

EcoA Research Nutshell

Radicals, Reformers, and Rejectors

Key details

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

Population groups: general population

Reports: *Who do Canadians blame for climate change?* (2021)

Source: Climate of Change Survey (2020)

Summary of research on the public's different theories of change about tackling climate change and opportunities to engage them based on these beliefs.




Researchers did a full segmentation specifically on climate, finding three clusters that are specifically focused on blame for the crises, rather than solutions for tackling it (unlike the *Radicals, Reformers, and Lifestylers* brief).


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.

 **Distribution**

Radicals	Reformers	Rejectors
 27%	 49%	 23%

 **Who and where are they?**

Radicals are found in households at both lower and upper-income levels, and they tend to be urban, university-educated, left-leaning, and women. They are concentrated in Ontario and Quebec.	They are urban, university-educated, and concentrated in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. More than any other cluster, Reformers tend to be more evenly distributed across income groups.	These people usually lean right and are more likely to be middle-aged, male, and from higher-income households. They are also more likely than those in other clusters to have children living at home. They are concentrated in Ontario and Alberta, equally likely to live in urban or rural areas.
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 **How do they tend to vote?**

Liberal Party or NDP: they are often found in relatively safe electoral districts currently represented by Liberal MPs.	Conservative Party, Liberal Party, or NDP: Reformers are twice as likely to reside in a "swing riding," while their partisan preferences are roughly equally distributed across the above three federal parties.	Conservative Party: They are concentrated in relatively safe electoral districts and represented by Conservative MPs.
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 **Who do they blame for climate change?**

They are more likely than the other two clusters to assign blame across the board, and in particular, are more likely to hold economic and colonial systems responsible for causing climate change.	Governments and fossil fuel companies. They are less likely than Radicals to hold individuals and economic systems responsible, and much less likely to say colonial systems play a major role.	Rejectors, relative to those in other clusters, are least likely to assign blame to any particular group.
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Key recommendations

1. **Target the middle:** Reformers are the largest cluster (nearly half the population). They are also politically important, with a higher probability of living in a swing riding. Given their softer, more ambiguous opinions, this cluster could be persuaded to think differently: this is the “moveable middle.”
2. **Tailor your message:** each cluster identified here is characterized by its own pattern of blame for climate change, representing different opportunities for environmental groups seeking to engage them.
 - a. **Radicals** are the most likely to be mobilized in support of your issues. They are most likely to assign blame to governments and fossil fuel companies and support measures to hold these actors accountable. Try targeting them in campaigns that use an accountability frame to demand that governments and corporations take responsibility for tackling climate change.
 - b. Despite their relatively strong propensity to assign blame to fossil fuel companies and unresponsive governments for causing climate change, **Reformers** have ambiguous views about how to hold these actors accountable. Those in this cluster require convincing that governments and fossil fuel companies need to change to help solve climate change, and that individuals (acting as consumers and voters) can play an important role in bringing such changes about. These are the people to target in voter mobilization campaigns.
3. **Test and retest:** Members interested in building a new narrative demanding more action and accountability from governments and fossil fuel companies might want to field-test a few ideas in their communications:
 - a. **Radicals**, as well as Reformers, seem to be the best targets for campaigns that hold governments and fossil fuel companies responsible for climate change impacts. Communicating the role played by fossil fuel companies in causing the problem and misleading the public, as well as that of governments that have been slow to act on climate policy, may resonate well with these clusters. Other messages that resonate with Radicals (e.g. about wealth redistribution and colonialism) however, do not have the same crossover appeal among people in other clusters.
 - b. It is unclear why **Reformers** are ambiguous on climate solutions and concrete actions. More research is required here, but we might speculate that Reformers require more information and exposure to compelling narratives that link industry and government activities to the climate impacts they care about. This should be further tested by examining their level of interest in such information. Show Reformers how their collective action can bring about change to enhance their sense of individual and collective efficacy. Show them they, too, can have a role to play.
 - c. Other things to test include themes like green technology, community resilience, and nature-based solutions which were found to resonate most with Reformers.
 - d. Should Members wish to engage **Rejectors**, they might try engaging in conversations about nature-based solutions to climate change—protecting and restoring nature, in particular—which tend to be more appealing to people in this cluster.