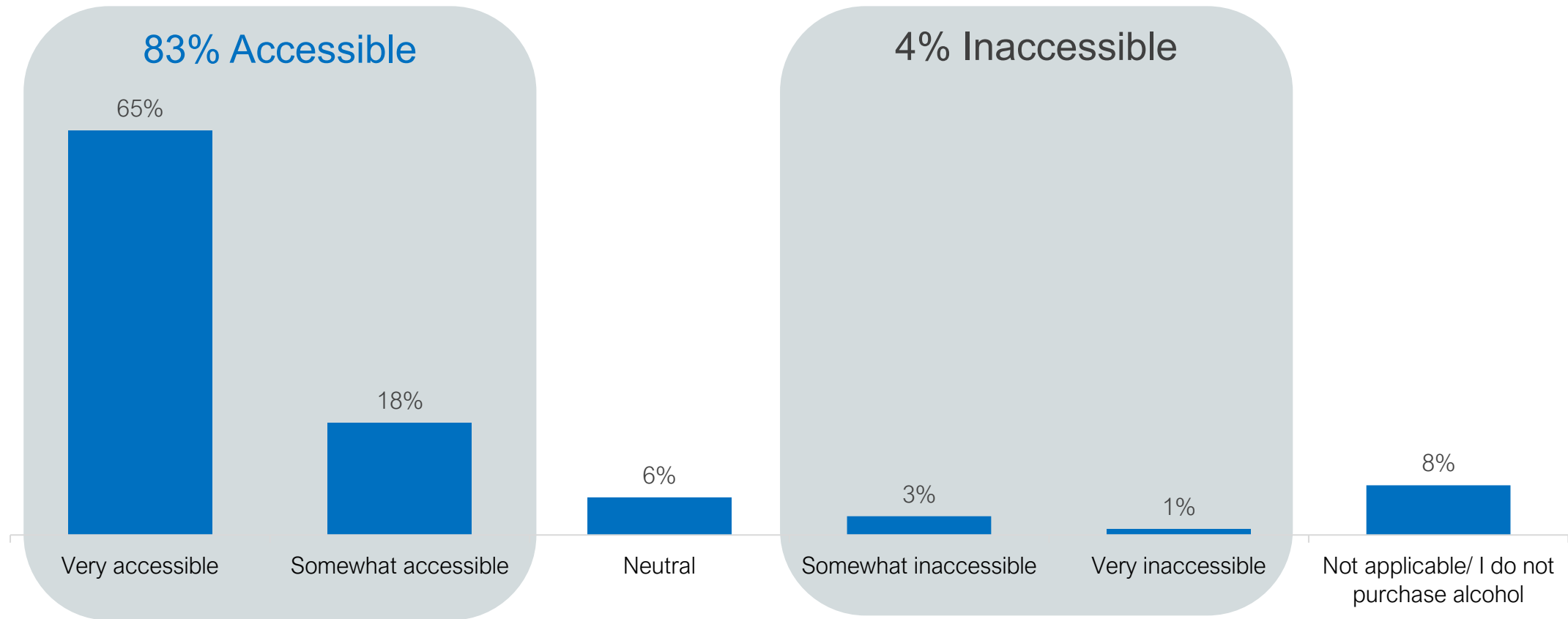
Access



Accessibility

83% of Nova Scotian adults believed purchasing alcohol in Nova Scotia is very + somewhat accessible. Specifically, two-thirds (65%) felt it is very accessible. Only 4% of Nova Scotians said purchasing alcohol is inaccessible.

How would you rate your current level of accessibility when purchasing alcohol within your area?

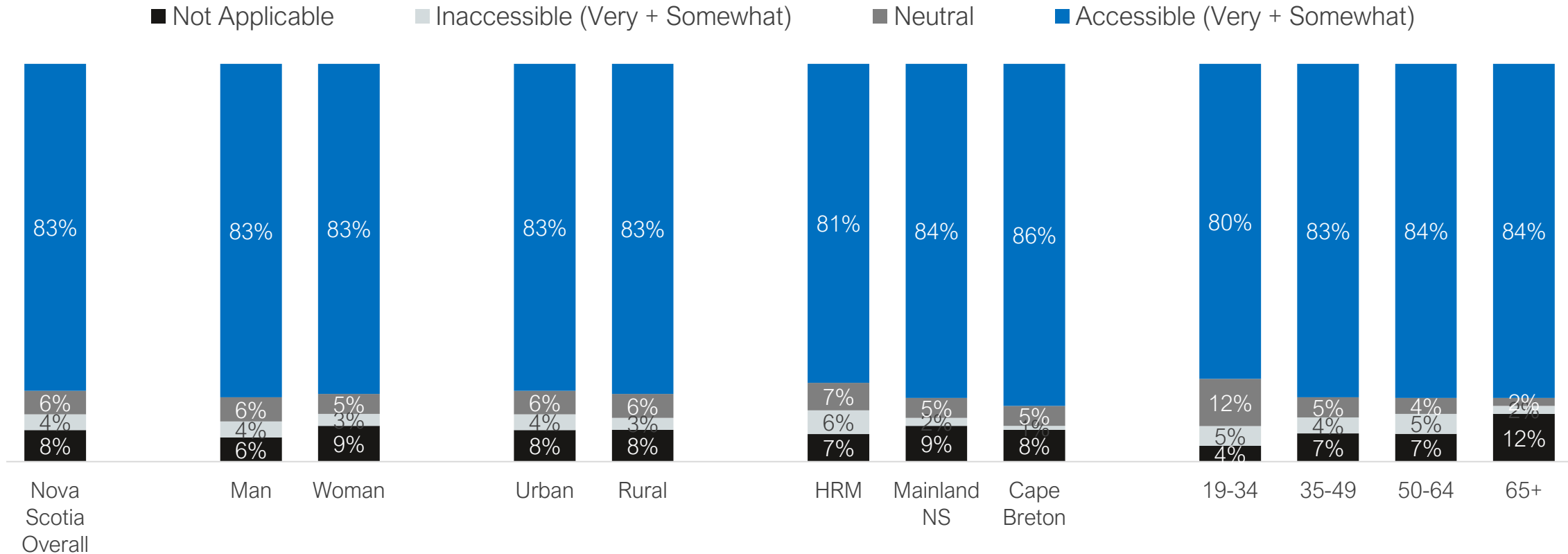


Base Total (n=1,501)

Accessibility by Demographics

The number of participants who chose “very/somewhat accessible” was similar across all demographics. There were very few statistically significant differences between the other options. This suggests the entire province holds similar levels of agreement on accessibility regardless of region, age or gender.

How would you rate your current level of accessibility when purchasing alcohol within your area?



Base Total (n=1,501)

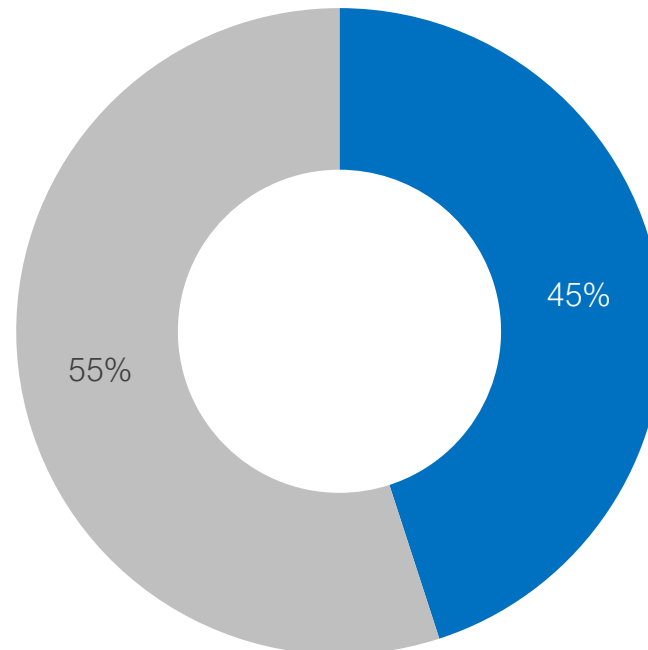
Opinions on Expansion



Opinions on Expansion

Would you like to see more retail locations selling alcohol?

