

EcoA Research Nutshell

Radicals, Reformers, and Lifestylers

Key details

Key terms: systemic change, individual behaviour, activism tactics, lifestyle, radical, reform, political consumerism¹

Demographic profile: Partner-Supporters², general population (GP)

Source: Partners-Supporters survey (2019)

Reports: *Radicals, Reformers, and Lifestylers* (2019)

Summary of research on environmental supporters' different theories of change about environmental protection and opportunities to engage them based on these beliefs.

Key findings

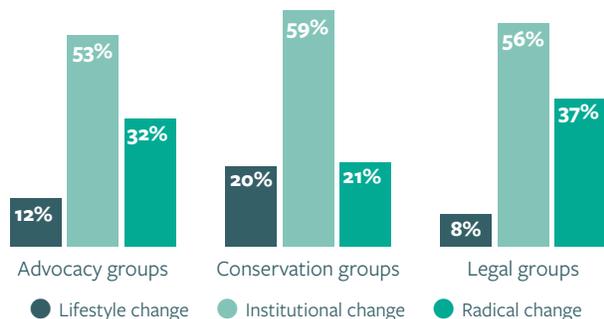
We categorize three groups based on their theory of change: how do they approach solutions to environmental protection?

1 Consumer's use of the market as an arena for politics to change institutional or market practices found to be ethically, environmentally, or politically objectionable.

2 Partner-supporters are people who support Member and Subscriber organizations of EcoA that participated in our values and behaviour research (2019), supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSRHC).

	Radicals	Reformers	Lifestylers
Radicals	 Radicals believe that radical, systemic change is necessary to solve our environmental problems.	 Reformers believe that reforming our existing institutions through changes to governments, markets, technology, and law is the solution to environmental issues.	 Lifestylers believe that individual lifestyle changes (to one's diet or political consumerism, etc.) will save the environment.
Distribution	32% of supporters 12% of the general population sample (GP)	56% of supporters 49% of the GP	12% of supporters 39% of the GP
Who are they?	Youth are somewhat more likely (38%) than older generations (31%) to believe that solving environmental problems requires broader systemic change.	Women (58%) and those with French as a first language (58%) are more likely to be Reformers than men (54%) and those with English as first language (50%). Millennials are also less likely (52%) than older generations (57%) to believe that solving environmental problems requires changes to our political economic system.	Men and those with French as a first language are more likely to believe in lifestyle change. No generational differences were found.
Where are they?	We found no significant regional differences with the distribution of perspectives fairly consistent across provinces.		
Individual behaviours	Radicals are most likely to adopt changes to their lifestyle.	Reformers do not stand out much in terms of their behaviours.	Ironically, Lifestylers are least likely to change their own personal behaviours.

Who do they support?



 **Views on economic growth**

Radicals

Those who rejected the idea that economic growth is good were more likely to view systemic change as necessary. Engage this group in conversations on degrowth (youth in particular).

*Partner-supporters 20% are more likely than people in the GP to agree with the need to set strict limits on production and consumption, and three times more likely to believe that technology will solve problems associated with growth.

Reformers

The probability of holding a Reformist view of environmental protection is highest when one holds a moderate view about economic growth.

Lifestylers

Among supporters, a positive view of economic growth is associated with believing that lifestyle change is sufficient to address environmental problems.

 **Other findings**

Political alienation* is associated with a greater probability of radical views, esp. among men.

*Definition: feeling negatively about political parties and candidates.

Key recommendations when engaging supporters:

- 1. Acknowledge diversity within the movement.** While most supporters believe we can solve our environmental problems through existing institutions (or working within the system), a sizable minority believe more radical systemic change is necessary. Consider this diversity as an opportunity to engage different segments of one's supporter-base on different fronts, or to collaborate with other groups to focus your efforts on different fronts.
- 2. Know your audience.** To reach **Reformers** in Canada's environmental movement, groups should target people toward the centre of the political spectrum, particularly supporters of Conservation groups, women and older generations. To engage **Radical** supporters, environmental groups (Advocacy and Legal groups, most notably) could target left-wing supporters, especially youth and politically alienated youth with empowering stories about how they can help—individually and collectively—make a difference in the environmental issues they care about.
- 3. Develop tools to better engage supporters in collective political action.** Groups focused on radical change and reform of the existing socio-economic system should offer supporters more opportunities to write MPs, confront ministers at public events, get out the vote, and so on—and emphasize the efficacy of such political action.
- 4. Engage with systemic change (*get radical*).** Youth and people on the left are receptive to calls for transformative action. Work with these segments—students in universities, for example—to test messages about environmental social justice, degrowth, waste, deteriorating material conditions on Earth, and species extinction.
- 5. Explore attitudes toward technology and growth.** Many supporters question the dominant economic growth paradigm, but further research is required to fully understand the way people think and feel about alternatives and their relationships to technology.