

Summary of Canadian attitudes, Mindsets & Perceptions 2023

August 2023

This document outlines data collected by EcoAnalytics and other sources on select Canadian mindsets, knowledge and perceptions over the last few years on selected topics.

This paper is organized by general issue areas such as urgency, demand for action, trust in government and impact of Covid. For each area a high-level summary of the state of public attitudes. Links are provided to each for more in depth review.

[EcoAnalytics Research Initiative](#) provides public opinion research on Canada's environment to inform public debate, advance environmental protection, and strengthen Canada's environmental movement.

Sense of urgency

Canadians' overall sense of urgency regarding climate change rises and falls in relation to other ongoing issues (war, COVID, inflation, cost of living) and is heightened temporarily by events like forest fires. It peaked in 2019 and has yet to recover, generally trailing behind cost of living, healthcare and the economy. Reasons behind the lack of urgency include beliefs such as "it's too late" the government won't be able to reduce emissions fast enough, we are already doing enough, now is not the time to address climate change when people are having a hard time making ends meet, and I am not personally at risk (climate change is still a distant problem).

- Infographic links: [Most Important Problem Infographics](#) (various research studies)
- Other research: [Nanos July 2023](#)

There are significant knowledge gaps that also impact people's sense of urgency (or lack thereof). Many are unsure if doctors consider climate change a health emergency and whether or not NATO considers climate change a security emergency and many still believe we can continue fossil fuel production and meet our emissions-reduction targets.

- Infographic links: [Misinformation](#) (Climate of Change 2022)

Perceived risk of climate change

There has been a decline in public concern as climate change remains a distant problem for many. There was a drastic increase in the number of Canadians who felt "climate change is already harming Canadians" but this peaked in 2017 and began to plateau in 2018 and hasn't moved much since. However, perceptions of the risk of posed by climate change to thee next generation, wildlife and other people has increased:

- Infographic links: [Personal risk](#) (Climate of Change 2022)

And climate concerns and demand for action do increase with experience of extreme weather. This was especially evident in BC after the heat domes and fires of 2021. In Atlantic Canada after Hurricane Fiona, there was no real increase in folks concerned they will be affected by climate change “a great deal”, but a large decrease in those who thought climate change would affect them “not at all”, as well as a large increase in those who felt they would be affected “a moderate amount.”

- Infographic links: [Climate concerns spike with experience](#) (Climate of Change 2021)

Eco-anxiety

Few Canadians are suffering greatly from eco-anxiety yet, with some significant exceptions. Most notably, youth, BIPOC, those who discuss climate change frequently and those who have experienced some form of extreme weather are much more likely to report experiencing “a great” or “moderate amount” of climate anxiety. Those who do report a high level of eco-anxiety are much more likely to be “already doing” or “likely to” exhibit pro-environmental behaviours (these include joining a climate campaign, eating less meat, driving less, voting based on climate policies and contacting an elected official.)

- Infographic links - [Behaviour/emotion/action](#) (Climate of Change 2022), [Learning for a Sustainable Future Climate emotions](#)
- Other research: [National study on youth anxiety](#)

Demand for action

Demand for action is increasing, especially where extreme weather has been experienced. Demand dropped during COVID, but has now rebounded.

- Infographic links: [Demand for action rebounding](#) (Climate of Change 2022)

On addressing climate change Canadians want the government to introduce strong carbon-emissions reduction policies. Most don't expect industry to make good decisions, and want the government to be the *adult in the room*. They want the government to address climate change *now*, (along with other issues) and recognize that immediate action is needed for our economy to stay competitive in a post-carbon world. However, many are very concerned about communities that will suffer in the transition.

- Infographic links: [Economic preparedness](#), (Omni 2022) [Rapid action](#), (Omni 2022) [Demand for emissions cap](#), [Demand for a just transition](#), [Policy and Efficacy Qualitative slides](#)

On biodiversity loss, Canadians support ambitious biodiversity conservation targets and want the government to spend more money on these. However, they have concerns and knowledge gaps about implementation, what land will be protected, how it will impact the housing crisis and who will pay for it.

