

Protest Positions: Canadians say universities are fair game for demonstrations; hospitals, schools less so

Majorities believe it should be illegal to protest at a hospital, abortion clinics

April 30, 2024 – While demonstrations are far from new phenomena in Canada, the last several months – and indeed – recent days, have put the question of where it is acceptable to protest under an increasingly intensified lens.

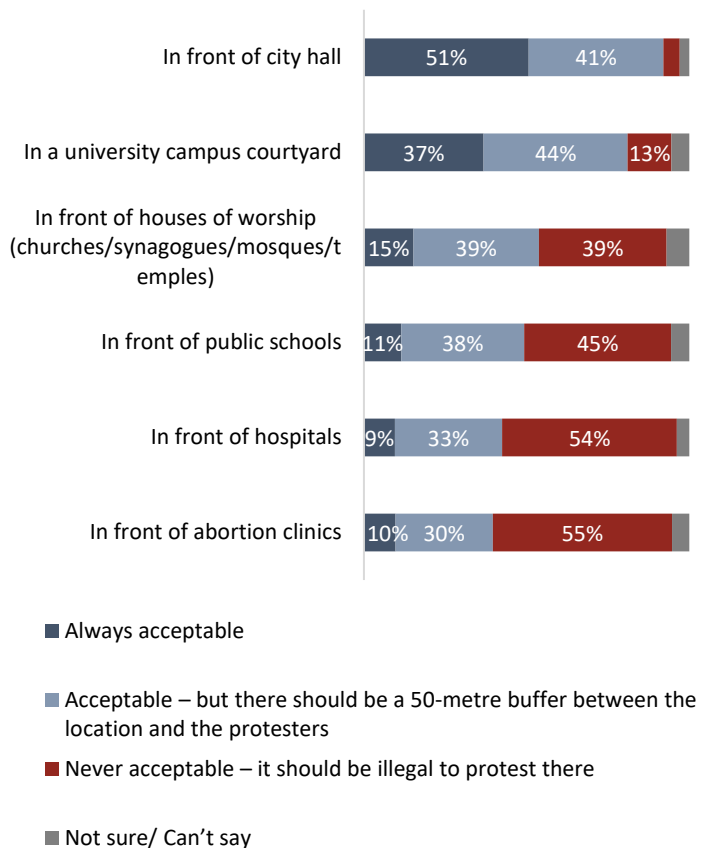
As administrators at McGill University this week declared a [pro-Palestinian encampment on its grounds “illegal”](#), the vast majority of Canadians say protesting on university campuses is “acceptable” (81%) either in the absence of an exclusion zone (37%) or with one defined and in place (44%).

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds broad acceptance of demonstrations at public buildings – such as city halls (92% acceptable) and embassies (87%) – while there is more resistance to demonstrations at hospitals (43%) and abortion clinics (40%). Among those who say demonstrations at hospitals or abortion clinics are okay, more tilt towards the requirement of a buffer or exclusion zone between protesters and the institution itself.

And while 45 per cent say it is never acceptable to protest at a public school, 49 per cent disagree. Division also exists about the acceptability of protesting at or near houses of worship – 54 per cent say it is fine, 39 per cent disagree. Again, most of those who see protesting these locations to be acceptable also express a preference for a buffer zone.

Drivers of opinion include age – older Canadians are more likely to believe more locations should be off-limits to protesters – and whether or not a respondent has engaged in a protest recently themselves. Three-

There has been much discussion about locations of protests. In your opinion, is it acceptable or not to protest... (All respondents, n=1,707)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 25-28, 2024 among a representative randomized sample of 1,707 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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quarters of Canadians who have protested in the past six months say it is okay to protest in front of a hospital while one-third of those who have never protested in their lives say the same.

This release is the first in a series that will explore Canadians' experiences with and views of protesting, an issue seen as a fundamental part of the fabric of society, but one with contentious contours.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Where are protests acceptable and where aren't they?

