

EcoA Research Nutshell

Regional Deep Dive: British Columbia

Key details

Key terms: British Columbia, climate change, biodiversity, blame, trust, segmentation, social values, misinformation, LNG, fossil fuels, Indigenous-led conservation, extreme weather, efficacy

Demographic profile: BC residents 18 year and older

Sources: Environmental Policy and Efficacy: Communications strategies (2023), Climate of Change National Survey 2022 (CoC), and CA-Map (2023), Clean Energy Canada BC Poll (2024), CPAWS national polling (2022), Wildsight (2024), Research Co. (2023)

EcoAnalytics research aims to understand the opinions of Canadians to build support for action on climate change and the protection of biodiversity. This often reveals regional differences. This third regional “deep-dive” *Nutshell* examines how the views of British Columbians differ from those of other Canadians. Like previous *Nutshells* on [Quebecers](#) and [Albertans](#), it draws on research by EcoA since 2016, and other sources (see Key details).

British Columbia: Overview

British Columbians often think of themselves as more *climate-aware*, more concerned and more progressive than other Canadians. But is this the case? This is, after all, where Greenpeace was founded and where *treehuggers* abound, but it is also the epicenter of fracking, liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, old-growth clear-cuts and the line between government official and industrial lobbyist is pretty thin these days. So where do everyday British Columbians sit when it comes to climate change and biodiversity conservation? What policies do they support? Did the floods and heat-dome of 2021 increase concern? How good are British Columbians at cutting through fast-growing forests of misinformation?

Climate change is a significant concern for many British Columbians, as it is for most Canadians, but not the top one at the moment. In 2022, only 8% BC respondents rated it as the most important problem. The cost of living was by far the most salient issue on most people’s minds (27%), which is similar to the rest of the country. However, when asked how concerned they were about climate change in 2022, a higher percentage of BC respondents than respondents from other provinces said they were *very* concerned, 37%, rising to 41% in 2023, compared to 30% (2022) and 33% (2023) for those in the rest of Canada ([CoC 2022](#) (Nov); [CA-MAP 2023](#) (Nov)). These heightened levels of concern do correspond with higher than the national-average levels of pro-climate behaviour and perceptions of personal efficacy.

Behaviour

British Columbians are slightly more likely to be thinking about and engaging in pro-climate behaviour than most Canadians in the rest of Canada – with the exception of Quebec ([CoC 2022](#)). Specifically, among British Columbians, this means:

- Only 11% talk about climate change often with their friends and family, while 43% talk about it occasionally
- 25% worry about climate change almost every day
- 62% feel that the actions they take, personally, can help reduce the impacts of climate change
- 35% are likely, very likely to, or already adhere to a plant-based diet

- 49% are likely, very likely to, or already cutting down on car travel
- 45% would vote for a political party with strict climate policies
- 18% would reach out to a public official to demand more climate action

Experience of climate change

In general, British Columbians indicate more experience of climate change and extreme weather, and more *negative* experiences with these phenomena than do residents of other provinces. For example, in 2022, 73% of British Columbians had seen significant weather changes compared with 55% in the rest of Canada (CoC 2022).

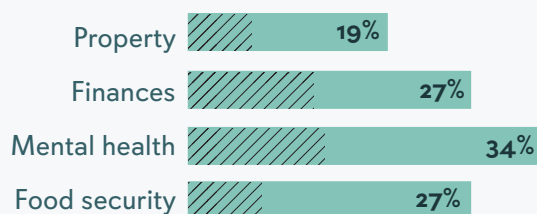
Many also reported damage related to extreme weather, especially in 2021, as shown in the chart below. The real experienced harms caused by climate change are juxtaposed with perceived risk of harm in the chart. As you can see, for many, the perceived risk of personal harm from climate change is still distant, despite significant levels of actual harm experienced as a result of recent extreme weather events. Real risk is still perceived to happen to others and in the future, though perceptions of risk did increase slightly between 2022 and 2023 (CoC 2022, CA-MAP 2023).

Almost 40% of British Columbians know climate change is already happening and impacting people, the highest in Canada. Other British Columbians, however, are less troubled: 20% think it won't happen for another 10 years, 18% are not sure and the rest think it will happen in the distant future or never (CoC 2022).