- Infographic Links: [Support for](#), [Barriers/knowledge gaps](#)
- Research summaries: [CPAWs polling](#)

Trust in government

While Canadians are demanding more climate action from the government, there are generally low levels of trust in the government's ability to act on climate change and biodiversity loss. All types of trust including competence, fairness, care, skills and openness are low; and levels of distrust on reliability, too much influence by industry and bias are relatively high, regardless of political leaning. Partisanship is evident, but overall trust is not high.

- Links: [Trust nutshell](#), [Edelman Trust Barometer 2021](#)

Who should be held accountable?

Canadians do hold fossil fuel companies primarily responsible for climate change and connect the rising cost of oil and gas prices to the surging cost of living. However many also hold the government responsible. Canadians don't trust the oil and gas (O&G) industry to do the right thing and expect the government to regulate this sector. More than 50% of Canadians support suing Big Oil. Many feel that holding Big Oil accountable and paying their fair share will be an important and effective climate solution. Legally binding targets set by the federal government

are preferred by NDP and Liberal supporters. Provincially set targets and/or voluntary targets are preferred by supporters of the federal Conservatives.

- Infographic links: [Oil and gas blame](#), [Who is to blame?](#)
- Research summary: [Conjoint Analysis 2021](#)

However, assigning blame has to be done carefully depending on your audience. Those who already know that O&G has misled us are much more responsive to confrontational language, than those who are unsure about this. Social values also affects the frames that resonate best: for example, progressive-minded *Rational Change-makers* (most traditional ENGO supporters) respond well to global consciousness, fair share, right thing to do frames, while more conservative *Community Driven Conformists* respond well to security/jobs/stability frames and less socially-minded *Energetic Hedonists* respond well to innovation, leadership and personal benefits frames.

- Links: [Assigning blame/SBO presentation](#), [Policy framing research](#) (inc. social values), [EcoA tips #16 \(tip 3 on social values\)](#)

How effective are Canada's climate policies? (potential policies)

An energy transition and nature-based-solutions hold the most promise as climate solutions for most Canadians, however there are concerns about details in how this can be implemented. Much of these are impacted by misinformation—for example many are unsure if a solar panel emits more emissions over its lifespan than it saves. Many also don't know if renewable energy prices are more stable than oil and gas.

- Infographic links: [Misinformation](#)
- Research summary: [Conjoint analysis](#)

Indigenous-led conservation

Relatively few Canadians are aware yet of Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, such as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas', though significant numbers indicate support for IPCAs once they have been described. The majority of Canadians surveyed recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge, putting more trust in land-based decisions to be made by Indigenous communities than those made by other levels of government. Youth are considerably more likely to support IPCAs, recognize Indigenous knowledge as at least equal to western science in terms of protecting nature, and more than any other age group believe Indigenous leaders (and ENGOs) demonstrate positive leadership in protecting and conserving land and water in Canada.

- Infographic Links: [Indigenous-led conservation](#)

Impact of COVID

Research in 2021 on impact of COVID on environmental perspectives showed an increased importance placed on community, social responsibility and social solidarity ("; a collective sense of efficacy and proof that what we do matters/has an environmental impact, which provides a sense of hopefulness/optimism; and increased appreciation of nature or the outdoors and going "back to basics." There was a sense of optimism expressed for Canada's post-pandemic future with themes of unity/equality, growth, balance.

Research done with a large sample of supporters of EcoA Member organizations in 2019 and with a follow-up in 2021 showed that support for ENGOs changed over the course of the pandemic:

- There were substantial individual changes in levels of support by existing supporters of ENGOs between 2019 and 2021
- These changes are shaped in part by supporters' perceptions of COVID - one-in-five became more engaged/radical, while one-in-four became less engaged or radical.
- Most supporters seem ready for solutions outside the political system, as a majority would support an NGO that emphasizes nature-based solutions (95%) or degrowth (87%) as a major priority
- Results suggest that positive messaging, rather than negative or more pessimistic messaging, is more likely to engage supporters.

According to [Environics summary in 2021](#), public opinion in general has been impacted more by the fall-out from reports of racial injustices (e.g., the murder of Minneapolis-resident George Floyd and the discovery of unmarked graves of children on the grounds of residential school, than by the pandemic.

Links: [COVID research](#)

END