

Rural Ontario and climate concern and denial

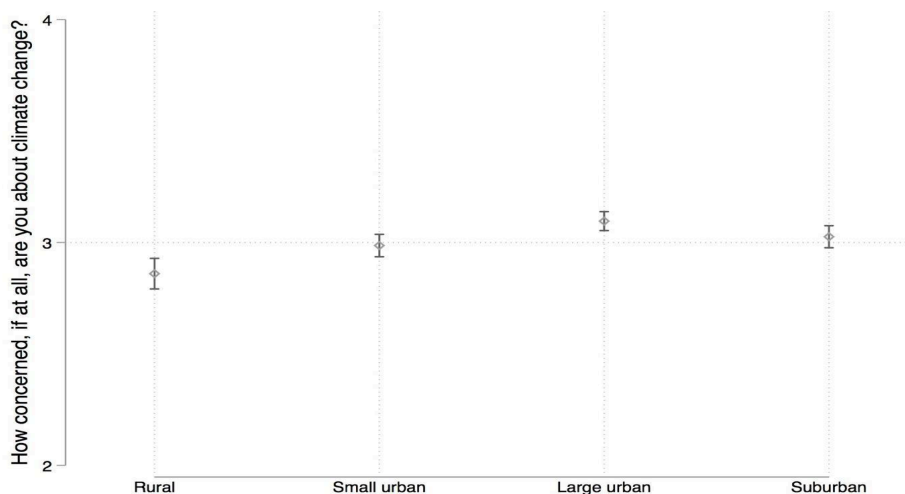
Research Brief

July 2024

The following brief highlights research on opinions around human-caused [or anthropogenic] climate change in rural Ontario. It draws from EcoA's [2023 CA-MAP National Segmentation Survey](#) conducted by Drs. Erick Lachapelle and Marjolaine Martel-Morin (Professors of Political Science at l'Université de Montréal) and [Yale Climate Communications Canadian Climate Opinion Maps \(2018\)](#).

Less concerned about climate change

Rural Ontario is on average less concerned about climate change than Ontarians living in small and larger urban regions. The [2023 CA-MAP national survey data](#), drawing from a national sample of 6142 and an Ontario sample size of 2178, highlighted this slight, though statistically significant difference. As illustrated in the chart below, where the grey dots indicate mean scores on the climate concern question and the grey bars indicate the 95% confidence interval, (range of estimates from any other random sample you would get 95% of the time) rural Ontario tends to be less concerned about climate change than Ontarians living in other regions. Note that data below are average scores for each region, and that a score of 3 corresponds to a neutral opinion (i.e. "neither concerned nor unconcerned").



[\[CA-MAP national segmentation survey 2023\]](#)

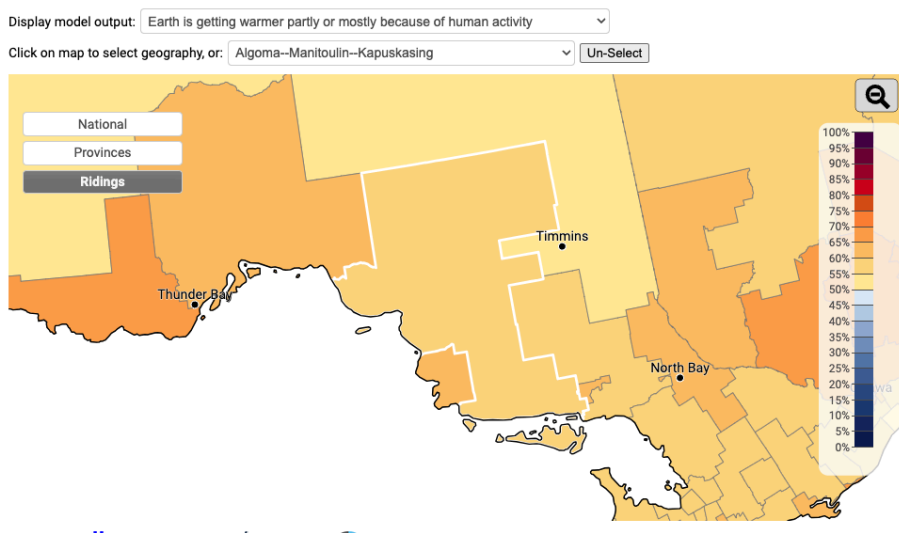
Rural residents are more sceptical about climate change and some solutions

In 2018, Erick Lachapelle and researchers at the [Yale Climate Communications](#) mapped [Canadian public opinion](#) by federal riding, based on responses to questions and assertions revealing Canadians' concerns and beliefs on climate change, including:

- Is the earth getting warmer?
- Earth is getting warmer partly or mostly because of human activity
- Climate change will harm you personally
- My province has already experienced negative effects from climate change
- Instead of trying to stop climate change we should focus on adapting
- Do you support cap and trade?
- Are you in favour of Increasing taxes on carbon-based fuel?
- When do you think climate change will start harming people in Canada?

On whether climate change is mostly or partly caused by human activity, most rural ridings in Ontario were 1-5 points below the national and provincial average of 60% of adults who think Earth is getting warmer partly or mostly because of human activity. These data and much more are freely available and hosted on the [Yale Canadian Climate Opinion maps](#).

