EcoAnalytics

A project of **MakeWay**

EcoA Research Nutshell
Regional Deep Dive: Atlantic Canada

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 fourth regional "deep-dive" *Nutshell* examines how the views of Atlantic Canadians differ from those of other Canadians. Like previous *Nutshells* on Quebecers, Albertans, and British Columbians, it draws on research by EcoA since 2016 among other sources (see Key details sidebar).

Atlantic Canada: Overview

Like all Canadian provinces and territories, the provinces of Atlantic Canada have their own histories, cultures, ways of doing things — and opinions. But in recent years the way the four provinces of Atlantic Canada have been weathering the social, health and environmental storms battering the region have stood out. Though not to be exaggerated, a measure of social cohesion, cooperation and resilience here is a distinguishing feature, compared with other provinces. Some call this *good neighbourliness*, a social element that helped people in the region get through the COVID pandemic in relatively good shape, and is now spurring innovation and growth. Despite financial struggles that are more acute than elsewhere in the country (CoC 2022), Atlantic Canadians consistently indicate relatively high levels of life satisfaction and sense of belonging in their communities. So how does this translate into support for climate policies and biodiversity protection? As this *Nutshell* shows, Atlantic Canadians share some of the contradictory attitudes about climate change of residents in other parts of the country, but distinct characteristics of their geography, politics and society provide opportunities for engagement in support of climate action and other forms of environmental protection.

Experience of climate change

As in other regions, there are disconnects in this region between real experience of climate change and perceived personal harm due to climate change. Atlantic Canadians are more likely than other Canadians to admit that they have felt the impacts of climate change (50% *agree* or *somewhat agree* vs 46% in the other provinces (CA-MAP 2023). Nova Scotians (57%) are the most likely in Canada to say they have felt the impacts of climate change. Half of Atlantic Canadians surveyed have experienced hurricanes, power outages and high winds, which is significantly more than those in other regions. And to a lesser extent, they have experienced heat waves, floods and interruptions in food-supplies. They are also more likely to say they are experiencing harm caused by climate change, with 55% indicating a *little, moderate* or *great* amount of property damage due to this, 42% saying they had damage to their financial well-being and 58% claiming adverse mental health effects. These are all a few points higher than the national averages (CoC 2022).

But, despite these experiences with climate change and extreme weather, when asked how much they think climate change will harm them personally, only 48% think it will harm them a *great* or *moderate* amount, while 57% think it will harm future generations (CA-MAP 2023) and only 35% think climate change is harming Canadians right now (CoC 2022).

Disconnects aside, Atlantic Canadians are *far* more pre-pared for an emergency than their counterparts in other provinces. More than 70% report having an emergency kit compared to the Canadian average of 50% (CoC 2022). Curiously, they are less likely (57%) than most other Canadians to worry that climate change will boost their home insurance premiums (Équiterre 2024). Data from the Insurance Bureau of Canada, nonetheless, show that more than two out of three residents in this region would support a national flood insurance program (IBC 2024).

Behaviour

Atlantic Canadians do worry about climate change. At least 71% think it is a serious or very serious threat and 60% think it is a crisis that we need to act quickly on to have any chance. After Quebecers, they feel the highest sense of urgency in Canada related to this threat (Angus Reid 2025).

Hurricane Fiona (2022) clearly contributed to this, and Atlantic Canadians are connecting the dots between extreme weather and climate change. Almost 70% *agree* or *somewhat agree* that climate change is the primary driver of extreme weather (CA-MAP 2023). People in this region are also among the most likely to point to climate change as the key catalyst of wildfires (EKOS 2024).

Atlantic Canadians are in line with their Canadian counter-parts on personal agency, with just over half feeling that the actions they take personally can help reduce the impacts of climate change (CA-MAP 2023). Also in line with other provinces, around 50% talk often or occasionally with friends and family about climate change (CA-MAP 2023). However, Atlantic Canadians are more likely than their Canadian counterparts to say they won't vote for a party that doesn't have a plan to protect nature (78% ATL vs 68% in other provinces) or a party without a GHG emissions reduction target (62% ATL vs 49% other provinces) (EKOS 2024).