■ Yes ■ No



Those who answered “no” were more likely to be:

- 50-64 (60%)
- 65+ (67%)
- Women (62%)
- Rest of Nova Scotia (60%)

Those who answered “yes” were more likely to be:

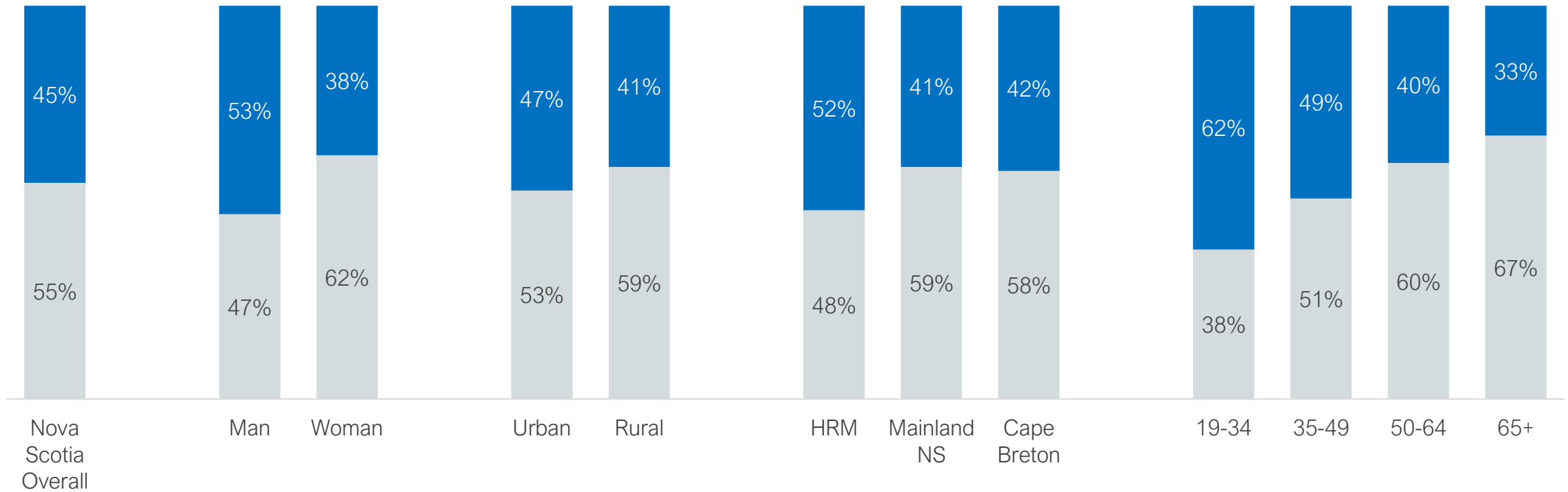
- 19-24 (62%)
- Men (53%)
- HRM residents (52%)
- Earn between \$90-\$200K

More Retail by Demographics

An increase in retail locations selling alcohol was more appealing to men and those between the ages of 19-34, and less appealing to women and those over 65 years of age.

Would you like to see more retail locations selling alcohol?

■ No ■ Yes



Base Total (n=1,501)

More Retail – Opposing Responses

Please share your thoughts and reasons why you do not want to see more retail locations selling alcohol in your area.

	n=823
Already sufficient access	56%
Personal choice not to drink or indifference	13%
Concerns about increased addiction and alcoholism	12%
Concerns about underage drinking	10%
Preference for current NSLC control and regulation	6%
Concerns about drunk driving and public safety	6%
Negative health impacts of alcohol	5%
Potential increase in crime and theft	4%
Economic concerns and job losses	1%

A random sample of verbatim responses

- *“More are not needed. It's already sold at some corner stores in rural communities that are not handy to an NSLC outlet.”*
- *“I do not want to see more retail locations selling alcohol in my area.”*
- *“There is enough now.”*
- *“We have enough places locally (too many actually) that sell liquor.”*
- *“I would be concerned about the level of security and who would be able to access it.”*
- *“More accessible could mean more public health harms.”*
- *“Alcohol is a drug. Kids should never have easy access to drugs!”*

Base – Those who do not want more retail locations (n=823)

Expansion

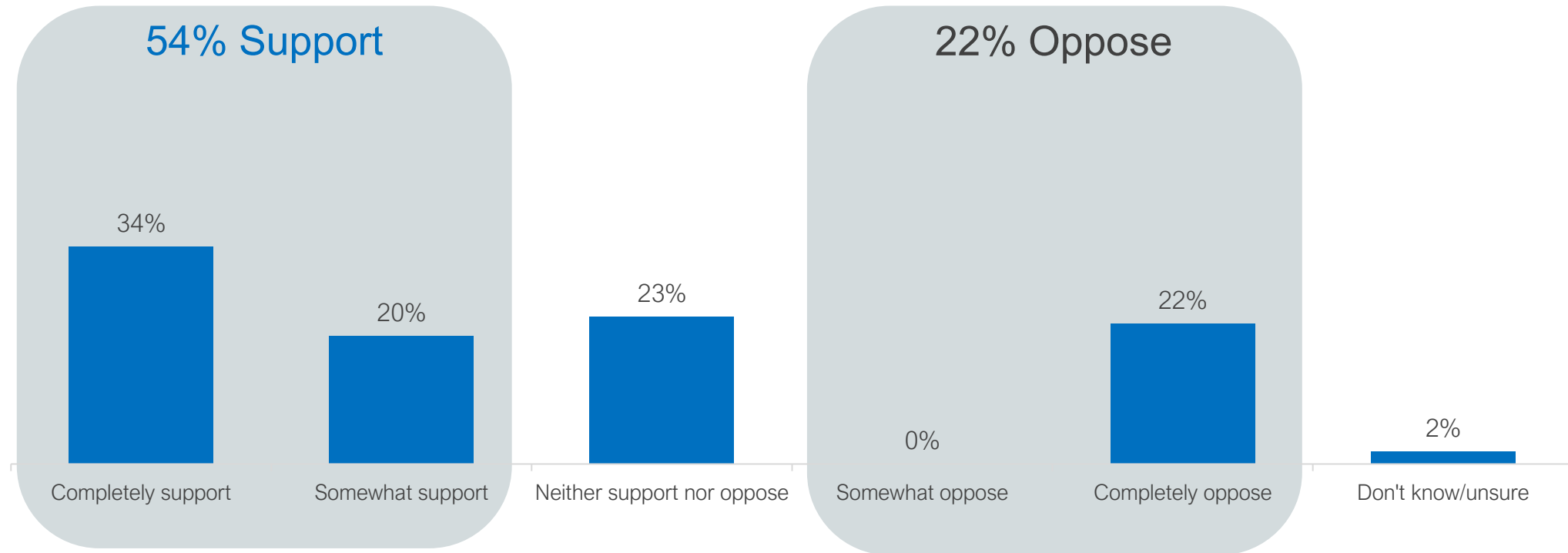
Nova Scotians were provided the following explanation prior to asking questions on expansion:

Nova Scotia is considering where alcohol products—such as beer, wine, spirits or ready-to-drink products are made available for purchase.

Expansion

When asked, 54% of Nova Scotian adults supported (completely + somewhat support) selling alcohol in convenience stores, grocery stores and gas stations. Men supported this more than women (62% vs. 47%). Additionally, those between the ages of 35-49 were the most supportive age group (61%).

How much do you support or oppose Nova Scotia selling alcohol in convenience stores, grocery stores and gas stations?