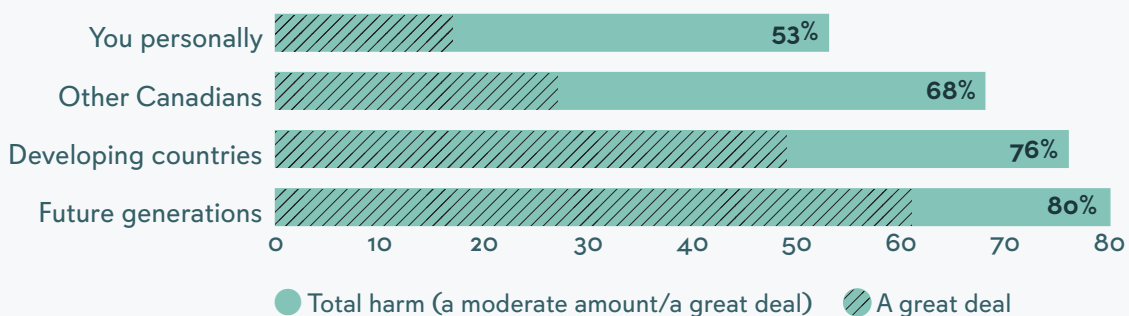
Assigning blame

When asked who to blame for climate change, British Columbians are somewhat more likely to point the finger at “companies that produce, burn and transport fossil fuels” (79%) than at governments (73%) that fail to enact strong enough regulations (CA-MAP 2023). They are also more likely than other Canadians to blame the oil and gas industry for deliberately misleading the public (CoC 2022).

“How much were you harmed by extreme weather events in the following areas?” (2022)



“How much do you think climate change will harm...” (2023)



What solutions do British Columbians support?

Most BC residents (74%) think the government should be doing more on climate change, including 40% who think they should be doing a *lot* more, and they feel similarly about policies to protect biodiversity (CoC 2022).

When asked about the efficacy of transitioning to clean energy, a majority think this will:

- make life more affordable (42%), or have no impact (33%)
- increase security (44%), or have no impact (41%)
- succeed or likely succeed (32%), or have no opinion about this (42%) (CoC 2022)

As for transitioning to 100% renewable by 2035,

- 49% of BC respondents think this will strengthen the economy while 27% are unsure
- 64% support investing in wind, solar and hydro and storage options while 17% are neutral (CoC 2022)

When asked specifically about investment in LNG and natural gas, support is decreasing, down from 22% who supported investment in LNG in 2020, to just 15% in 2024. Meanwhile, support for investment in renewables has grown in the same period from 61% to 69% (CEC 2024).

Almost 65% of British Columbians also want to see fossil fuel companies pay for their own electrification. LNG exports and natural gas exploration are at the bottom of the list of potential development options, with British Columbians greatly preferring renewables (85%), clean technology (80%), clean hydrogen (75%) and sustainable mineral extraction (67%) (CEC 2024).

A majority (55%) of British Columbians want BC to be a climate leader, with 43% wanting the government to move faster on climate action. Just over 30% think BC is doing a good job in fighting climate change, so far. And a majority (56%) have confidence that BC Hydro, the public utility, will be able to generate enough electricity to meet the needs of British Columbians and BC businesses, with 73% in support of the \$36 billion investment to expand and improve the province’s electricity grid over the next 10 years (CEC 2024).

Knowledge and misinformation

British Columbians also may be a bit better than other Canadians in recognizing misinformation, but levels of uncertainty remain high (CoC 2022). For example, see the comparisons shown below in responses by residents of BC and the rest of Canada (ROC) to a series of assertions, true and false:

To the best of your knowledge, how accurate are the claims in each of the following statements? (Correct responses in brackets)

Oil companies have hidden evidence of human-caused climate change since the 1970s (true)



We can't power an industrial economy with renewables alone (false)



Rising oil and gas prices is a major reason for the rise in cost of living (true)



Renewable prices are more stable and predictable (true)



Solar panels emit more greenhouse gases than they save (false)



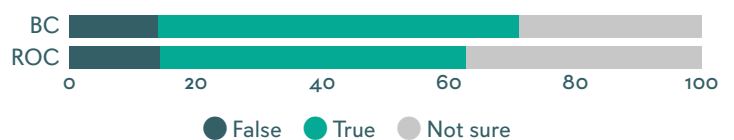
We can continue to expand oil and gas production and reach emissions targets (false)



If we protect more land the affordability crisis gets worse (false)



Doctors believe climate change is a public health emergency (true)



● False ● True ● Not sure

Conservation and environmental leadership

Residents of BC show high levels of support for biodiversity protection, with 86% supporting more government spending to protect 30% of BC's land and water by 2030, a government commitment ([CPAWS 2022](#)). BC's government has made some good commitments towards protecting more land and water, but many policy gaps remain for the protection of BC's disappearing old-growth forests. When talking about biodiversity protection, British Columbians (and Canadians) prefer frames that focus on threats to the land, access to the area, animals to be protected and health benefits for community and family ([Environmental Policy and Efficacy 2023](#)).

Knowledge of biodiversity loss is growing, but is not high.

- 37% of British Columbians say they know something, or a lot about biodiversity loss
- 36% know something or a lot about nature-based solutions to climate change
- 36% know something or a lot about Indigenous-led conservation

Knowledge about Indigenous-led conservation is relatively low, though support is widespread.

