

Environmental Opinions among Canadian Seniors

EcoAnalytics Data Summary (2022-2023)

The following summary highlights key data on the senior demographic segment from three EcoA surveys: our [Climate of Change Survey](#) (CoC, Nov.2022) by Dr. Erick Lachapelle (Professor of Political Science at l'Université de Montréal), and [Policy and Efficacy Communications Strategies Survey \(Apr. 2023\)](#) and [National Omnibus Survey](#) (Spring 2022), by Environics Research. Seniors' are defined differently, depending on the survey: 55+ in the Climate of Change survey, 60+ in the Policy and Efficacy survey research, and 60+ and 75+ in the National Omnibus Survey.

Urgency

Cost of living and healthcare rank as the issues of most importance to seniors. (CoC):

- 20% ranked cost of living highest, 19% ranked healthcare as the most important issue (compared to 30% and 8%, respectively, for respondents in younger age groups.
- Climate change and the environment are only considered the most important issue by 11% of seniors, which is comparable with other age groups.

Concern

46% of seniors are concerned, 30% are very concerned about climate change, which is similar other ages groups, according to the CoC results.

Perceived risk posed by climate change

Seniors did not perceive high levels of risk to themselves from climate change, but recognized increasing risk for family, other people in Canada, developing countries and future generations (CoC).

- Personal risk related to climate change: 8% think they will experience a great deal of harm personally, 28% a moderate amount of harm
 - Other age groups: 16% think climate change will harm them a great deal, 30% a moderate amount
- Risk to family: 44% are concerned that climate change will harm their family (a great or a moderate amount) vs 54% in other age groups

- Risk to Canadians: 61% think climate change will harm others in Canada (a great or a moderate amount)
- Risk to those in developing countries: 77% think it will harm (a great or a moderate amount) those in developing countries, these are similar to other age groups.
- Future generations: 77% think it will harm (a great or moderate amount) future generations, similar to other age groups.

Demand

74% of seniors think governments should be doing more to tackle climate change, a similar level of demand as for biodiversity protection (CoC).

Preferred solutions

When asked about transitioning to renewable energy sources (CoC):

- 39% of seniors said an energy transition will increase affordability, which is similar to ROC
- 42% said it will make our energy sources more secure
- 46% said it will strengthen the economy
- 51% support Suing Big Oil for the damages they are causing to our communities
 - The most cited reason was the high profits they make.

Experience with extreme weather

Like other Canadians, many seniors have experienced changing weather patterns and negative impacts from them. (CoC).

- 63% reported experience with negative impacts from changing weather patterns

When asked about harm experienced from extreme weather related to property, finances, mobility, physical, mental health and food security, seniors reported the lowest levels of harm experienced compared to other age groups. The most significant areas of harm reported were:

- food shortages (20%)
- mental health (16%)

In these and all other categories, seniors were at least 10 percentage points less likely to report experience of harms related to extreme weather. Note: we have asked the researcher to advise as to whether this has more to do with how seniors think about and report harm, rather than the degree to which they actually experience harm.)

Preferred framing and messaging

The [2022 Climate of Change survey](#) asked participants several questions to understand the best frames for assigning blame to the fossil fuel industry for causing climate change. Like the majority of other Canadians, less loaded, less confrontational language was generally preferred. Seniors were more likely to assign blame to the fossil fuel industry for “producing, transporting and emitting fossil fuels”, than for “lying to the public about the impacts of fossil fuels on climate change” or because the “industry isn’t doing its fair share” to reduce emissions. Also, like other Canadians, many seniors hold the government at least partially responsible.

In the spring of 2023, Environics’ [Policy and Efficacy Communications Strategies survey](#) tested messages and framing for communicating about three key policy areas: protecting 30% of land and water by 2030, a cap on carbon emissions in the oil and gas sector, and Clean Electricity Regulations.