Knowledge and misinformation

Like many Canadians, people in Atlantic Canada have a limited understanding of climate issues and solutions, leaving room for misinformation to proliferate here, and more than 20% believe the effects of climate change to be seriously exaggerated (CA-MAP 2023).

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 (true)

You cannot power an industrial economy with renewable energy alone (false)

Rising oil and gas prices are a major reason for the surge in cost of living over the past year (true)

Renewable energy prices are more stable and predictable than are prices for oil and gas (true)

Solar panels emit more greenhouse gases during manufacturing than they end up saving (false)
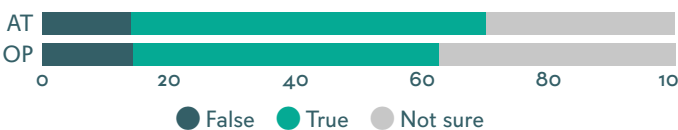

We can continue to expand oil and gas production and reach our net zero emissions targets (false)

If we protect more land through conservation programs, the affordability crisis in housing will get worse (false)

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

● False ● True ● Not sure

AT: Atlantic Canada / OP: Other provinces

Source: CoC 2022

What solutions do Atlantic Canadians support?

More than 70% of Atlantic residents think governments should be doing more on climate change, including 35% who think they should be doing *a lot more.* And they feel similarly about policies to protect biodiversity (CoC 2022). The majority of Atlantic residents (65%) think it is important for Canada to show leadership on climate, which is the highest in the country (EKOS 2024).

When asked about the federal government's plan to regulate electricity supplies so that by 2035 power generation emits little to no GHGs, many Atlantic Canadians (45%) agreed or strongly agreed that their financial situation would get worse. Newfoundlanders were the most concerned about this (50%), and even more felt that those with low incomes would be the most negatively impacted. Again Newfoundlanders were the most concerned at 75%. Notably, however, over 70% of residents in the region felt this climate-friendly policy was *acceptable, very acceptable* or *slightly acceptable,* or were neutral. Interestingly, many didn't think it would be effective in protecting nature, the environment or future generations. Agreement and strong agreement on the efficacy of this policy range from 26% in NB to 37% in NF (CCNB 2023).

Other climate policies that Atlantic Canadians would like to see the next federal government include public transportation, renewable energy and agricultural reform.

When we look at the specific types of climate solutions that provincial governments in Atlantic Canada might adopt, significant differences in levels of support emerge:

Atlantic Canadians show high levels of support for the next Government of Canada to take bold action on many climate initiatives...

81% Contributing to the funding of public transit infrastructure, maintenance and operations to fight road congestion

79% Increase to financial assistance to farmers to help them adapt their practices to better cope with climate change

77% Call on companies to better communicate the environmental impact of their products to consumers

77% Prioritize the development of renewable energy

But less support for (lower than the national average)...

39% Maintain current regulations to encourage the availability of electric vehicles

47% Maintain financial incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles

47% Continue to impose a minimum price on pollution

Source: Équiterre, 2024

Indicate how strongly you support or oppose the following electricity supply options in your community

