



# Canadian attitudes about the environment during COVID-19

Debrief on Phase 1 focus groups

July 7, 2020

**ENVIRONICS**  
RESEARCH



# Today's agenda

- Background
- Key insights
- Thoughts for consideration
- Next steps
- Q&A/discussion



# Objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic is a disruptor:

- Drawn public focus away from the environment and climate change
- Also an **opportunity to do things differently** as we re-open

Research needed to better understand **where Canadians stand on these issues and why**

**Inform development of strategies and communications efforts that resonate with key audiences (whether public or government stakeholders).**



# Methodology

Qualitative research: six online focus groups (June 2020)

- Two youth (18-34) (West and East)
- Two older (35+) (West and East)
- Two French-speaking groups (Montreal and ex-Montreal)

Each group also included representation from small towns/rural areas (excl. Montreal group) and from visible minorities

Excluded climate change deniers or those unconcerned about the environment



## KEY INSIGHTS

**THE WORLD IS  
TEMPORARILY CLOSED**



# Environment/climate change remain issues of concern

- Environmental/climate action not top-of-mind when discussing:
  - Change in their perspectives over past few months/what is important
  - Lasting impact of pandemic on Canada
- Acknowledgement that focus on environment/climate change supplanted by more immediate threat of pandemic
- Nonetheless, expressed an ongoing desire for action and solutions



## Lack of parallels with the pandemic

- Pandemic = emergency requiring **immediate** attention
- Climate change = long-term or distant threat

“Immediate effects cause immediate action. Yes, the world is going to end but that will be in generations.”

- Not drawing similarities between the issues, including:
  - Lack of pandemic preparation needs to be remedied for climate change
  - Climate change exacerbated the pandemic

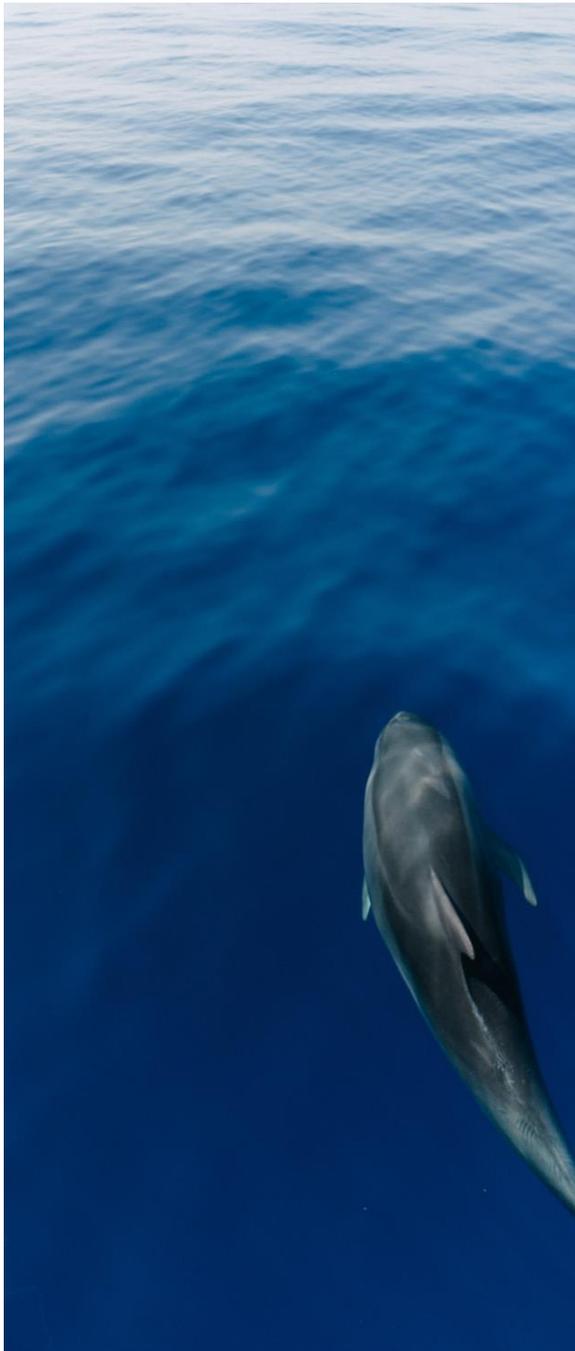


# Frame of reference for environmental change is personal and incremental

- Focus is on own individual efforts
- Had difficulty envisioning large-scale “transformative” change
- Do not see themselves as main cause of our environmental problems (low impact)
- Do not believe they are, or can be, the solution (low efficacy/agency)

“Our carbon footprint as individuals is small”

“It’s hard for people to believe that as individuals we have ability to change this. The average person doesn’t know how to go about that.”