From the research, we learned that for protecting biodiversity, frames and messaging about plants and animals to be protected, personal benefits, access to protected land, threats to the land and how protected areas will absorb carbon are favoured by seniors (in that order). These are similar to the frames favoured by other age groups, though they were more strongly preferred by seniors.

As for making decisions about conservation and areas deserving protection, seniors trust environmental NGOs, scientists and people whose whole livelihoods depend upon the land the most. They also show more trust in these groups as good leaders, than other age groups.

In discussions about reducing and capping carbon emissions, as with other groups of Canadians, seniors liked these frames and messages best:

- “Better future: Reducing emissions is not only good for the planet, but it will also help Canada transition to a stable and prosperous economy with many jobs in the clean energy sector”
- “Impact of climate change/ Right thing to do/owes to the world: Canadians and others around the world are already feeling the impacts of climate change. It’s time for Canada to do its part in reducing emissions by placing a limit on emissions from oil and gas”
- “Innovation: Limiting emissions will create incentives for companies to invest in cleaner energy technologies and other ways to reduce their emissions, which would create jobs and grow the economy”.

Two frames that were less convincing for other age groups, though convincing to seniors were:

- “Collaboration: Canada cannot meet its climate targets without reducing emissions from its most polluting sector. Limiting emissions from oil and gas production will encourage provinces and territories to work together towards a common goal”

- “Innovation: Oil and gas companies are making record profits, and limiting emissions will encourage the industry to invest some of those profits in cleaner energy technologies and other ways to reduce their emissions.”

When talking about clean electricity, like others, but to a greater degree, seniors preferred these frames and messages:

- “Build on success, world leader: In Canada, 82% of our electricity comes from sources like hydroelectricity, which is far less polluting than electricity generated from coal, oil and fossil gas. As the world shifts to zero-emitting energy, this is a chance for Canada to build on its success and lead the world.”
- “Pay more for quality-of-life: Electricity is central to our quality of life and modern living, and in Canada we are fortunate to spend relatively little on something so important to our health and safety. It is worth investing in a clean electricity grid to maintain our standard of living in the future.”
- “More affordable: Improving Canada's electricity grid is an opportunity to make energy more affordable by providing all Canadians with access to affordable power from wind, solar and storage technologies.”

Behaviour

More seniors than those in other age groups have emergency kits (CoC):

- 61% reported having emergency kits, 20 points higher than among those in other age groups.

When thinking about climate change:

- 23% of seniors think about it a lot, 45% think about it sometimes
- 45% talk about climate change occasionally, 31% rarely talk about it and 16% never talk about it.

As for empowerment, seniors seem to have a greater sense of personal efficacy around addressing climate change, than other age groups.

- 70% of seniors feel that actions they take personally can help reduce the impact of climate change, compared to only 55% in other age groups.
- 74% feel that if everyone does their bit we can tackle the causes of climate change vs 60% in other age groups.

While seniors do report feeling concerned about climate change, they have significantly lower levels of eco-anxiety than other age groups.

In terms of eco-friendly behaviours:

- 29% were likely, very likely or already eating a more plant-based diet
 - 45% were unlikely to make the switch to do this

- 47% were likely, very likely or already reducing their travel by automobile
- 39% were likely, very likely or already voting for a politician or political party promising stricter climate policy.