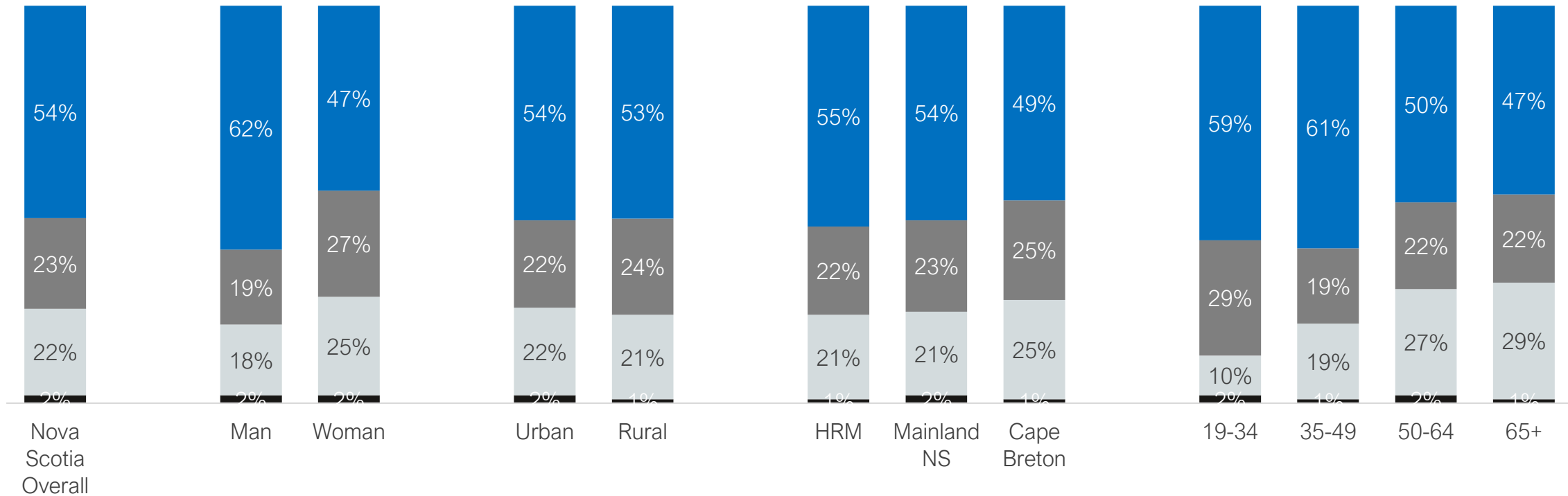
Base Total (n=1,501)

Expansion by Demographics

Expanding alcohol sales was more appealing to men (62%) and those between the ages of 35-49 (61%), and less appealing to women (47%) and those over 65 years of age (47%).

How much do you support or oppose Nova Scotia selling alcohol in convenience stores, grocery stores and gas stations?

Don't Know
 Oppose (Completely + Somewhat)
 Neither
 Support (Completely + Somewhat)



Base Total (n=1,501)

Support for New Retail Locations

Please share the main reason(s) for supporting alcohol sales in new retail locations.

	N=806
Convenience and accessibility	64%
Support for local businesses and economic growth	12%
Increased choice and competition	8%
Extended hours and availability	8%
One-stop shopping experience	7%
Comparison to other regions and modernization	6%
Indifference or opposing comments	4%
Reduce travel and environmental benefits	3%
Personal preference and enjoyment	3%
Have no reason to share or indifferent	2%
Concerns about underage drinking and responsible consumption	2%

A random sample of verbatim responses

- *“It would help when you are travelling and trying to find an NSLC store.”*
- *“I just think Nova Scotia needs to be more open, like many other provinces.”*
- *“Better opportunity for selection, convenient locations, especially for rural residents.”*
- *“One stop shopping (food, alcohol, and other necessities).”*
- *“It would be more convenient to buy alcohol while grocery shopping, thus allowing a one-stop shop experience.”*
- *“Works well in other provinces.”*
- *“As long as ID is required, I think making it more convenient to purchase alcohol is a good idea.”*

Base: Those who support new retail locations (n=806)

Opposition for New Retail Locations

Please share the main reason(s) for opposing alcohol sales in new retail locations.

	N=325
Increased accessibility concerns	26%
Underage access and safety	24%
Unnecessary and already accessible	23%
Addiction and health concerns	15%
Drunk driving and public safety	14%
Economic and regulatory concerns	10%
Crime and theft	9%
I don't drink	4%
Uninterested/would not purchase	3%

A random sample of verbatim responses

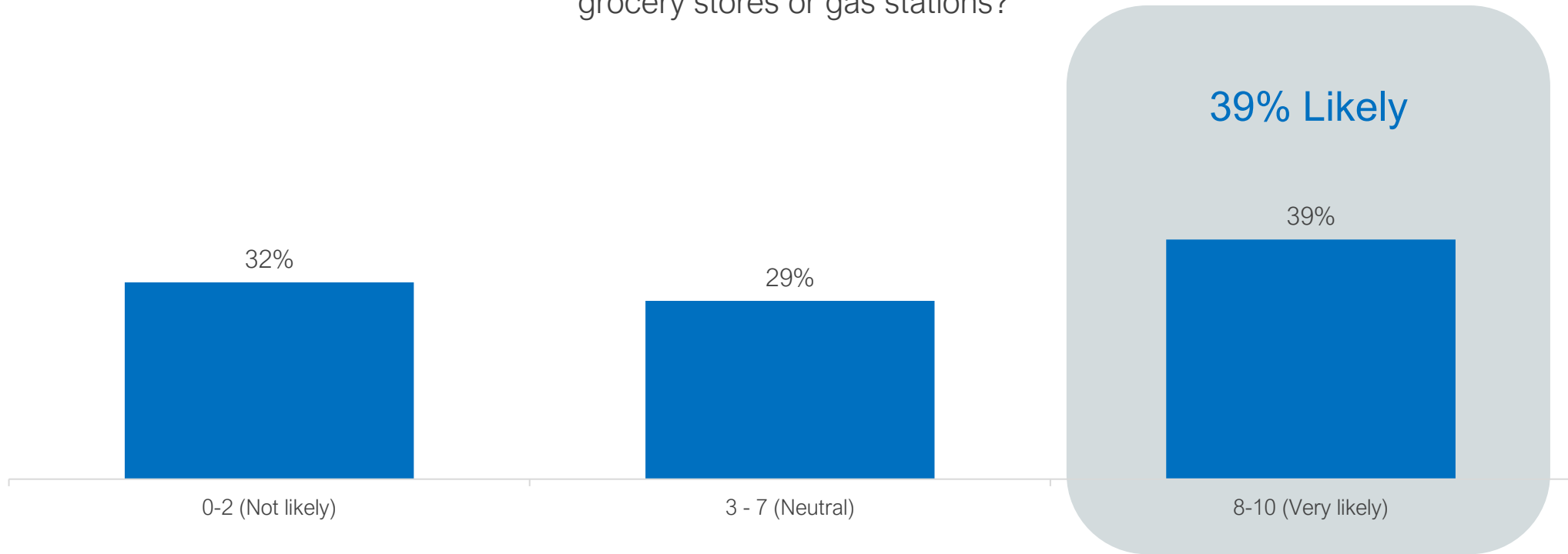
- “More are not needed. It's already sold at some corner stores in rural communities that are not handy to an NSLC outlet.”
- “There are already as many NSLC & private liquor stores as there are Tim Horton's, it's hardly an access issue.”
- “Concern for staff safety. Concern that people who have alcohol issues will have more temptation/access.”
- “Risk of inappropriate uses like drinking and driving.”
- “I worry about public intoxication, garbage & underage.”
- “More accessible could mean more public health harms.”
- “Too easy for teens to access by getting someone to purchase it for them.”

Base: Those who oppose new retail locations (n=325)

Likely to Purchase

39% of Nova Scotian adults felt they would be very likely to purchase alcohol from a convenience store, grocery store or gas station. Another third (32%) reported they were not likely (0-2 on a scale of 0-10), while the last 29% provided a neutral score (3-7). Those more likely to purchase were those between the ages of 19-34 (45%), and 35-49 (44%), and men (43%).

How likely are you to purchase alcohol from a convenience store, grocery stores or gas stations?