- 84% of British Columbian respondents think protected areas are good or somewhat good for a region
- Only 12% have heard of Indigenous protected and conserved areas (IPCAs), though 58% support expanding them (once defined)
- 49% agree that Indigenous conservation knowledge is at least equal to western science in understanding and protecting nature ([Environmental Policy and Efficacy 2023](#))

In looking for leadership on conservation, British Columbians think ENGOs, scientists and people whose livelihoods depend upon the land are most strongly demonstrating positive leadership in decisions about protecting land, freshwater and oceans.

- ENGOs: 38%
- Scientists: 32%

- People whose livelihood depend upon the environment: 29%
- Indigenous communities: 26%
- Provincial government: 21%
- Federal government: 16% ([Environmental Policy and Efficacy 2023](#))

This also holds true for marine conservation issues, with scientists, ENGOs, DFO and First Nations communities being the most trusted and the fishing industry and companies being the least trusted, according to research by the private pollster Mario Canseco ([Research Co.](#)).

When asked about the future of BC's coastal economy, the issues of most concern to British Columbians were declining fish stocks (92%), bottom trawling (90%), open-net fish farms (90%) and climate change (84%). Those living on the coast and Vancouver island, as well as those over 65, showed the most concern. Loss of commercial fishing jobs and excessive government regulations were at the bottom of the list of concerns. Asked about factors that would contribute most to the future of BC's coastal economy, marine conservation (93%) topped the list, followed by renewable energy (86%) and outdoor recreation (82%). Deep-sea mining (44%), industrial-scale fishing (69%) and fish farms (64%) were at the bottom of the list ([Research Co. 2023](#)).

When it comes to mining, 84% of British Columbians believe that in BC's resource economy, the cost of environmental restoration and clean-up should be covered entirely by the companies responsible for the damage, with more than half of British Columbian respondents not confident that the provincial government's current method of estimating the cost of cleaning up mine pollution will protect taxpayers from footing the bill for clean up costs ([Wildsight 2024](#)).

Social values

EcoAnalytics' [National CA-MAP survey regional analysis](#) revealed the dominant social values in BC that inform perspectives on climate change and preference for solutions. Refer to the [national slide deck](#) for a description of each segment at the national level. The following chart indicates the proportion in BC of each segment and how these ratios differ, if at all from the national figures:

British Columbia's persona profiles

National level segments	BC level differences
Progressive activists 15% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politically engaged, opinionated, proud, cosmopolitan Most environmentally conscious 	↑ 24%
Civic nationals 21% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-minded, nativist & egalitarian Less politically & environmentally engaged than PAs Politically centrist, lean right High federal vote variability 	↓ 15% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lean more to the left As politically and environmentally engaged as PAs Plurality vote towards the left
Centrist liberals 20% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politically centrist, lean left Progressive values, Favour free-market and immigration 	↑ 32% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centrist but lean to the right Less progressive, favour free market Conflicted over immigration
Disengaged middle 30% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High proportion of neutral opinions Center/center-right politically 	↓ 14% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less authoritarian & nativist than at national level
Fossil fuel conservatives 14% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong authoritarianism & hierarchism Right-wing, opposed to environmental goals 	↔ 15%