## Pandemic has demonstrated that our environmental efforts matter...

- Value of nature and outdoors during the lockdown/in absence of other activities/entertainment
- Almost universal experience with environmental benefits of lockdown – direct evidence of tangible impact humans have/can have

“Going out for a walk has never been more chic!”

“This pandemic has allowed nature to flourish, allowed the environment to take a breath.”



## Perception that change is driven by governments/institutions “with power”

- Need to give individuals better access to choice
- Skeptical about potential for progress:
  - Acknowledge urgent competing priorities
  - Poor government track record
  - Complexity of problem without simple solutions
  - Lack of readiness for necessary sacrifice

“Yes, [strong government action] is something I would like to see. But it’s probably not something that’s going to happen, because we’ve seen time and time again that environment is not at the forefront. First we need to see that everybody gets out of this [pandemic] with food to eat, a job, a place to live...”



## Patterns by target audience



### Gender

Women: greater optimism & personal efficacy, less zero-sum thinking  
Men: more cynical, more likely to raise economic tradeoffs.



### Age

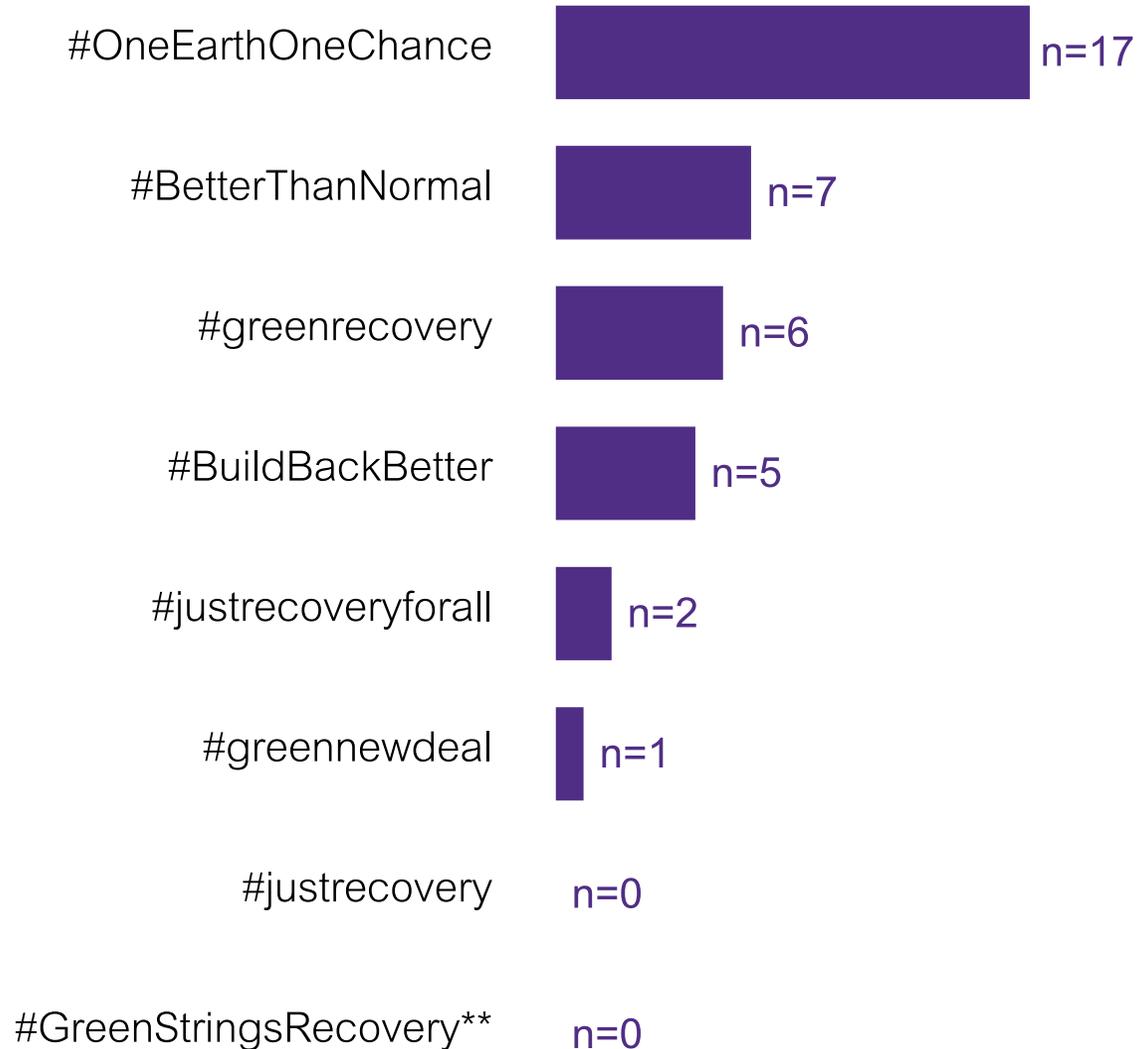
Younger (<35): greater emphasis on social justice/not leaving anyone behind