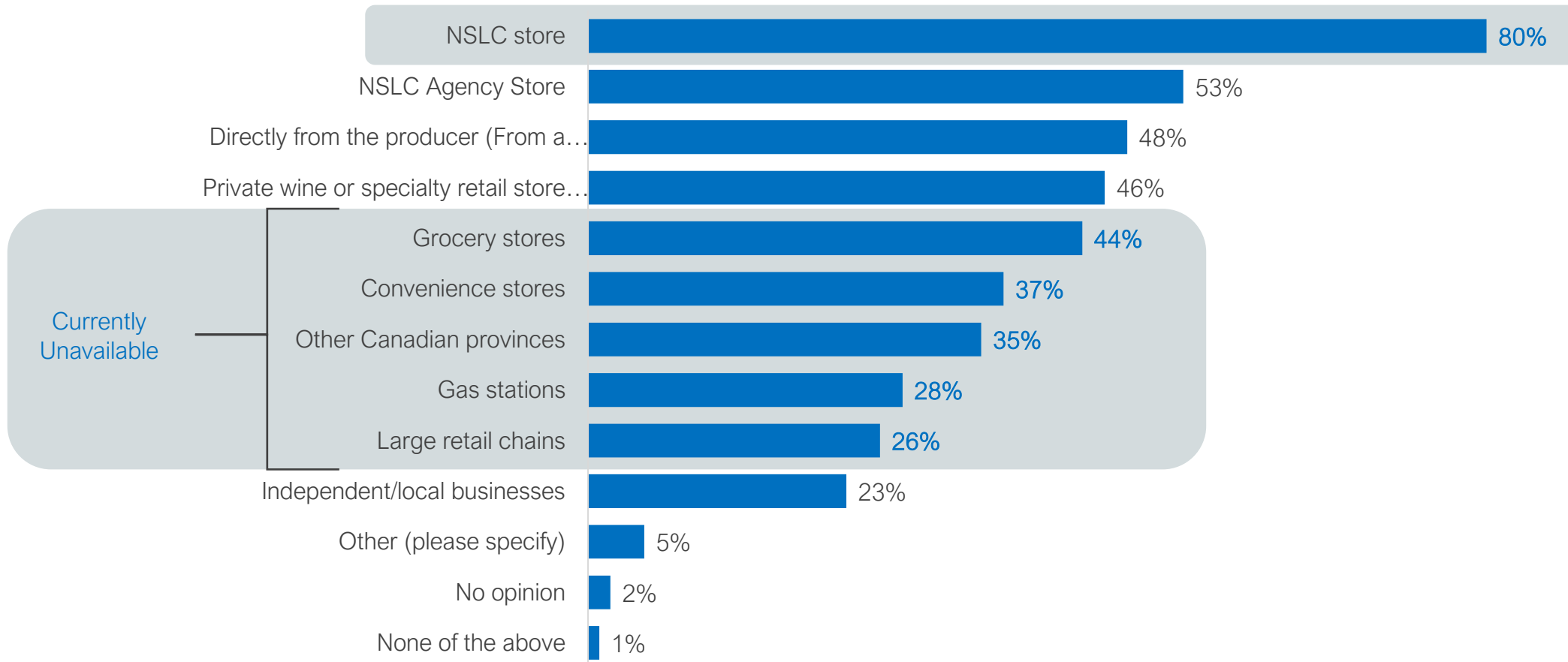


Base Total (n=1,501)

Expectations for Purchase

The majority of Nova Scotian adults expected to be able to purchase alcohol from an NSLC store (80%). Results to this question were consistent across demographics, including residents of HRM (78%) and the rest of NS (81%).

Where would you expect to be able to purchase alcohol?



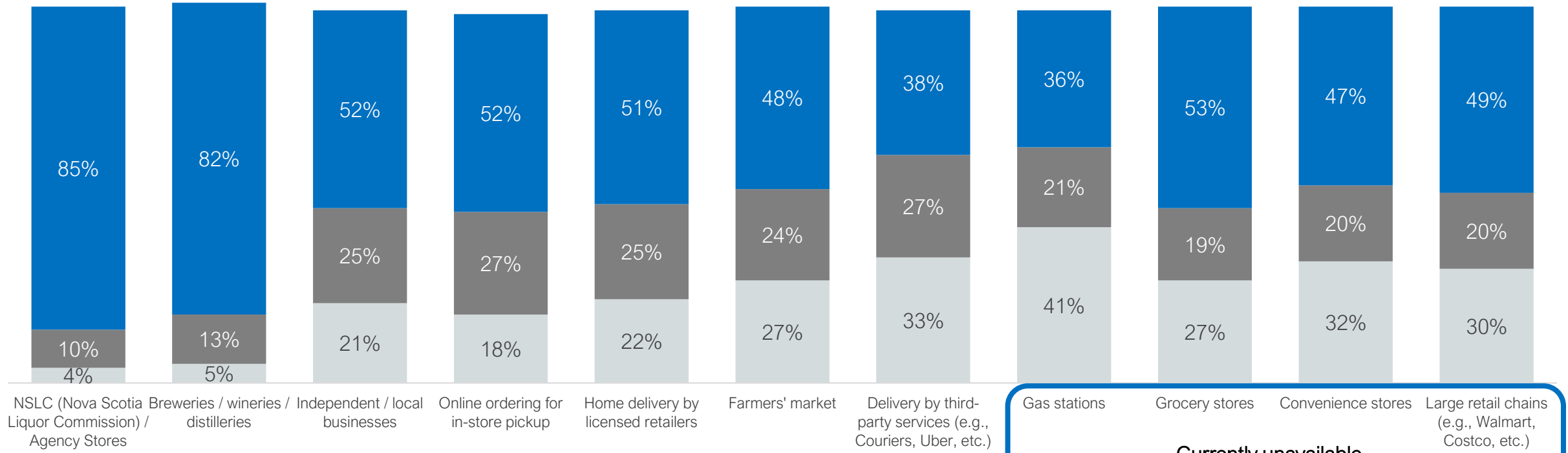
Base Total (n=1,501 ; Multi-select question)

Purchase Availability Support

Nova Scotian adults supported alcohol being sold at NSLC and NSLC Agency Stores (85%), breweries, wineries, and distilleries (82%). Regarding new retail locations for alcohol sales, 53% of Nova Scotians supported grocery stores, 49% supported large retail chains, and 47% supported convenience stores. However, each option also faced notable opposition, with 27% opposing grocery stores, 30% opposing large retail chains, and 32% oppose convenience stores. Additionally, more Nova Scotians opposed selling alcohol in gas stations than those who supported it (41% vs. 36%).

Indicate your level of support or opposition for selling alcohol through the following retail locations?

Strongly oppose + Oppose Neutral Strongly support + Support



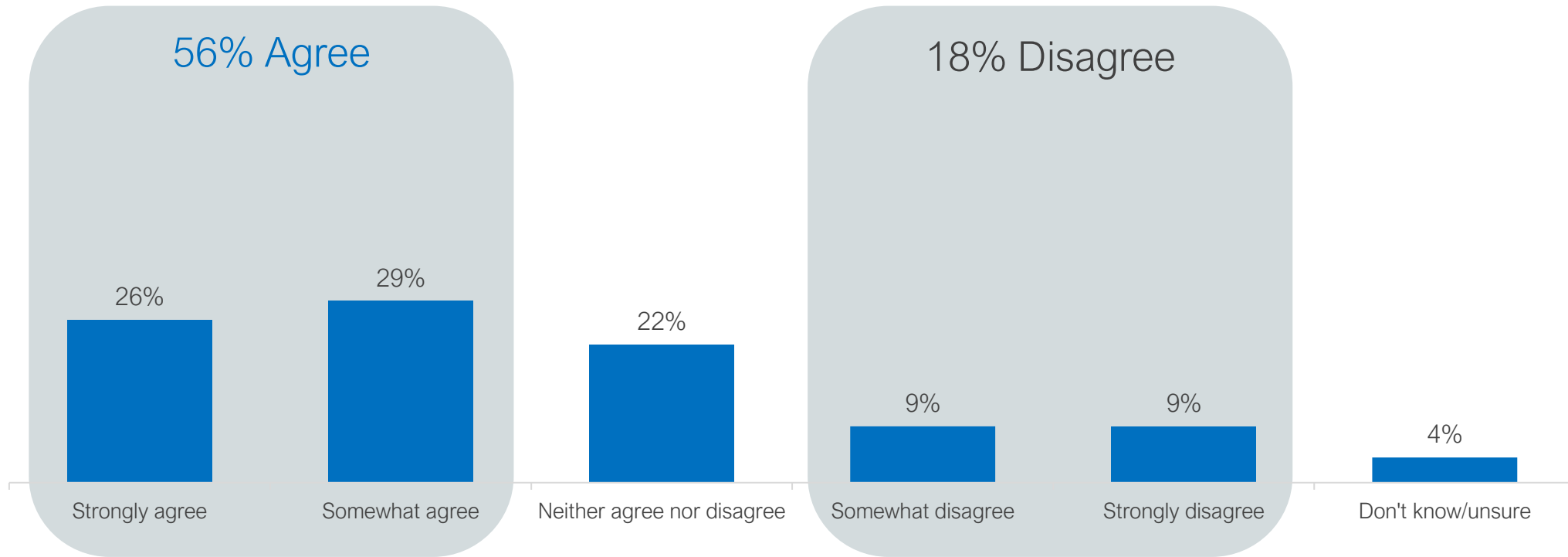
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Base Total (n=1,501)

Limitations

If alcohol was sold in additional retail locations, 56% of Nova Scotian adults agreed that there should be limitations on the types of products available. Agreement was consistent among all demographic segments.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: If alcohol is sold in additional retail locations, there should be limitations on the types of products available (beer, wine, spirits or ready-to-drink products).