Legend: NB, NFL, NS, PEI, Other provinces
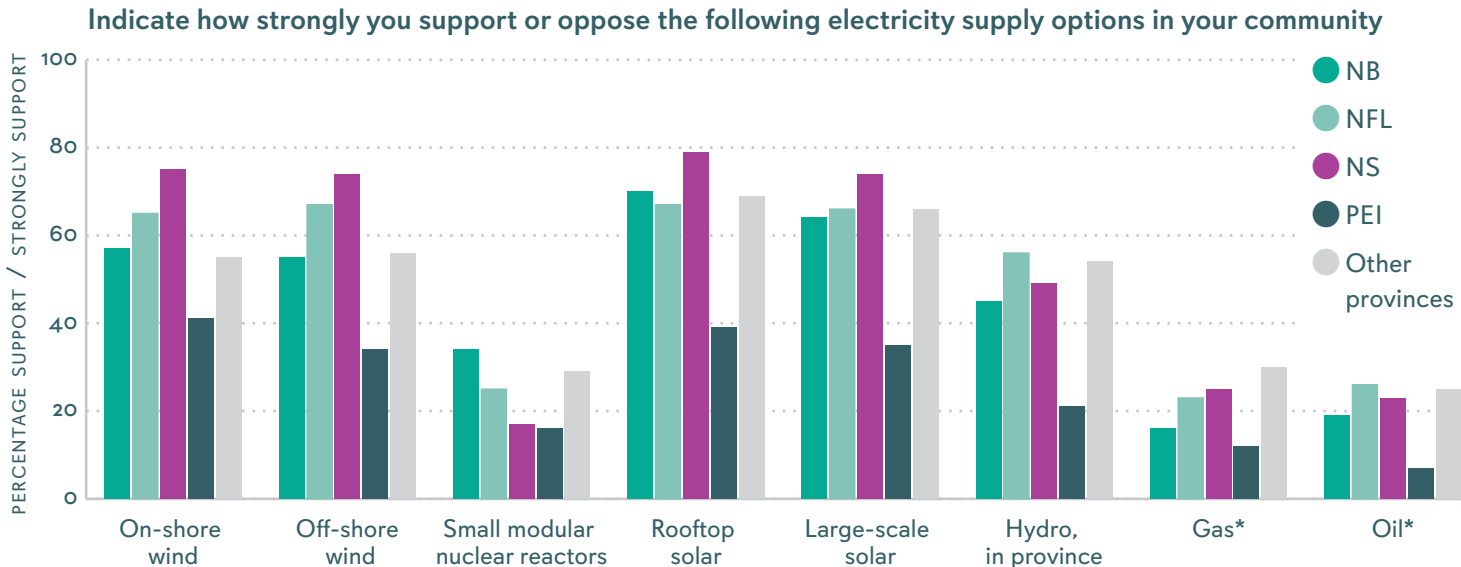
Source: CCNB 2022

*using pollution capturing tech

Conservation and environmental leadership

Atlantic Canadians show strong support for land and water conservation. More than 75% think governments should do more to protect and restore the boreal forest, even if it means imposing limits on the forestry industry, while 62% want to end logging in intact forests (EKOS 2024). As for protecting the coast against impacts of climate change (erosion, storm surges, flooding, etc.), 86% of Nova Scotians said this is *extremely* or *somewhat* important to them, and 68% wanted the government to implement the Coastal Protection Act, proposed in 2019 then abandoned (Narrative Research 2024).