The location of protests across Canada have come under the spotlight in recent months. Israel's invasion of Gaza in October last year sparked protests across Canada that have continued as the war between Israel and Hamas has persisted. Pro-Palestinian protesters have demonstrated at Jewish-owned [businesses](#), [synagogues](#) and the [historically Jewish-connected Mount Sinai Hospital](#) in Toronto. Meanwhile, students at [McGill University](#) and the [University of British Columbia](#) have set up encampments on campus fields, following the controversial occupations of several American universities in recent weeks.

Public schools in the country have also been a common location for demonstrations in recent years, especially as [tensions over school gender policies have risen](#).

The Angus Reid Institute asked respondents about the acceptability of protests in a number of spaces around their own and others' communities. Choices ranged from completely acceptable, to acceptable with a so-called "exclusion or safe zone" of 50 meters, to completely unacceptable. In Canada, exclusion zones have become common in recent years [to protect schools, medical clinics, and other public infrastructure](#) from disruption due to protests.

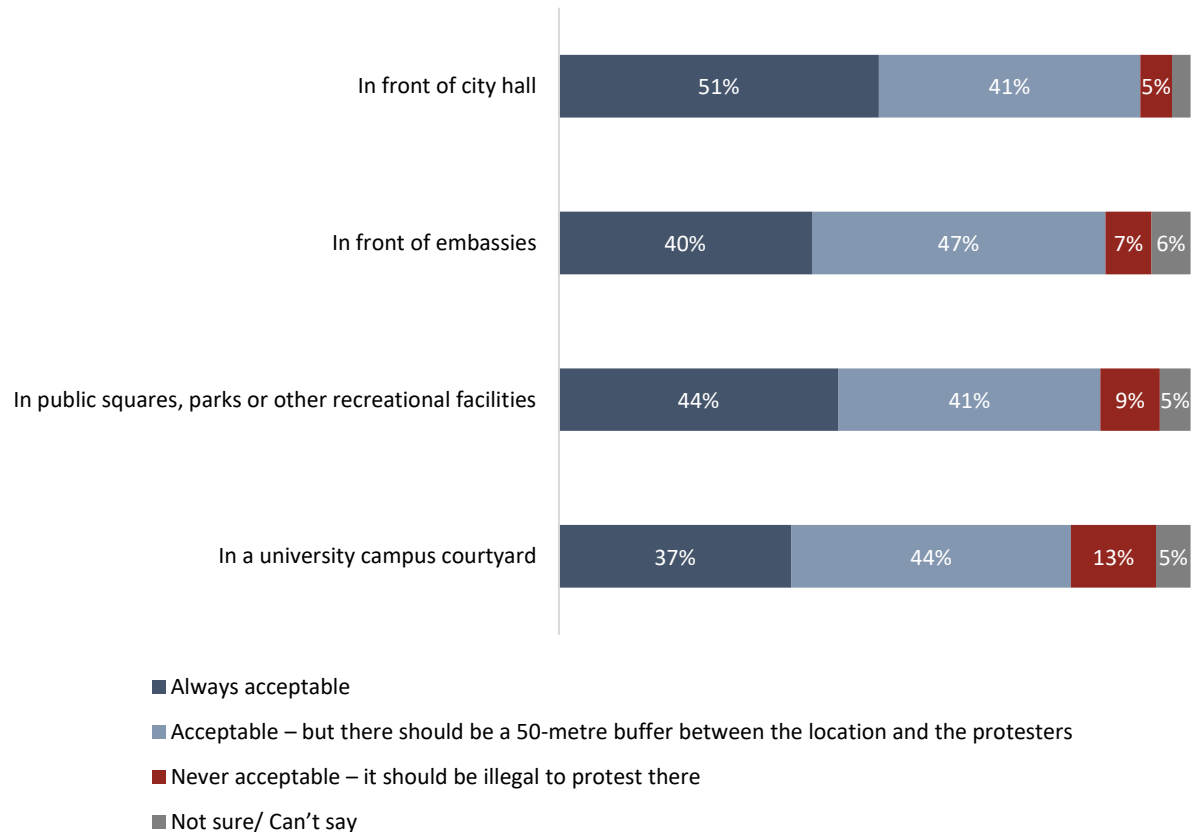
Acceptance for protests at city halls, universities, public spaces