Base Total (n=1,501)

Concerns with Expansion

What concerns, if any, do you have with seeing the expansion of retail access points for alcohol?

	n=1501
No concerns	28%
Underage drinking	24%
Addiction and health concerns	12%
Drunk driving and public safety	10%
Regulation and enforcement	9%
Crime and theft	7%
Unnecessary	6%
Promote alcoholism with ease of access	5%
Job security and economic impact	4%
No comments	3%
Other	2%
I don't know	3%

A random sample of verbatim responses

- “No concerns. People are going to access alcohol regardless.”
- “Nothing really, as long as laws are enforced.”
- “When we lived in England, and we didn't drink more just because it was available at the grocery stores. People have to be responsible for their own drinking habits.”
- “Theft, underage, making it more accessible.”
- “More criminal offences, such as break-ins. It would be much easier for minors to purchase alcohol if access is increased.”
- “More temptation for those with addiction.”
- “More places to buy alcohol, the more people will buy and consume. Not necessary in some places.”

Base Total (n=1,501)

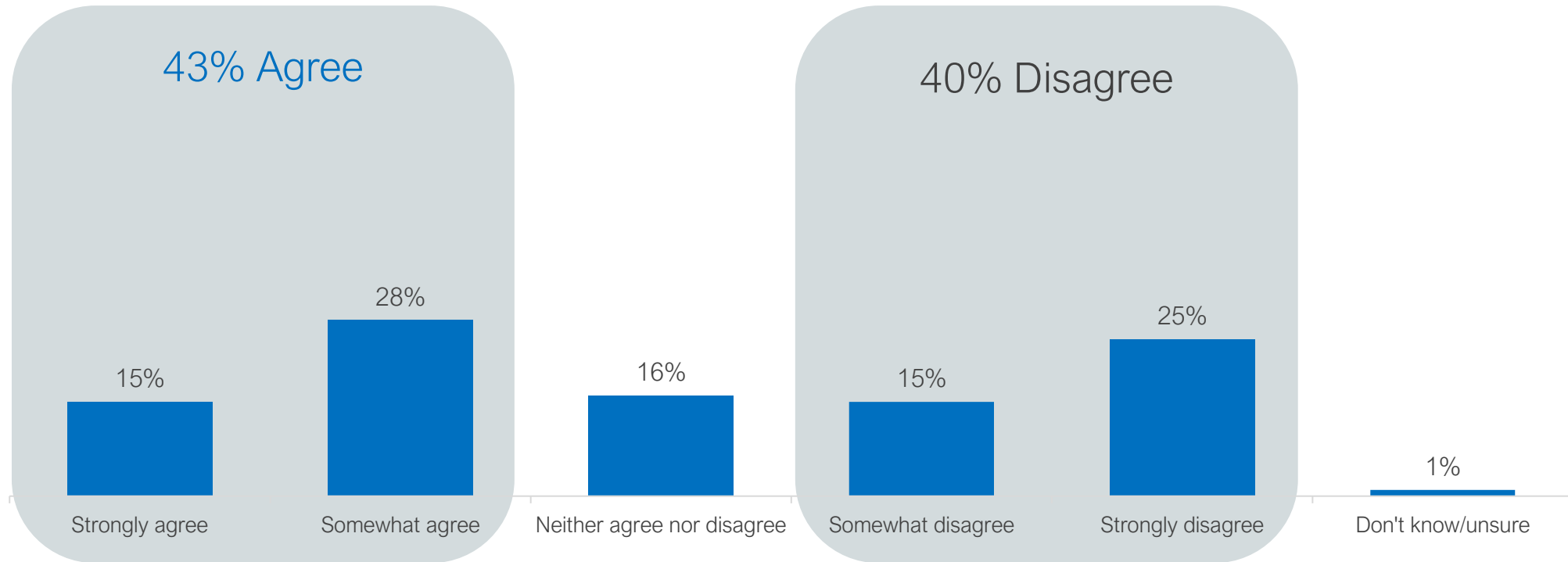
Open Consumption



Open Consumption

Nova Scotian adults were evenly split on the topic of open consumption. The results showed **no statistically significant difference** between those who agreed and those who disagreed. Support was notably higher with those between the ages of 19-34 (54%), 35-49 (51%), males (50%), and residents of HRM (47%).

To what extent do you agree with the following statement:
I believe that alcohol should be available for open consumption in designated public spaces (parks, beaches, tourist zones, waterfront boardwalk), at designated times.



Base Total (n=1,501)

Open Consumption – Support

Can you please explain why you feel that way, or share any additional thoughts?

	n=648
Social enjoyment and relaxation	26%
Personal freedom and choice	25%
Need for regulation and control	23%
Concerns about public safety and overconsumption	18%
Convenience and accessibility	10%
Concerns about impact on children and families	8%
Comparison to other jurisdictions	7%
Economic benefits and tourism	5%
I don't know/No comments	9%

A random sample of verbatim responses

- “A bottle of wine shared over a picnic, a beer or a few while beaching shouldn't be a criminal offence.”
- “I feel like it's reasonable as long as it's done in moderation and the people are respectful.”
- “If the rules support responsible consumption, drinking wine or similar at an outdoor picnic should be acceptable.”
- “It would have to be away from kids and family settings. Maybe a certain section of a beach or something.”
- “I think alcohol should be allowed in places like parks and tourist spots so adults can enjoy themselves, but it needs to be controlled.”
- “Rules would have to be enforced. No glass bottles. Only in designated areas away from kids.”

Base – Those who support open consumption (n=648)

Open Consumption – Opposition

Can you please explain why you feel that way, or share any concerns?

	N=594
Potential for public intoxication and disorderly conduct	42%
Public safety concerns	34%
Exposure to children and underage drinking	31%
Not necessary or appropriate in public spaces	17%
Negative impact on community and family environment	7%
Concerns about drunk driving	7%
Personal preference	2%
No reason/No comments	2%

A random sample of verbatim responses

- “Parks & beaches are for everyone to enjoy, especially children. I would prefer not to see people under the influence in areas such as these.”
- “Public intoxication is not acceptable.”
- “I would be concerned about the level of security and who would be able to access it.”
- “Not a family environment.”
- “Allowing open drinking in public would and could lead to bad behaviour and littering of bottles.”
- “Alcohol should not be consumed where there are children.”