Estimated % of adults who think earth is getting warmer partly or mostly because of human activity

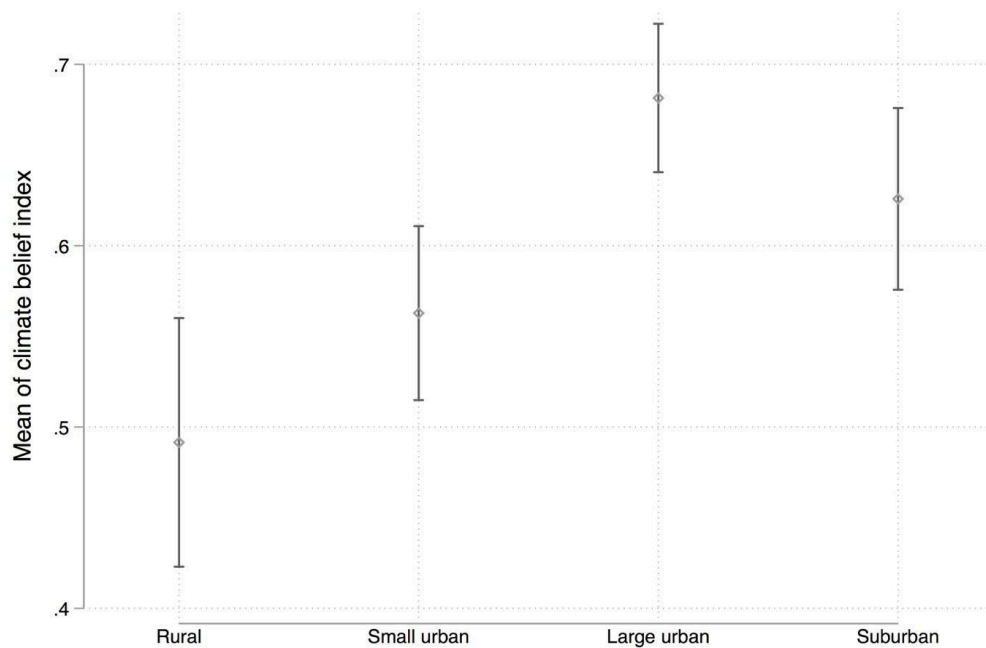


[[Canadian Climate Opinion Maps \(2018\)](#)], Yale University.]

Similar distributions of opinion were found in EcoAnalytics' 2023 [CA-MAP national segmentation survey](#). People in rural Ontario are more likely than Ontarians living in other settings to be skeptical about climate change. The belief index below is derived from answers to the following statements in EcoAnalytics' survey, measured on a standard Agree-Disagree scale:

- I have personally experienced the effects of climate change
- The main cause of climate change is human activity
- Climate change is the primary driver of extreme weather recently experienced in Canada
- The effects of climate change are seriously exaggerated
- I believe climate change is a hoax

This index variable was recoded from 0-1. High scores indicate greater belief in climate change. We see that rural Ontarians tend to express higher levels of skepticism about climate change when we combine the five questions into an additive index of climate belief.

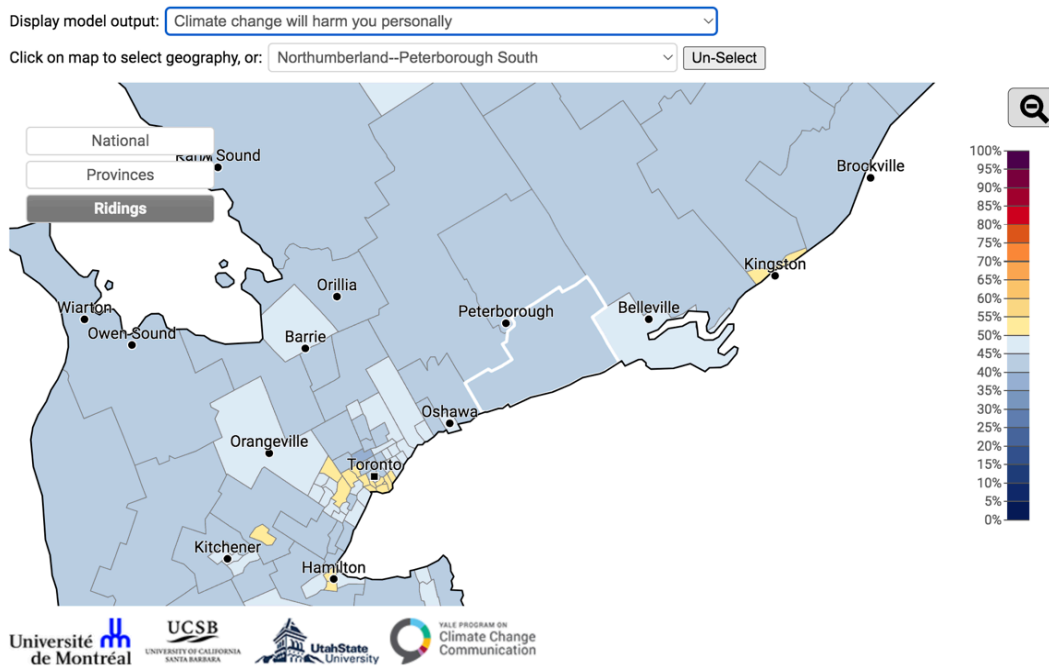


[\[CA-MAP National Segmentation Survey, 2023\]](#)

Rural residents have lower perception of personal risk

The [2018 Yale data](#) shows that less than half of those in rural ridings of Ontario are concerned that climate change will hurt them personally, a moderate or great deal. This is lower than in urban areas and less than the provincial (45%) and Canadian average (47%).