Knowledge of biodiversity and biodiversity loss is growing. Familiarity with the term biodiversity is pretty consistent across the region, with 61% *somewhat* or *very* familiar with the term, but those in Nova Scotia are much more familiar (62%) with the term *nature loss* than those in New Brunswick (49%) and NL/PEI (49%) (National Biodiversity Survey 2024). Knowledge of Indigenous-led conservation is also fairly consistent across the region, with 31% feeling knowledgeable on this topic (Environmental Policy and Efficacy 2023). Though knowledge varies significantly within the region when it comes to familiarity with the term IPCA (Indigenous Protected Conservation Area). Nova Scotians are least likely to be familiar with the term (15%) and Newfoundlanders and PE Islanders, the most likely (30%).
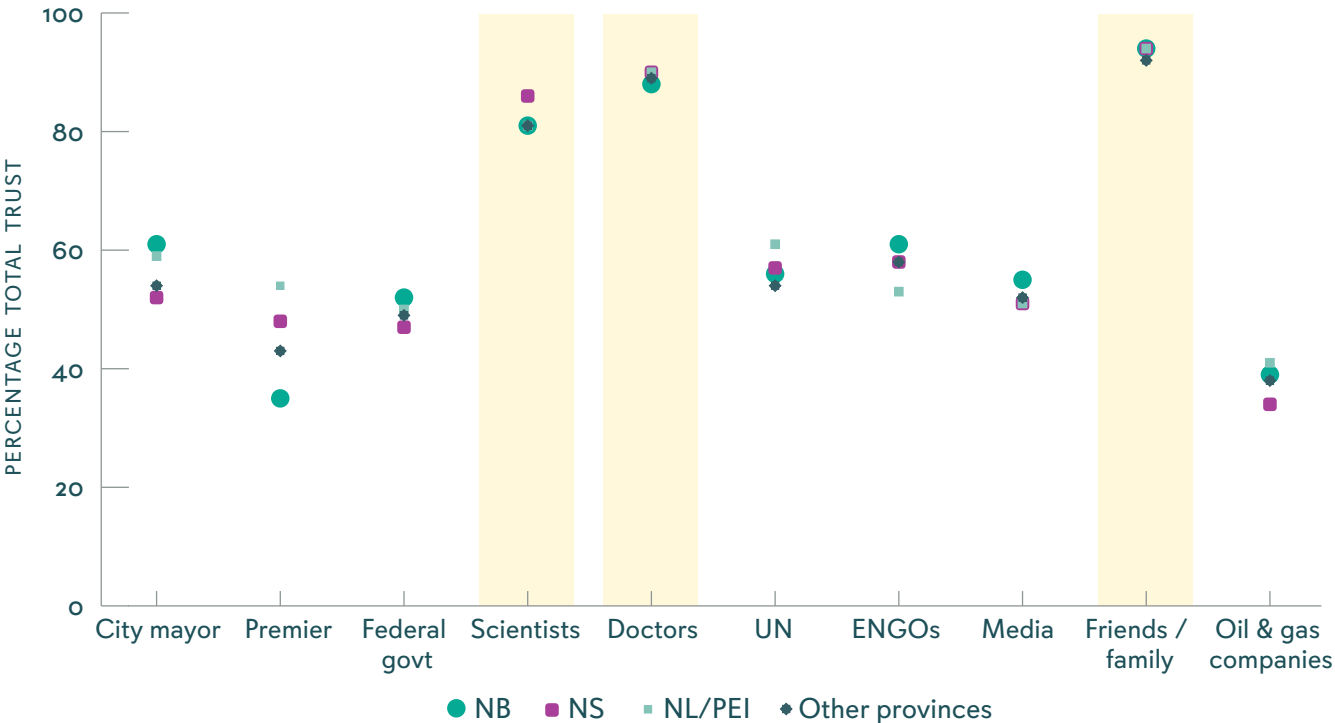
Overall support for IPCAs, however, is consistent across the region at about 62%.

Nova Scotians are slightly more likely to have noticed or possibly noticed nature loss where they live (80%). However most in the region rate the health of Canada's nature as good or excellent (a low of 78% in Nova Scotia and high of 96% in NL/PEI). And only half think nature has declined in the last ten years. As in other parts of Canada, Atlantic Canadians don't strongly connect the benefits of nature to their personal health and well-being, with just over 50% making this connection, a similar level of recognition to that of other provinces, with the exception of Quebec (70%) (National Biodiversity survey 2024).

In looking for leadership on conservation, Atlantic Canadians think environmental organizations, scientists and people whose livelihoods depend upon the land are most strongly demonstrating positive leadership in decisions about protecting land, freshwater and oceans (Environmental Policy and Efficacy 2023).

Trust

Like other Canadians, Atlantic Canadians strongly trust friends and family, doctors, health care practitioners and scientists. Their trust in environmental organizations is polarized, however, with only one in four Fossil fuel conservatives (FFC) trusting these groups, compared to nearly three out of four Progressive activists (PA) trusting ENGOs.

Trusted messengers in Atlantic Canada

Legend: ● NB ■ NS ■ NL/PEI ◆ Other provinces

Y-axis: PERCENTAGE TOTAL TRUST (0–100)

X-axis categories: City mayor, Premier, Federal govt, Scientists, Doctors, UN, ENGOs, Media, Friends / family, Oil & gas companies

EcoA's recent national segmentation survey (CA-MAP 2023) identified five different segments based on their social and political values: Progressive activists (PA), Civic nationals (CN), Centrist liberals (CL), Disengaged middle (DM) and Fossil fuel conservatives (FFC). The majority of PAs, CNs and CLS also distrust Canadian oil and gas companies.

Social values

EcoAnalytics' regional analysis of the (CA-MAP 2023) national survey revealed dominant social values in Atlantic Canada that inform perspectives on climate change and its policy solutions. Atlantic Canadians of all segments have a stronger sense of belonging to Canada than to their provinces, though provincial attachment is relatively high among three segments: PAs, CNs, and CLs.