Base – Those who oppose open consumption (n=594)

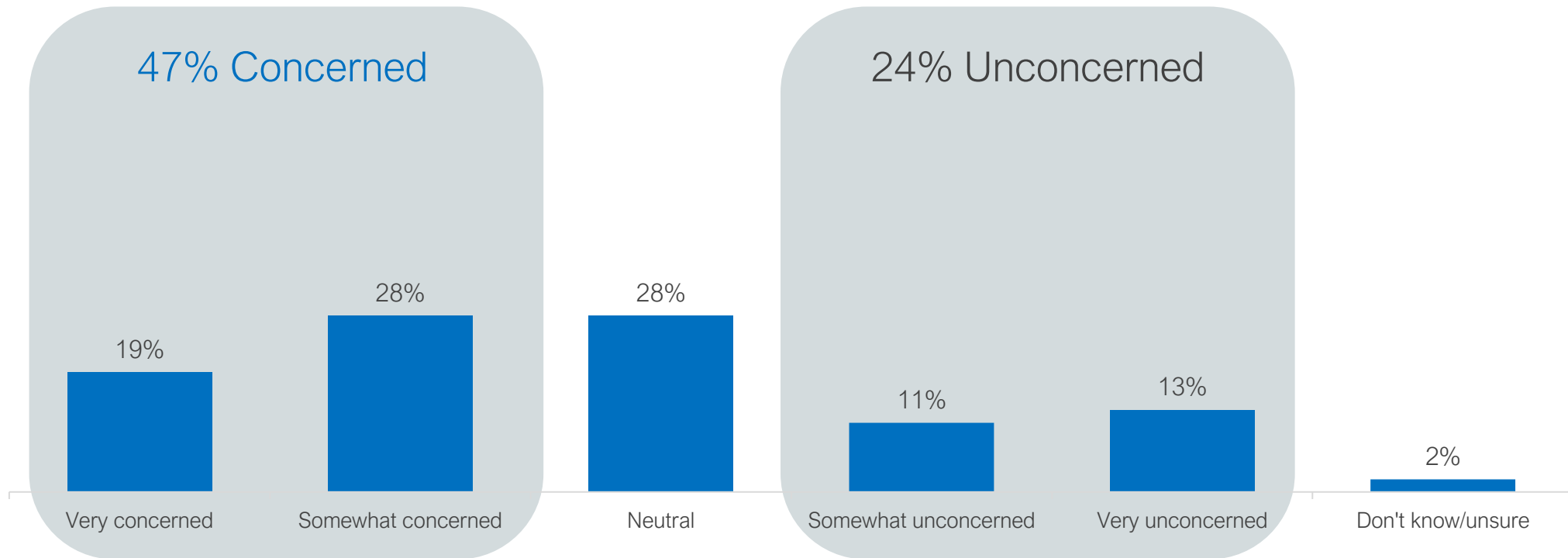
Social Responsibility



Potential Social Impacts

47% of Nova Scotian adults felt very or somewhat concerned about the potential social impacts of increasing alcohol retail access points in Nova Scotia.

How concerned are you about the potential social impacts of increasing alcohol retail access points in Nova Scotia?



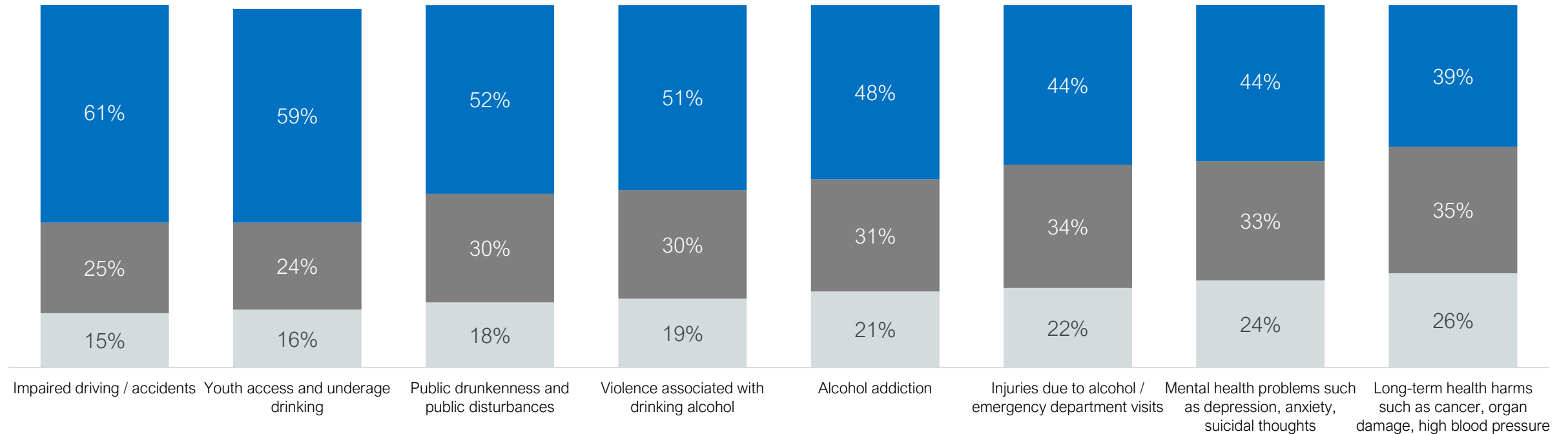
Base Total (n=1,501)

Associated Alcohol Harms

Nova Scotian adults were most concerned with potential impaired driving and accidents, youth access/underage drinking, public drunkenness and disturbances, and violence associated with drinking alcohol.

How concerned are you about these harms increasing if access to alcohol is expanded in Nova Scotia?

■ Not concerned (0+1) ■ Neutral (2+3) ■ Concerned (4+5)

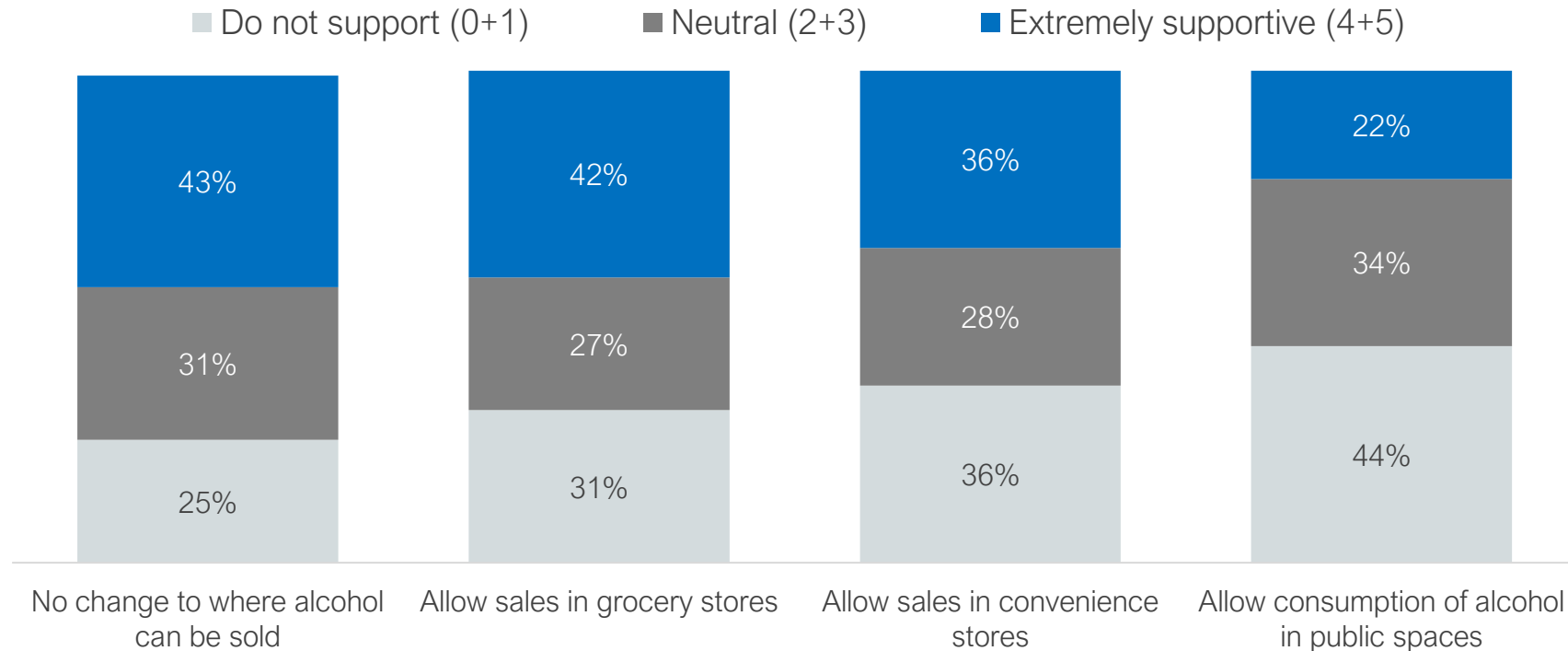


Base Total (n=1,501)

Support for Alcohol Sales Options

43% of Nova Scotian adults supported no change to where alcohol can be sold. While 42% of Nova Scotian adults supported allowing sales in grocery stores, one-third did not support this. An equal number of Nova Scotian adults both supported and opposed allowing alcohol sales in convenience stores (36%). Two-times the number of Nova Scotian adults opposed (44%) allowing consumption of alcohol in public spaces than those who supported it (22%).