Knowledge and misinformation

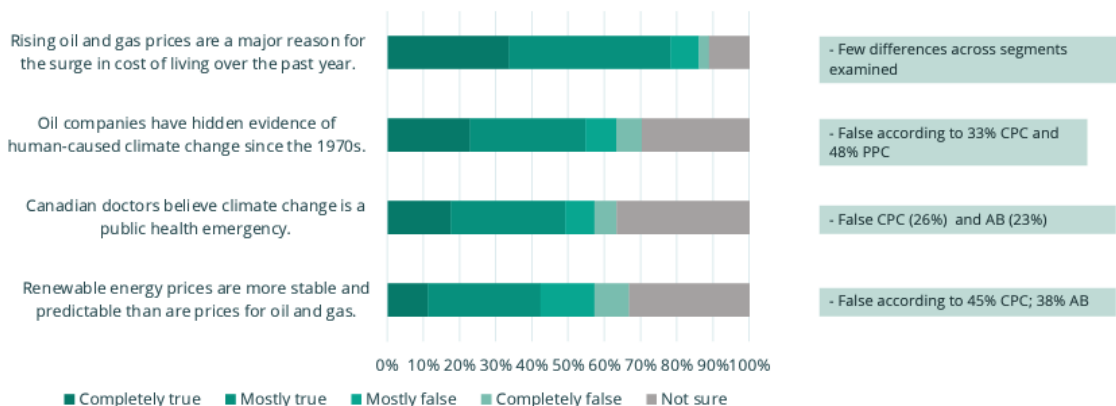
Seniors *reported knowledge* about climate change and biodiversity was similar to that of other age groups. (Policy & Efficacy 2023)

- 47% felt they know a moderate amount about climate change, 40% felt they know a little
- 28% report never having heard of biodiversity loss (comparable to other age groups older than 24), 35% have heard of it but don't know much, 33% report knowing a little about it.

The Climate of Change survey tested Canadians' ability to spot misinformation, by providing a battery of statements, true and false. Seniors, like most Canadians, showed high levels of uncertainty in many areas. The following slides show average results for all age groups, though seniors' responses to these assertions were similar to those of other age groups.

Many Canadians know the truth, but...

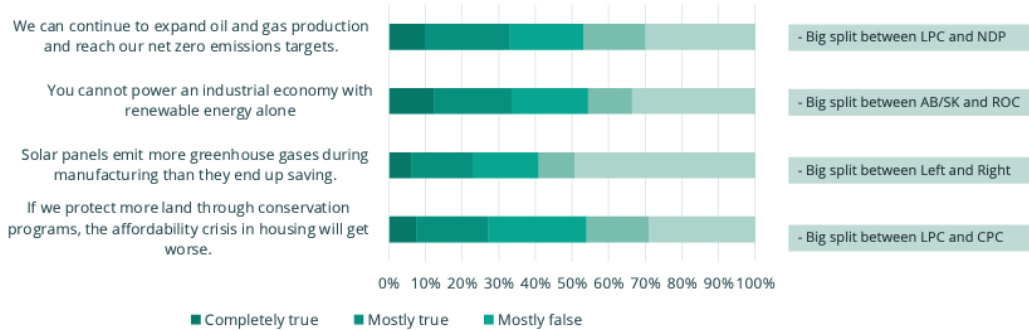
Q: To the best of your knowledge, how accurate are the claims in each of the following statements?



Canadians recognize that world energy prices are fuelling inflation, that oil companies have lied about climate change, and climate change is a bona fide health emergency, and that renewable energy prices are more stable than prices of fossil fuels, but...

Where are Canadians confused?

Q: To the best of your knowledge, how accurate are the claims in each of the following statements?



Percentage answering "not sure" reveal opportunities for opponents (and liars) to sow seeds of confusion among certain segments on certain topics (e.g. about life-cycle analysis of EVs).

Trust in government

The [2022 National Omnibus Survey](#) asked several questions to gauge Canadians' trust in the government's ability to tackle climate change. Overall trust is not high across all demographics, but there were some differences in types of trust between seniors and other age categories. Among those over 75 the results show higher levels of trust in the government's "competency to tackle climate change", more faith that "they are listening to people and making decisions that are fair" and acting "in the public's best interest". The opinions of those in the 60-74 category were more aligned with younger age groups, where at least 10% fewer people shared the levels of trust in government shown by people 75 and older.

In other areas all seniors (60+) tended to express a little bit less cynicism than younger demographics about the "government distorting facts and changing policies without good reason." But as in other age groups, almost half of seniors agree that the "government is too influenced by industry" and only four in ten think the "government has the people skilled enough" to carry out the job with respect to climate change and biodiversity protection.