### Region/English vs. French

Quebec: more emphasis on social solidarity, more unprompted mentions of the provincial government

## Number of participants preferring each hashtag (English)



## Hashtag preferences (EN)

**#OneEarthOneChance** - factual, easy to understand and urgent call to action

**#BetterThanNormal** - liked how it spun a negative into a positive, resonates with society's obligation to do better.

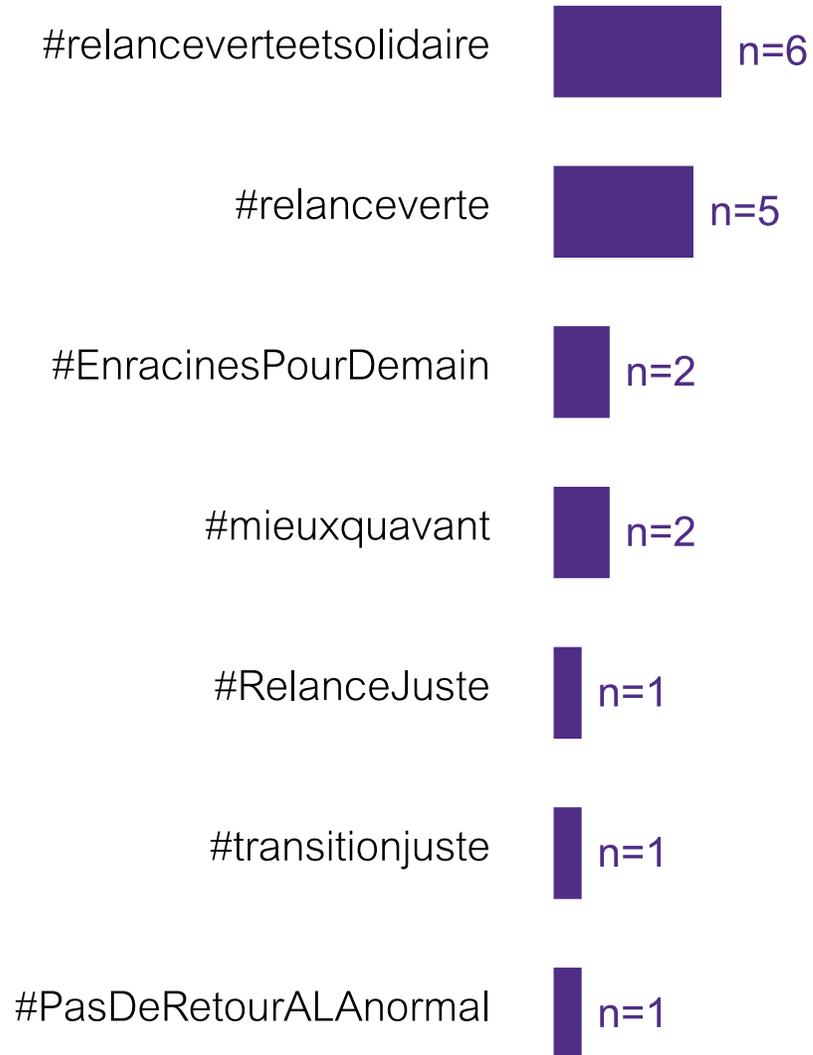
**#greenrecovery** - liked as a compromise between other hashtags.