Please rate your level of support for the following options for alcohol access in Nova Scotia.



Base Total (n=1,501)

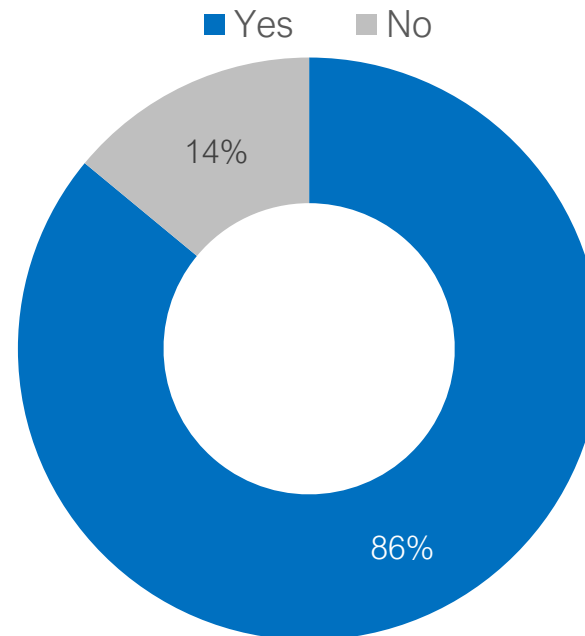
Interprovincial Trade



Interprovincial Trade

86% of Nova Scotian adults would like the option to purchase alcohol directly from producers in other Canadian provinces in Nova Scotia retail locations. Results are consistent across the province and across demographic segments.

Consider the following: Canadian leaders are looking to remove barriers that make it easier to trade goods, including alcohol, between provinces. Would you like the option to purchase alcohol directly from producers in other Canadian provinces within Nova

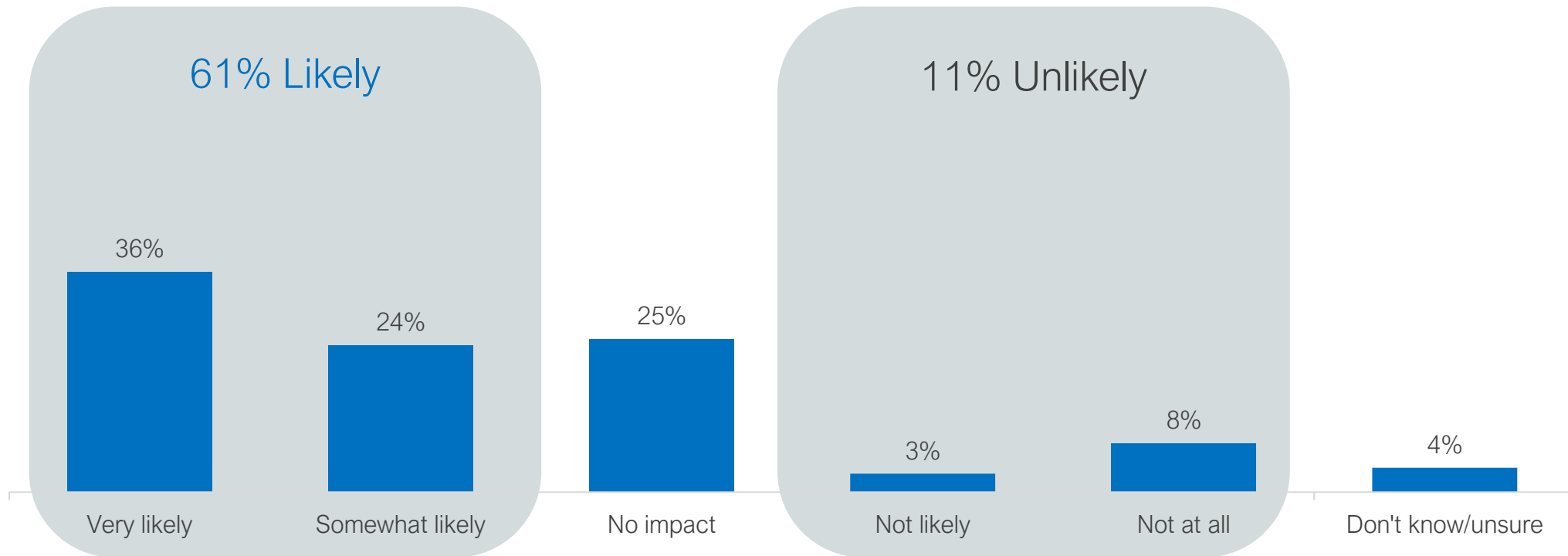


Base Total (n=1,501)

Preference for Local Alcohol

61% of Nova Scotian adults reported they are very or somewhat likely to buy local Nova Scotian alcohol products.

How likely are you to buy local Nova Scotian alcohol products with more Canadian products available which are around the same price?



Base Total (n=1,501)

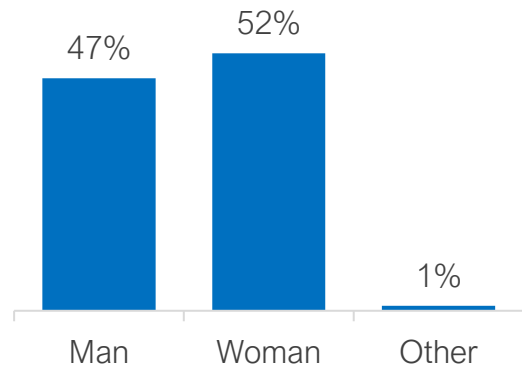
Demographics



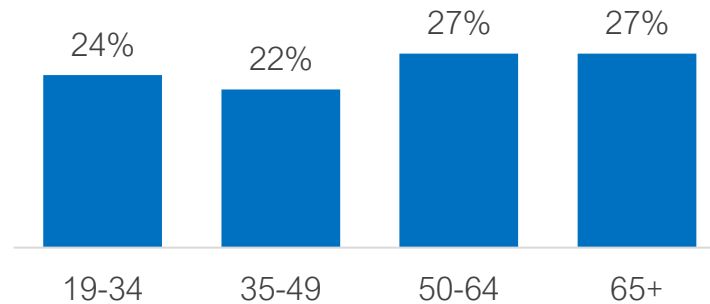
Participant Profile

Gender, Age and Region

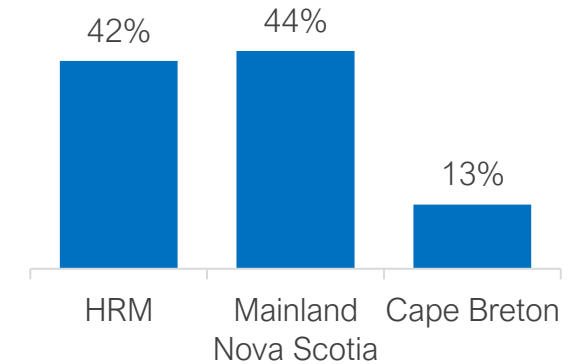
Which of the following
best describes you?



What is your current age?