- Civic nationals in Atlantic Canada are similar to their counterparts in Ontario and BC in terms of their high levels of concern about climate change, perceived personal risk of harm due to climate change and their sense of personal and collective agency in addressing climate change. They also feel a high sense of personal responsibility, the significant role of individuals in causing climate change and combatting it (*EcoA Tips newsletter #27*, March 2025)

- Rezoning protected lands is an issue opposed by PAs and CLs, but CNs and those in the Disengaged middle (DM) are more polarized on this issue.

- Majorities in each segment (apart from PAs), believe the oil and gas industry provides benefits to their communities, but PAs, CLs and CNs support taxing the industry more heavily.

- Those in the Disengaged middle, the largest segment in Atlantic Canada at 28%, are a mix of people, many of whom are somewhat concerned about climate change but for other reasons, often economic, are not as engaged or concerned as they might otherwise be (for details, see CA-MAP Survey: Disengaged middle). Overall, however, Atlantic Canadians in this segment do appear to be more concerned about this existential threat than counterparts in other parts of the country. For example, 75% of the DM in Atlantic Canada are *very* or *somewhat* concerned about climate change, compared to 49% in the other provinces. And, thinking about the future of the planet, 52% *somewhat* or *strongly agree* that they feel scared, compared to 27% in the other provinces of Canada (CA-MAP Regional segmentation).

Takeaways and opportunities

Communication guidelines:

- Know which Atlantic Canadians you are trying to speak to:

  > 17% are Progressive activists, and will respond to narratives that emphasize accountability, global responsibility, reconciliation, climate justice, systems change, along with universal frames focused on personal benefits, fairness and affordability.

  > 20% are Centrist liberal, with fairly progressive social values and faith in free markets, but less concerned about climate change directly. With this audience, focus more on climate-adjacent issues such as technology, innovation, economic growth, personal benefits, and staying globally competitive.

  > 19% are Civic nationals who tend to like narratives that focus on protecting the places we love, local community issues, health, conservation and accountability.

  > 28% are in the Disengaged middle, which doesn't necessarily mean they don't care or are out of reach; there may simply be barriers separating you from them: lack of free time (or *bandwidth*), economic stress and competing priorities. In this context, you might want to find ways of reaching these folks using frames that are more aligned with health and financial priorities.

- With all these segments, keep messaging positive, but realistic:

  > Keep it simple, but do include responses to common questions and acknowledge the challenges of transitioning.

  > Use health and affordability frames in talking about climate solutions.

  > Address efficacy of solutions.

- Highlight Atlantic Canada's successes, like New Brunswick and Nova Scotia's high rate of emissions

reduction, the very ambitious HaliFACT municipal climate action plan, and PEI's heat pump program, but hold leaders accountable for the gaps and omissions in their plans.

- Acknowledge that many in Atlantic Canada do depend upon the oil and gas industry for jobs. After Alberta and the prairie provinces, Atlantic Canadians are the most likely to say their community benefits from oil and gas development. They are also the most likely to indicate that logging provides benefits to their communities (CA-MAP 2023).

  > Recognize the value of workers in the oil and gas sector and the important role they have played in the past, but assert that our economy is transitioning towards jobs in the clean energy sector.

- Focus on corporate responsibility, as Canadians in the Atlantic region are more likely than their counterparts to feel that corporations are greedy (77%) and that the system is rigged to help the rich and powerful (72%) (CA-MAP 2023).

- Leverage friends and families and community networks, online and IRL (offline).

- Talk about community benefits, amplify collaboration and past successes in cohesion and collaboration.

- In rural areas, and with more right-leaning audiences, focus on cost considerations and benefits of transitioning households to clean electricity. Also emphasize the cost benefits to low income households. Information will be most effectively shared through face to face and friends/family (CCNB 2023).

- In urban areas and with more progressive-minded people, trust is higher for environmental groups and academics. Talk about the benefits to health and safety and nature, egalitarian distributional effects (e.g., everybody affected the same, people who consume more are most affected), and benefits to low-income households (CCNB 2023).