**#BuildBackBetter** - prompts constructive thought about how we continue forward after the pandemic.

The remaining hashtags were not as well liked.

Note: **#GreenStringsRecovery** was added to the list partway through the focus groups; participants noted that it seemed out of place and confusing.

## Number of participants preferring each hashtag (French)



## Hashtag preferences (FR)

**#relancevertesolidaire** - term “solidaire” was key; we can’t do this alone, useless if we are not in this together.

Generally, people liked **#relanceverte** and (to a lesser extent) **#relancejuste** because of equity concerns; these were not considered confusing.

Those who liked **#mieuxquavant** found it positive.

At least one participant said **#PasdeRetourdeLaNormal** made them fearful.

# WRAP-UP

# Thoughts for consideration

- Environment/climate change remain relevant topics
- The pandemic has not (so far) sensitized the public to the idea that:
  - Climate change is also an emergency requiring immediate action. “Emergency” is now defined as an immediate threat.
  - We need to prepare now to avoid a pandemic-like environmental crisis in the future – this is a complex argument that may resonate better with government stakeholders.
  - The solution lies in transformative or large-scale structural change – instead, need to connect with people through their personal lived experience

# Thoughts for consideration (cont'd)

- Opportunity to leverage changing perspectives:
  - Increased importance of community, social responsibility and “solidarité” – champion a collective sense of efficacy
  - Proof that what we do matters/has an environmental impact – provides a sense of hopefulness/optimism
  - Increased value placed on nature/outdoors and “back to basics”

*For example: “Together, we can protect and care for what matters”*

- Be clear on what you are asking of the public. What is it you want people to do?

## Next steps

- Quantitative – handful of omnibus questions
- Qualitative Phase 2
  - Timing
  - Content

# QUESTIONS?

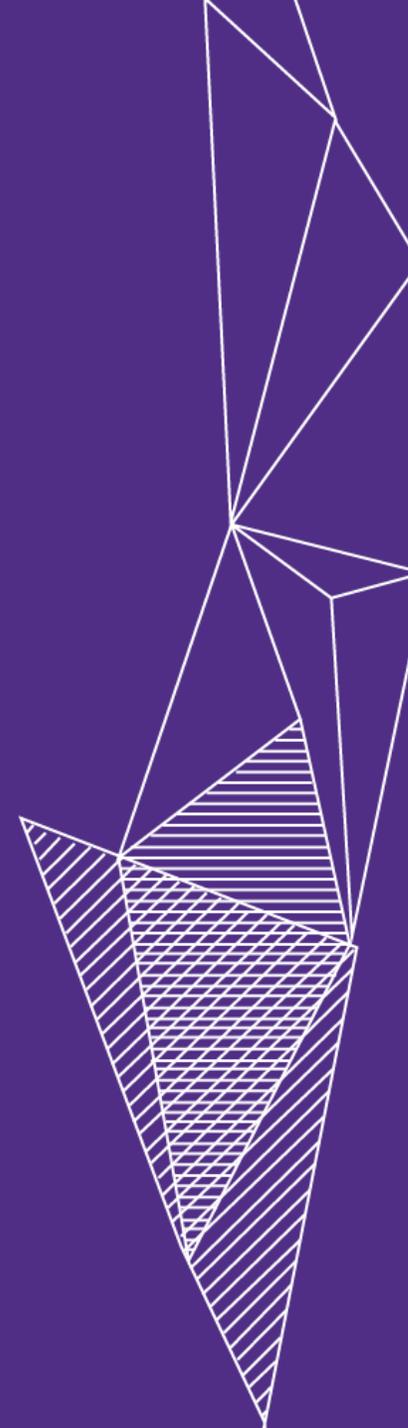


**Sarah Robertson**

VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC AFFAIRS

tel. 613-230-5089

[sarah.roberton@environics.ca](mailto:sarah.roberton@environics.ca)



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