Estimated % of adults who think climate change will harm them personally

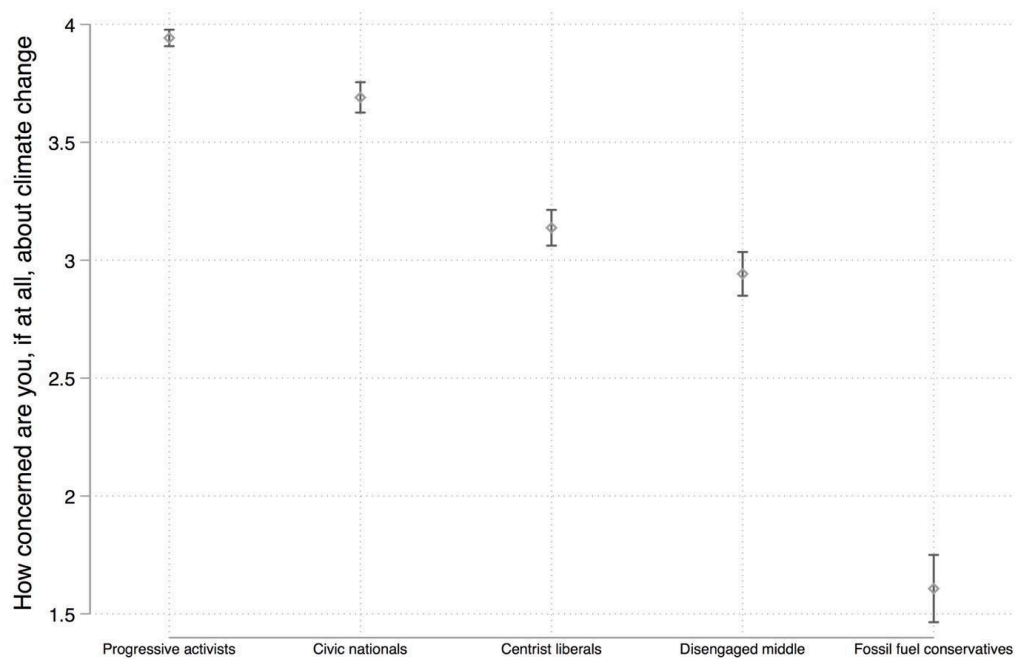


[[Canadian Climate Opinion Maps \(2018\)](#), Yale University]

Social values rather than place of residence are more strongly correlated with climate concern

But rural residency is only part of the story, and some rural Ontarians do care about climate change. The biggest differences are to be found across people with different sets of values. The CA-MAP National Segmentation Survey identified five segments based on their social values and engagement around climate change and other salient issues. As shown in the graph below, the demographic segment which we have called *Progressive activists* show the highest levels of concern on climate change, while *Fossil fuel conservatives* show the lowest. Concern about climate change is more strongly correlated to a person's values than to their place of residence.

The following links provide more information on the [different segments](#) and a [regional analysis](#) of the segments. The chart below provides estimates of mean (i.e. average) levels of concern around climate change by segment.



[\[CA-MAP National Segmentation Survey, 2023\]](#)

What kind of social values do rural Ontarians have?

The CA-MAP data indicate that social values segments in rural Ontario are slightly different from those in Ontario generally. Below are the estimated percentage comparisons of average distributions of the five by segments for all of Ontario (not just its rural residents) and Canada. When we focus just on rural Ontario, we find a higher concentration of the Disengaged middle (32%), Civic nationals (25%) and Fossil fuel conservatives (17%), while Progressive activists (10%) and Centrist liberals (15%) are under-represented when compared to the Ontario and National segmentation averages .

Ontario's persona profiles

	National level segmentation	Ontario differences
	Progressive activists 15% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politically engaged, opinionated, proud, cosmopolitan Most environmentally conscious 	↑ 16%
	Civic nationals 21% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-minded, value service to others Nativist & egalitarian High federal vote variability 	↑ 22% Vote variability not as high, plurality vote towards the right
	Centrist liberals 20% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politically centrist Share progressive values, favour free-market and immigration 	↓ 19%
	Disengaged middle 30% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High proportion of neutral opinions Center/center-right politically, less authoritarian & nativist than Civic nationals 	↓ 28%
	FF conservatives 14% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong authoritarianism & hierarchism Right-wing, opposed to environmental goals Majority vote towards the right 	↑ 16%

[\[CA-MAP national segmentation survey 2023: regional analysis\]](#)