In some cases, Canadians say protest should be allowed without restriction. Four areas draw higher levels of support for this than others – city hall (51%), public squares or parks (44%), embassies 40%), and university campuses (37%). There is still, however, a sense that in each of these cases, an exclusion zone of 50 metres to remove protesters out of particularly disruptive spaces is necessary. What this means is that overall, at least four-in-five Canadians feel that each of those venues are reasonable places to protest, though with some hesitation about necessary precautions:

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**There has been much discussion about locations of protests. In your opinion, is it acceptable or not to protest...
(All respondents, n=1,707)**



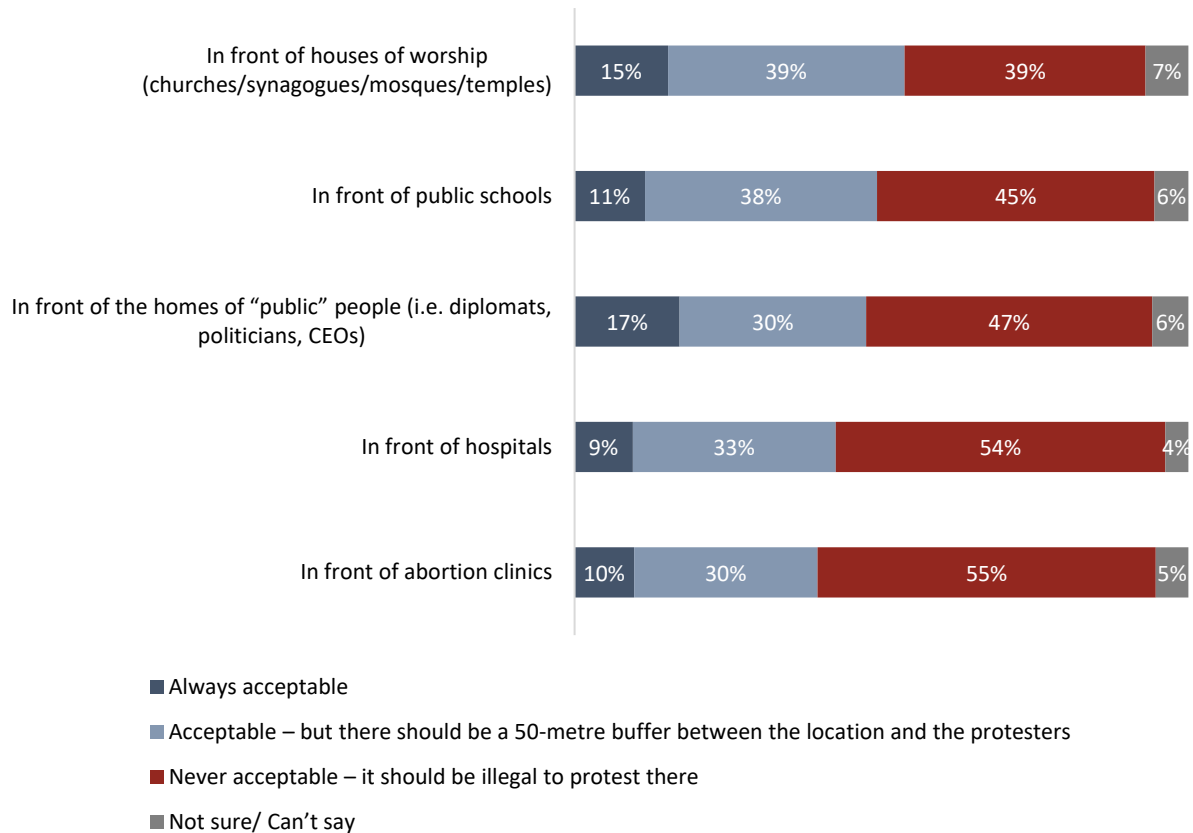
Hesitation or opposition to protest at hospitals and public schools

Canadians draw a line between these aforementioned locations and other, often popular, spots for protests. Public schools and places of worship are particularly divisive for respondents, with approximately half of Canadians saying each is either an acceptable place for demonstration or not. A significant portion of those who say that protests are acceptable say this with the inclusion of a buffer around the property, to preclude disrupting the lives of those attending. Majority opposition for *any* protest is noted for hospitals and abortion clinics. Many jurisdictions have implemented exclusion zones for both in recent years:

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Age and gender perspectives show distinction

While a majority of Canadians feel that it is never acceptable to protest in front of abortion clinics or hospitals, men younger than 55 are less likely to agree with the rest of the population. Young men, those between the ages of 18 and 34, are most likely to feel that demonstrating at these two locations is acceptable. This group is least likely to say protest at any venue is unacceptable, while women over the ages of 55 are most likely:

Percentage who say the following locations are <u>never acceptable</u> to protest...							
	Total (n=1,707)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=240)	35-54 (n=282)	55+ (n=315)	18-34 (n=233)	35-54 (n=291)	55+ (n=347)
In front of abortion clinics	55%	39%	49%	54%	63%	62%	62%
In front of hospitals	54%	35%	48%	65%	47%	53%	66%
In front of the homes of "public" people	47%	27%	44%	54%	39%	46%	61%
In front of public schools	45%	27%	39%	56%	33%	47%	60%
In front of houses of worship	39%	22%	30%	47%	33%	36%	59%
In a university campus courtyard	13%	7%	11%	19%	8%	11%	21%
In public squares, parks or other rec facilities	9%	6%	7%	14%	4%	9%	13%
In front of embassies	7%	4%	4%	8%	7%	7%	13%
In front of city hall	5%	4%	2%	6%	5%	4%	8%

Political perspectives on protest protocol

Past Liberal and Conservative voters are likely supportive of different causes, but they find common ground in their perspectives of where protest is acceptable. With the exception of abortion clinics, responses from 2021 Liberal and CPC voters are nearly identical, with a majority saying they feel it is unacceptable to protest at hospitals, public schools, and at the residences of public figures. Past NDP and BQ voters are much more permissive in most cases:

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Percentage who say the following locations are <u>never acceptable</u> to protest...					
	Total (n=1,707)	Federal Vote 2021			
		CPC (n=468)	Liberal (n=466)	NDP (n=250)	BQ (n=110)
In front of abortion clinics	55%	42%	68%	67%	58%
In front of hospitals	54%	59%	61%	52%	26%
In front of the homes of "public" people	47%	53%	53%	34%	47%
In front of public schools	45%	52%	53%	41%	28%
In front of houses of worship	39%	49%	47%	26%	20%
In a university campus courtyard	13%	20%	13%	7%	4%
In public squares, parks or other rec facilities	9%	14%	9%	4%	2%
In front of embassies	7%	10%	7%	3%	7%
In front of city hall	5%	6%	5%	2%	5%

Those who take part in protests are much more permissive in choice of venue

Among the more than 1,700 Canadian adults who participated in this survey, approximately 10 per cent say they have recently taken part in a protest, themselves. This factor is among the most important when assessing one's views of protest permissiveness. Half of these individuals (46%) say that abortion clinics are off limits, but few other locations cause this group much consternation. Those who have never taken part in a protest themselves, more than half of Canadian adults, see a higher number of areas of contention:

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Percentage who say the following locations are <u>never acceptable</u> to protest...							
	Total (n=1,707)	Attended protest				Encountered protest in past six months	
		Yes, in past six months (n=164)	Yes, but longer ago (n=602)	Never (n=941)	Total: Yes (n=783)	None (n=618)	One or more (n=1,089)
In front of abortion clinics	55%	46%	50%	60%	49%	53%	56%
In front of hospitals	54%	24%	47%	63%	42%	59%	51%
In front of the homes of “public” people	47%	22%	40%	55%	36%	52%	44%
In front of public schools	45%	20%	38%	54%	34%	49%	43%
In front of houses of worship	39%	18%	30%	49%	27%	46%	35%
In a university campus courtyard	13%	4%	7%	20%	6%	15%	12%
In public squares, parks or other rec facilities	9%	0%	4%	15%	3%	10%	9%
In front of embassies	7%	4%	3%	11%	3%	8%	7%
In front of city hall	5%	1%	2%	8%	2%	4%	5%

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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