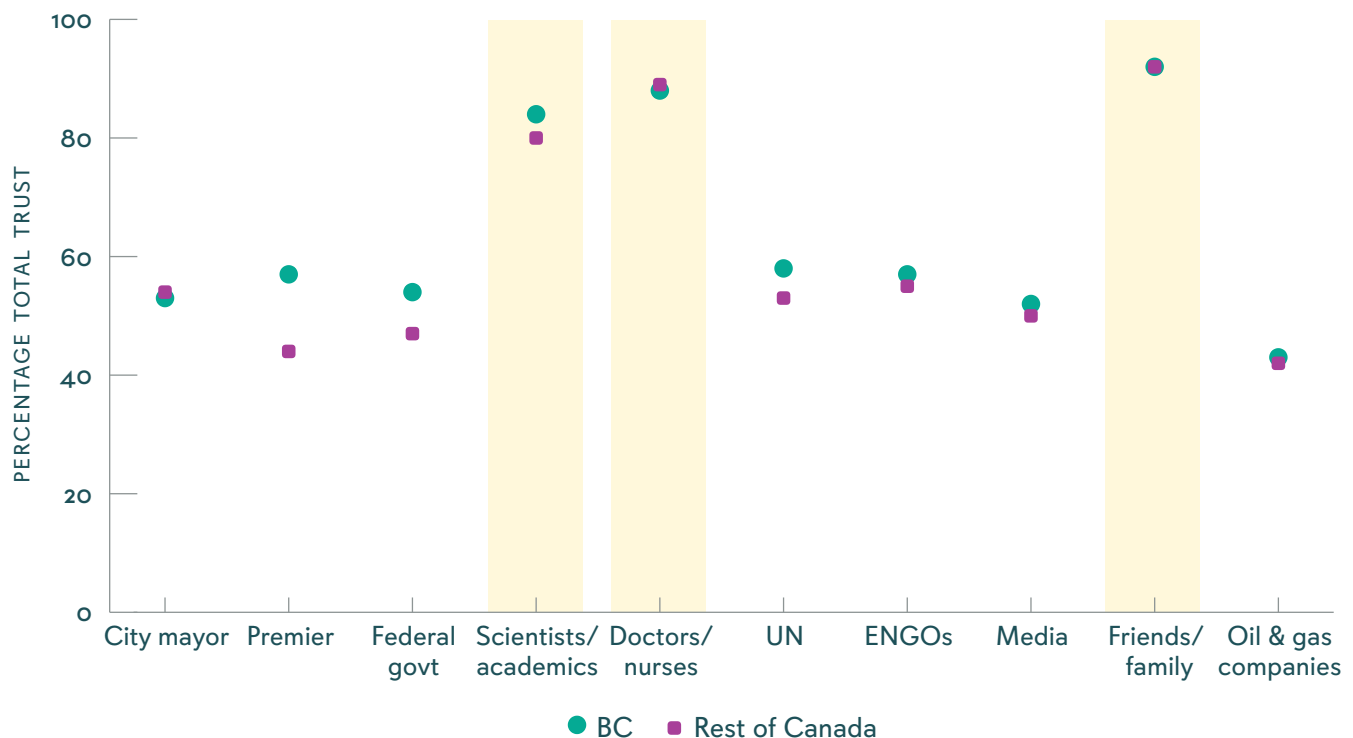
- Both Progressive activists and Civic nationals have strong connections to their provincial identity and a high distrust of the oil and gas industry. So using frames that emphasize accountability, fairness, and strengthening communities are a good bet in BC.
- Centrist liberals in BC should respond well to frames that emphasize optimism, innovation, and clean-tech solutions driven by free markets and competition.

Source: CA-Map 2023: Mapping Canada Regional insights from the CA-MAP National Segmentation Survey (Slide 17), Lachapelle and Morin, Feb. 2024

Trust

British Columbians appear to have slightly more trust in some messengers on climate change than do those in the rest of Canada. Doctors, scientists and friends and family are the most trusted messengers here, though British

Columbians are more likely than many other Canadians to trust (however moderately) the UN, the federal government, their premier, and environmental NGOs, as shown below (CA-MAP 2023).



Source: Mapping Canada: Regional insights from the CA-MAP National Segmentation Survey (Slide 18)

Takeaways and opportunities

BC is a leader in Canada on some climate and biodiversity fronts. The provincial government, here, has announced some ambitious plans, but left many policy gaps that could undermine efforts to meet climate and biodiversity targets. British Columbians, by and large, support ambitious climate solutions and will look favourably on calls that demand politicians be accountable to environmental promises made.

Communication guidelines:

- Know which British Columbians you are trying to speak to:
 - › 24% are Progressive activists, and will respond to narratives that build on accountability, global responsibility, reconciliation, climate justice, systems change, along with more universal frames emphasizing personal benefits, fairness and affordability.
 - › 32% of British Columbians are Centrist liberals, who lean more to the right in this province, than do CLs in other parts of the country; so focus more on climate-adjacent issues with these folks such as technology, innovation, economic growth, personal benefits, and staying globally competitive.
 - › 15% are Civic nationals for whom narratives that focus on protecting the places we love, local community issues, health, conservation and accountability should resonate
- Keep messaging positive, but realistic
- Keep it simple, but do include responses to obvious questions and acknowledge the challenges of transitioning
- Do leverage BC's dwindling support for LNG and fracking to counter subsidies, misinformation and greenwashing campaigns
- Amplify BC's faith in BC Hydro's ability to provide enough power to support more investment in renewable energy, municipal and provincial "gas bans" (but don't call them gas bans)
- Do continue to use ENGO voices, along with scientists to communicate about biodiversity protection
- Highlight BC's successes, but hold leaders accountable for the gaps and omissions in their plans
- Acknowledge that many in BC do depend upon the oil and gas industry for jobs and the significant benefits the companies have brought to small BC communities. Validate the identity of workers in the O&G sector and the important role played by the sectors in the past, but add that British Columbians have become overly dependent on the sector, and this is now adding to the burden of illness and environmental problems
- Do focus on resource industry responsibility to clean up after itself and pay their fair share of costs, be it mining clean up costs, orphan wells or the costs of climate damage