Region

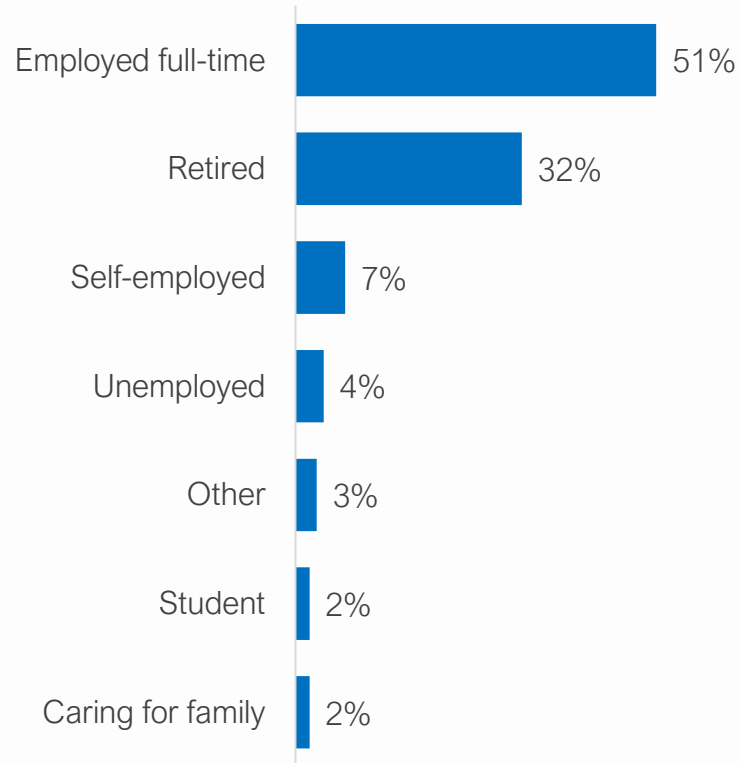


Base Total (n=1,501)

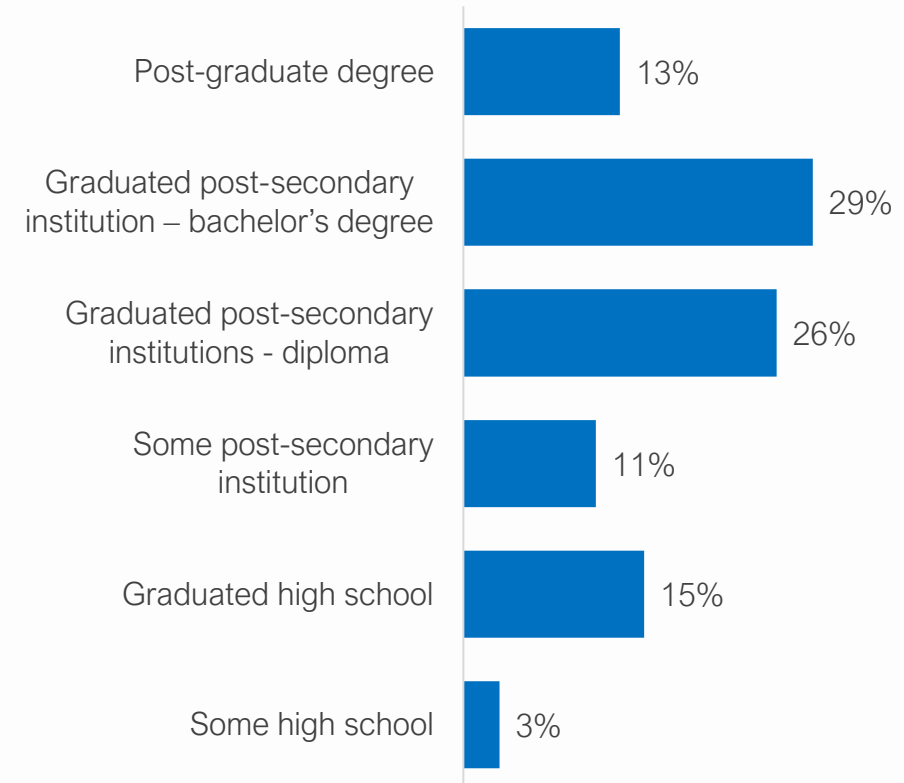
Participant Profile

Employment Status and Education

What best describes your employment status?



What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

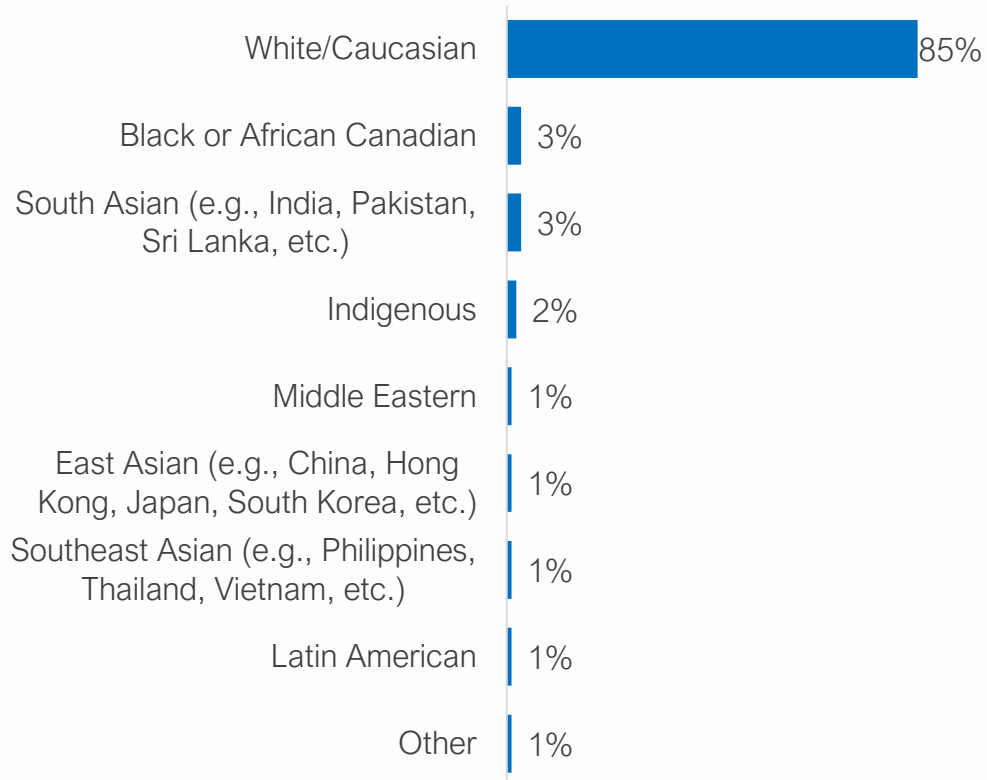


Base Total (n=1,501)

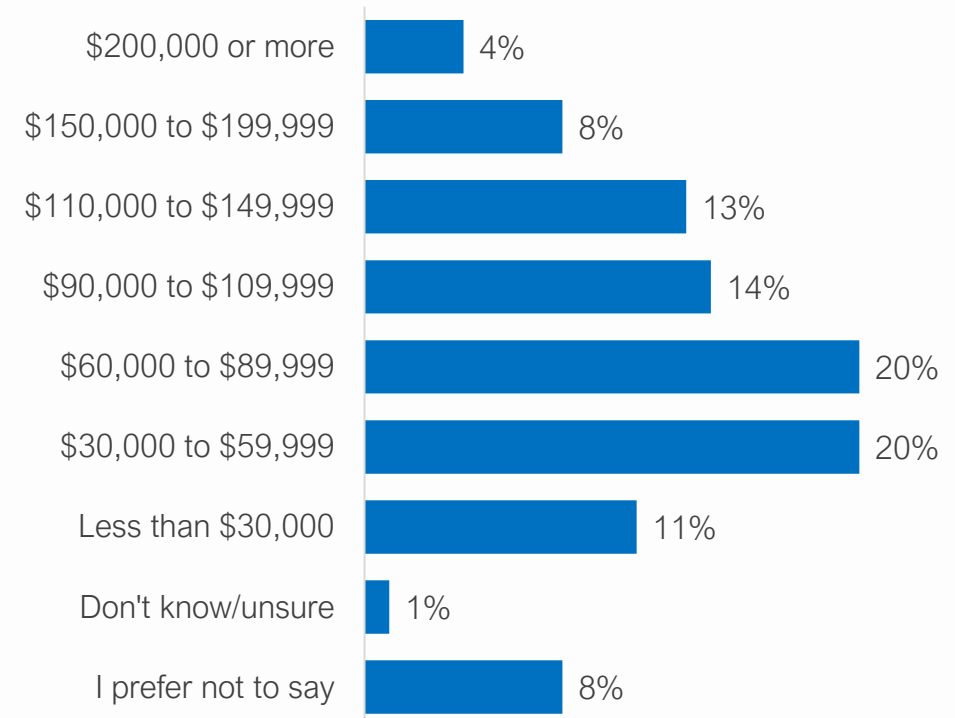
Participant Profile

Ethnicity and Annual Household Income

Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic background?



What is your total annual household income, before taxes?



Base Total (n=1,501)

